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Campaign

OSPREY PUBLISHING

Kalka River 1223

Genghiz Khan's Mongols invade Russia

D Nicolle & V Shpakovsky • Illustrated by V Korolkov

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ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

Temüchin of the Borjigin tribe adopted the name of Genghiz Khan or 'Universal Ruler' when he was chosen as supreme khan of all the Mongol tribes. The Kalka River campaign, during which a small part of Genghiz Khan's apparently invincible army made a remarkable armed reconnaissance far to the west, was only a minor episode in a career of conquest that surpassed that of any military leader before or since. He appears here in a Chinese portrait made a few years after his death. (National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China)

Looking back at the 13th century, before the Mongols erupted onto the scene, it is obvious that this was not a peaceful or quiet period. Wars seemed to flare all across Europe and Asia between states large and small, between kings, princes, emperors and even between local barons or governors. This was as true in Russia as elsewhere. Here the Russian princes fought between themselves and against their neighbours. The latter included Volga Bulgars to the east, Finnish tribes to the east and north-east, Poles and Hungarians to the west and Polovtsians to the south. The latter formed a loose federation of Turkish tribes otherwise known as Kipchaqs or Cumans. Rivalry with the Polovtsians sometimes also drew in the rulers of Georgia, Abkhazia, Armenia and even the Byzantine Empire. Competition for control of wealthy trading outposts in the Crimean peninsula also began to draw in the western European Genoese and Venetians as well as the Seljuk Turkish rulers of Anatolia on the far side of the Black Sea.

Meanwhile the Islamic world was no more peaceful. Here an ambitious dynasty of rulers had emerged in the previously rich but rather isolated province of Khwarazm on the southern shore of the Aral Sea in Transoxania. These Khwarazmshahs were now carving out a huge state encompassing much of Transoxania, Iran and Afghanistan, built on the ruins of the fragmented Great Seljuk state which had preceded them. At the same time the remaining Seljuk Turkish princes and their other smaller successor states were all too often fighting against each other when they were not engaged in trying to suppress the aggressive Crusader States in the Middle East. In the Far East things seemed somewhat more peaceful; but even here there was bitter rivalry between the three states

The great and wealthy city of Samarqand in Transoxania, in what is now Uzbekistan, was one of the first Islamic cities to fall before the flood of Mongol conquest. The site of the early medieval city is now abandoned, though its massive mud-brick fortifications overlook the late medieval city made famous by a later conqueror who modelled himself upon Genghiz Khan, Timur-i Lenk known to Europe as Tamerlane. It was from this area that Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur set out with their followers on an expedition that culminated at the battle of the Kalka River. (D. Nicolle photograph)

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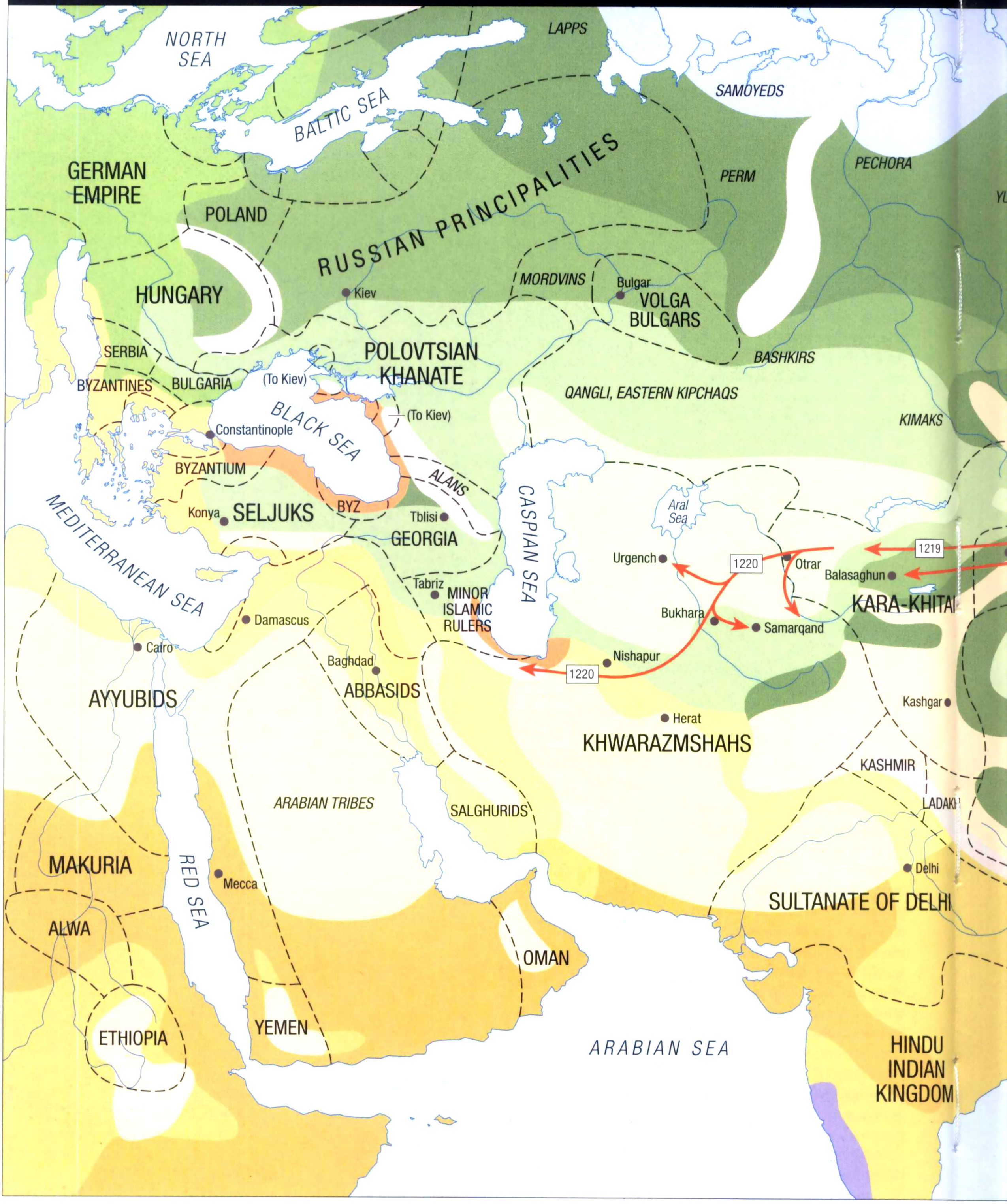
THE EURASIAN STEPPES AND NEIGHBOURING LANDS, EARLY 13TH CENTURY



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TUNGUS
BURYATS
YUGRA
OIRATS
MERKITS
KIRGHIZ
MONGOLS
TATARS
KERAITS
ONGUT
NAIMAN
1209
1219
1218
1211
1215
Beshbalik
UIGMUR
HSI-HSIA
Ta-Tu
CHIN
JAPAN
K'ai-Ching
KOREA
Hei-An
Ning-Hsia
K'ai-Feng
Hang-Chou
TIBET
Lhasa
SUNG
PACIFIC OCEAN
NAN-CHAO
BURMA
Arimaddanapura
ANNAM
SIAM
CHAMPA
SOUTH CHINA SEA
BAY OF BENGAL

CLIMATIC ZONES
- Wet Mountain
- Dry Mountain
- Tundra
- Boreal Forest
- Temperate Maritime
- Temperate Continental
- Temperate Steppe
- Temperate Arid
- Subtropical Humid
- Subtropical Mediterranean
- Subtropical Steppe
- Subtropical Arid
- Tropical Arid
- Tropical Savanna
- Tropical Rain Forest

- Political frontiers
- Mongol Campaigns under Genghiz Khan 1204-1220
- JAPAN States
- *MONGOLS* Tribal peoples

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ABOVE **Many of the Turkish and Mongol peoples of Central Asia erected stone statues in the steppe grasslands. Most marked the graves of warriors or tribal leaders. This example is in the eastern steppes, but similar carvings could be found as far west as the Ukraine and even in Bulgaria.**

ABOVE, LEFT **Central Asia is not one vast sea of grass or prairies as is sometimes thought. The grasslands themselves vary in quality while there are also mountains and woodland far south of the endless Siberian forests. In addition there are arid areas like the Kara Kum desert seen here. But almost everywhere in the medieval period Turkish and Mongol tribes roamed, living largely off flocks of sheep and other animals. These peoples played a major role in an interlocking series of caravan routes known as the Silk Road. This linked China to the Islamic Middle East and Christian Europe, bringing considerable wealth to peoples who controlled a section of the Road. (D. Nicolle photograph)**

which made up China, each of which also watched their Central Asian Turkish and Mongol neighbours with increasing alarm. Everywhere it seemed that peace agreements were drawn up, adhered to for a while then broken as wars flared up again and again. Yesterday's enemies became today's allies, and vice-versa in seemingly endless repetition.

While such habitual and destructive wars appeared to be the normal mode of international relations, particularly in Europe and the Middle East, a new power was rising far away on the fringes of the Gobi Desert north of China. This was the vigorous state of the Mongols – a people who played their part on the international stage before but who would come to dominate the 13th century. They would, in fact, soon govern the destinies of a great many Asian and European peoples.

In 1206 the leaders of all Mongol tribes held a *quriltai* or meeting of chieftains at which they chose Temüchin of the Borjigin clan as their Supreme *Khan* or overall ruler. Temüchin may then have adopted the title of Genghiz Khan, meaning 'Universal Ruler'. The warriors of the new Mongol state thus created would subsequently ride thousands of kilometres across the continents of Europe and Asia. They would also prove a cruel ordeal for the many nations, including Russia, who came up against this irresistible new Mongol military power.

The 13th century would prove to be the last in the long and glorious history of Kievan Russia. By that time its huge territories on the eastern edge of Europe had already fragmented into a number of self-governing principalities. The great and beautiful city of Kiev had itself declined in importance and was no longer the centre of Russian power. In fact Kiev was even having difficulty maintaining its status as the religious capital of the Russian people. In 1169 the city was devastated by the army of Andrei Bogolyubskiy, the Prince of Vladimir, which was one of the strongest principalities in the eastern part of Russia. Not many years later Kiev was again ravaged by the armies of other rival Russian rulers, including the Prince of Smolensk and then in 1203 by Ryurik Rostislavich. After that the city could not recover and it never regained its former grandeur, beauty and power. As Kiev declined politically and economically, other Russian cities rose to rival and then surpass this the

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traditional centre of medieval Russia. Most notable were Ryazan and Vladimir in the east. Meanwhile Polotsk and Great Novgorod in the north and west of the country gradually became almost entirely separated from the other Russian lands, at least in political terms.

Meanwhile the life of the ordinary people of Russia continued much as usual. The century before the Mongol invasions was, in fact, something of a golden age for medieval Russian culture, art and architecture. The expanding towns and cities were decorated with new cathedrals, princely palaces and in a few cases by imposing stone or brick fortifications – though these remained rare, most Russian fortification still being made of earth and timber. In the countryside around such cities the fields were still ploughed and market-gardens spread outside the town walls.

Internecine wars between the various Russian princes were usually of short duration, causing limited casualties, and were followed by all too often short-term truces. Oaths of loyalty between greater and lesser princes, like those between princes and their senior followers, were confirmed by the kissing of the Christian Cross in a ceremony that formed an integral aspect of political agreements or truces. Yet in a relatively short time these solemn oaths tended to be forgotten. As a result many of the fine cathedrals were destroyed or burned, the towns' market-gardens ravaged and pillaged, the surrounding fields trampled. In response to repeated devastation, the patient Russian people rebuilt and replanted, reconstructing what had been lost. Beyond their horizon, however, a cataclysmic storm was approaching. Its initial thunderbolt would strike at a dreadful battle on the banks of the Kalka River when Russian armies would first feel the power of a new and terrible enemy.

Uighur Turkish chieftains submitting to the Chinese general Guo Zui, as illustrated by the 11th–12th-century Chinese artist Li Gonglin. The contrast between the soberly dressed Chinese officer and the barbaric splendour of the steppe nomads and their horses may have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, the Chinese artist was correct in noting that the Uighurs, like other leading Turkish and Mongol tribes, were by no means ill-kept and unwashed barbarians. They had their own sophisticated cultures. (National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Republic of China)

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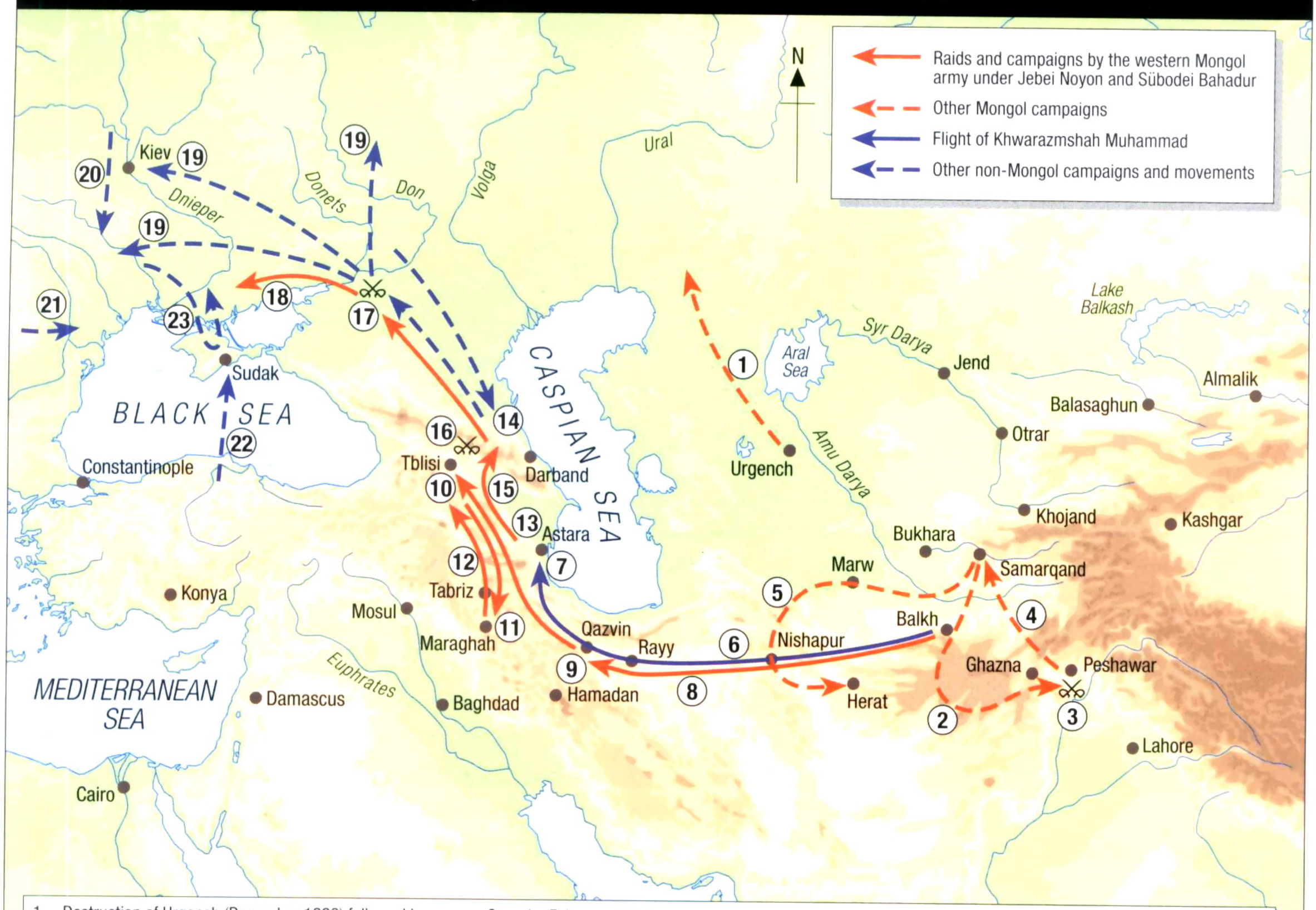
MONGOL CAMPAIGNS, SUMMER 1220 TO 1222



1. Destruction of Urgench (December 1220) followed by a campaign to the north of the Caspian Sea by a Mongol army under Jochi, against the Qangli Turks (eastern Kipchaqs or 'Wild' Polovtsians).
2. Genghiz Khan pursues Jalal al-Din, son of the Khwarazmshah Muhammad; destroys Balkh (spring 1221) and Ghazna (spring 1222).
3. Genghiz Khan defeats Jalal al-Din near the river Indus (25 November 1221).
4. Genghiz Khan returns to Transoxania.
5. Campaign by a Mongol force under Tolui 1221–22; destroys Marw (February 1221) and Nishapur (April 1221).
6. Flight of Khwarazmshah Muhammad.
7. Death of Khwarazmshah Muhammad on a small island in the Caspian Sea near Astara.
8. Western Mongol army under Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur pursues the Khwarazmshah Muhammad.
9. Western Mongol army destroys Qazvin (early 1221).
10. Western Mongol army devastates the Kingdom of Georgia (February 1221).
11. Western Mongol army captures Maraghah and Hamadan (February-March 1221).
12. Western Mongol army raids Georgia for the second time (October 1221).
13. Western Mongol army winters on the steppes of Azerbeijan near the Kür (Araxes) river; Sübodei received orders from Genghiz Khan to cross the Caucasus Mountains after the snows melt and to attack the Polovtsian Khanate ('Civilized' Polovtsians or western Kipchaqs) in conjunction with a planned assault by a Mongol army under Jochi, then to return to Central Asia via the north of the Caspian Sea.
14. Polovtsian army assembles on the Terek river lowlands and is joined by Alan, Iasian and Kosogian forces.
15. Western Mongol army crosses the Caucasus Mountains but is trapped in the narrow Daryalsk ravine by combined Polovtsian, Alan, etc. forces.
16. Mongols convince Polovtsians to break their alliance with the Caucasian peoples; Mongols then attack and defeat Alans, Iasians and Kosogians.
17. Western Mongol army invades the Polovtsian Khanate and defeats the Polovtsian army near the river Don.
18. Western Mongol army spends winter (1222–23) in the steppes north of the Crimean peninsula.
19. Surviving Polovtsian leaders flee to various Russian princes in search of support (late 1222); Köten Khan goes to Galicia; the main Polovtsian army retreats west of the river Dnieper while steppe lands east of the Dnieper fall under Mongol control.
20. Prince Mstislav Mstislavich takes control of the Principality of Galicia (1221).
21. Catholic Church sends Dominican missionaries to the court of the Polovtsian Khan Köten (1221).
22. Seljuk Sultan of Rum (Anatolia) imposes his suzereinty on the nominally Genoese trading outpost of Sudak (1221).
23. The defenders of Sudak, probably with Seljuk assistance, repulse a combined Russian-Polovtsian attempt to take control of the town (1221–22).

Apparently unknown to the Russian princes and their advisors, Genghiz Khan, supreme ruler of the Mongols, had been waging a bloody war against his eastern and southern neighbours in Central and Further Asia. At the same time the Great Khan was anxious to strengthen his western frontier, where he faced an equally ambitious rival. This rival was Muhammad, the Khwarazmshah, who had already siezed control of so much territory that he now dominated most of the eastern Islamic World. Between Genghiz Khan and Muhammad the Khwarazmshah lay lands that as yet neither of them fully controlled. These stretched from Dzungaria, east of Lake Balkash, to the southern Ural Mountains.

This apparently inhospitable territory was criss-crossed by the rich caravan trade routes which linked Europe and the Middle East with

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China. The merchants who used these various roads carried many different goods, but all of them were highly valuable. Above all there was silk from China. Furthermore these merchants paid good money for local services, as well as paying the taxes, fines or tribute imposed on them by whoever controlled these territories and their caravan routes. During this period conditions along the Silk Roads were not, in fact, particularly peaceful nor secure, and the merchants often suffered injustice from local authorities or attack by bandits.

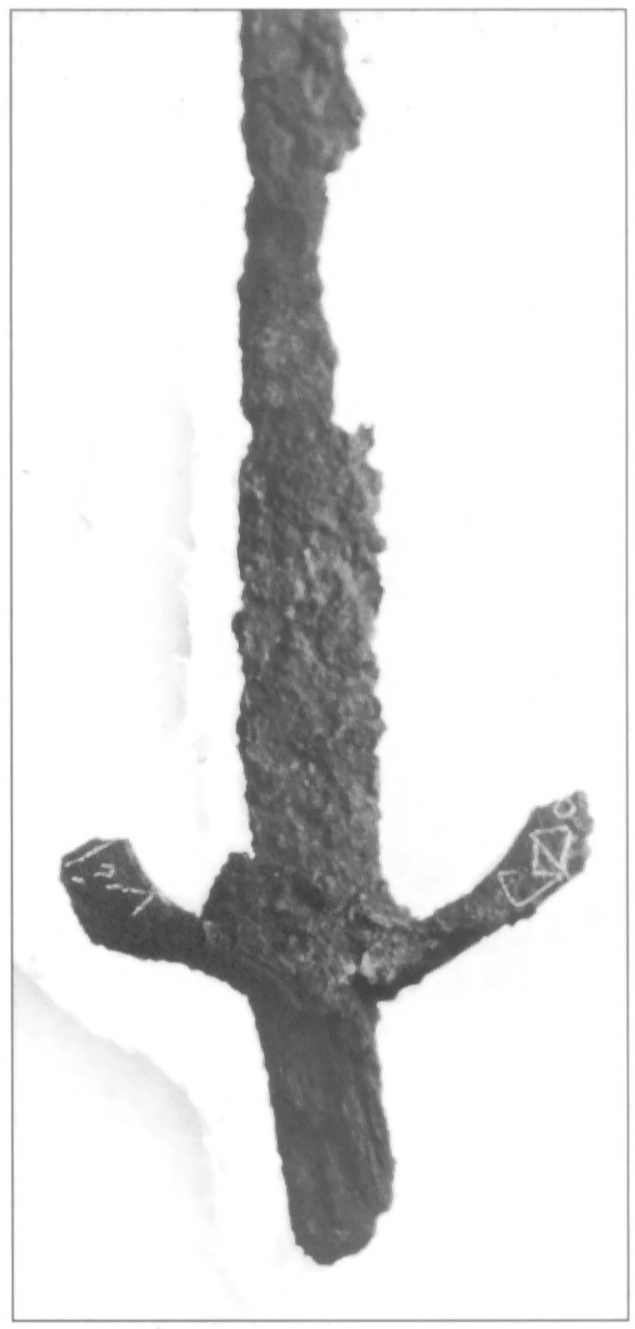
Religious enthusiasm added another element of uncertainty in this part of Central Asia. Muhammad the Khwarazmshah bore the name of the Muslim Prophet. He was also known as *al-Ghazi*, which meant 'warrior against the infidels'. Indeed Muhammad the Khwarazmshah was not only deeply committed to his religious beliefs but was also worried about the rising power of his Mongol neighbours to the east. A true *ghazi* fought in defence of Islam and it would not be the first time that a non-Islamic Central Asian state, nor indeed one of Mongol origin, had threatened the wealthy Islamic provinces of Transoxania. These had, in fact, sometimes even fallen under infidel rule – a completely unacceptable situation for Muslims. Genghiz Khan and his followers were, in the eyes of the Khwarazmshah and his people, primitive but dangerous pagans, so a clash was almost inevitable.

In 1216 Genghiz Khan's Mongols reached the River Irgiz in what is now Kazakhstan. Ahead of them fled the Merkit tribe who were old enemies of Genghiz Khan's own Borjigin clan. The River Irgiz was situated a little to the north of the Aral Sea, in territory which Muhammad the Khwarazmshah regarded as falling within his sphere of influence, if not actually within his state. So the Khwarazmshah sent some troops against the Mongols, but his soldiers were defeated. For their part the Merkits were now given shelter by the Kipchaq Turks, eastern or 'wild' Polovtsians. They and the 'civilised' or western Polovtsians dominated the vaste Eurasian steppes from the Aral Sea in the east to the Danube River in the west. Thus these Polovtsians inhabited much of what are now western Kazakhstan, southern Russia, the Ukraine, part of Moldova and even part of Romania.

They were a numerous, militarily powerful and culturally sophisticated people. Known to the Russians and the Polovtsy, and to the Byzantines, Hungarians and western Europeans as the Cumans, they consisted of a number of tribal unions forming two major but somewhat loose federations – the eastern or 'wild' Polovtsians and the western or 'civilized' Polovtsians. The majority may still have been pagan but some had adopted Islam and some Judaism, while it seems as if their ruling elite was in the process of converting to Christianity.

These Turkish Polovtsians would prove to be serious military opponents for the Mongols, being similar in numbers and in their military capabilities. Indeed these Turks of the western steppes, though they would lose their own Kipchaq-Polovtsian-Cuman identity, would eventually come to dominate the westernmost Mongol state of the Golden Horde – at least numerically. That, of course, lay far in the future, after the great Mongol conquests and after Genghiz Khan's extraordinary 'World Empire' had itself fragmented into competing states.

In 1220, after mobilizing his forces, Genghiz Khan moved against the Khwarazmshah. The latter, however, had his own very large army



The hilt of a very corroded sabre from the northern Caucasus region, 13th-15th century. Its quillons are inlaid with a simple silver design. This sort of weapon was used by local Caucasian peoples such as the Alans, Iasians and Kosogians as well as by the Polovtsian Kipchaq Turks of the steppes and by their Mongol conquerors. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

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The simple but vigorous carvings on the exterior of the Cathedral of Dmitri Sobor in the Russian city of Vladimir date from 1193–97. The designs appear to be taken from manuscript illustrations but the carvings also include human figures, such as the infantry archer shown here. His bow is unnaturally small and represents a weapon of composite construction. (D. Nicolle photograph)

consisting of well-trained and particularly well-equipped troops. Its élite units were recruited from *ghulams*, professional soldiers of slave origin better known in a Crusader context as *mamluks*. Unfortunately for Muhammad the Khwarazmshah, these forces were scattered amongst the garrisons of a large number of fortresses and fortified cities. In fact Muhammad the Khwarazmshah, fearing intrigue or even rebellion amongst his own followers, had considered it wiser to keep his leading military commanders separate from one another. This proved to be a fatal mistake.

The massive fortresses of the Khwarazmshah's sprawling realm had been designed and built by the best military architects and engineers of Islamic Transoxania, who were themselves recognised as being amongst the best in the world. Nevertheless, these fortifications failed miserably, surrendering one by one – usually with little or no resistance. Even the great cities such as Bukhara, Samarqand and Herat surrendered and as a result the Mongol armies soon penetrated deep into the heart of the eastern Islamic world. Some even pressed on into Iran. Meanwhile the unloved son of Muhammad the Khwarazmshah, Jalal al-Din, retreated to south-eastern Afghanistan and northern India with some of the best Khwarazmian troops. Militarily this had been the strongest frontier zone of the Khwarazmian state and Jalal al-Din was himself a skilled military commander. Nevertheless, he suffered a crushing defeat in 1221 on the banks of the River Indus.

At the same time Muhammad the Khwarazmshah, having lost his army and his throne, fled westward, hoping to find safety in the rugged and isolated region of Mazanderan on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. He was pursued, however, by 20,000 Mongol troops under the command of Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon. Abandoned by the remnants of his panic-stricken troops, Muhammad the Khwarazmshah eventually sought shelter on a small island near Astara. There he died of pleurisy and perhaps despair in February 1221.

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CHRONOLOGY

1167
Probable birth of Temüchin (the future Genghiz Khan).

1194
Death of Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich, last of the Ol'govichi dynasty to occupy the throne of Kiev for any length of time.

1195–96
Negotiations between Russian princes to agree the division and frontiers of the Russian states fail and there is civil war.

1200–01
Russians raid Polovtsian territory.

1203
Ryurik and the Ol'govichi princes, with Polovtsian support, capture Kiev.

1206
Temüchin, renamed Genghiz Khan, is proclaimed ruler or Khan of all the Mongol tribes.

1206–10
Further conflict between the Russian princes for possession of Kiev, Galicia and some other areas.

1209
Mongols invade westernmost Chinese state of Hsi-Hsia.

1211
Mongols under Genghiz Khan invade Chin Empire of northern China.

1212–22
Conflict between rival Russian princes for possession of the principality of Suzdalia; also conflict in north-western Russia and an invasion of Estonian territory.

1215
Mongols capture northern Chinese capital.

1218
Mongols occupy Kara-Khitai Empire; Mstislav Mstislavich campaigns to control Galicia in south-western Russia with the help of the Polovtsians under Köten Khan.

1219
Genghiz Khan begins his invasion of Khwarazmian territory; Hungarians recapture Galicia from Mstislav Mstislavich.

1220
February, Mongols capture Bukhara in Transoxania.
April, Mongols capture Samarqand in Transoxania.
Summer, Mongol army under Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur sent to pursue Muhammad the Khwarazmshah across northern Iran; the Khwarazmshah dies on an island in the Caspian Sea.
December, Mongols destroy Urgench in Khwarazm.

1221
Late winter, Mongol army in western Iran, under Jebei and Sübodei, destroys Qazvin.
February, Mongol army in western Iran devastates the Kingdom of Georgia, then returns to capture Maraghah in north-western Iran, followed by Hamadan in western Iran; Mongol army in eastern Iran destroys Marw in Khurasan.
April, Mongol army in eastern Iran destroys Nishapur in Khurasan.
Spring, Mongols destroy Balkh in northern Afghanistan.

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October, Mongol army in western Iran invades Georgia for the second time.
25 November, Mongols defeat Khwarazmshah's son Jalal al-Din at a battle near the Indus river.
Dominican Order of Friars sends Catholic Christian missionaries to the Polovtsians.
Mstislav Mstislavich campaigns to control Galicia in south-western Russia.
Seljuk Turkish Sultan of Anatolia imposes his suzereinty over the nominally Genoese merchant outpost of Sudak in the Crimea and instals a Turkish garrison; defenders of Sudak defeat a combined Russian-Polovtsian attempt to take the city.

1222

Spring, Mongols destroy Ghazna in Afghanistan.
14 June, Mongols destroy Herat in Afghanistan.
Mongol army in western Iran crosses the Caucasus Mountains and later in the year defeats the Alans and other north Caucasus peoples, followed by the Polovtsians.
Polovtsians in Hungary granted a charter of privileges in the Györ-Sopron region.
Western Mongol army under Jebei and Sübodei winters in the steppes north of the Crimean peninsula.

1223

Western Mongol army captures Genoese trading outpost of Sudak in the Crimea early in the year.
Köten Khan of the Polovtsians convinces Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia to form an alliance to drive the Mongols from the western steppes.
Mstislav Mstislavich summons a council of leading Russian princes in Kiev.
Russian army consisting of contingents from several principalities assembles on the Dnieper River south of Kiev, executes Mongol ambassadors.
Entire Russian army assembles with its Polovtsian allies at Khortytsya island (next to modern Zaporizhzhya).
22 May, Russian and Polovtsian army crosses the Dnieper, defeats the first Mongol outpost then advances against the main Mongol army, marching for nine days (Arabic source by Ibn al-Athir, probably based on Mongol sources, says 12 days).
31 May, (some sources say June 16), Russian-Polovtsian army crushed at the battle of the Kalka River.
Summer, Western Mongol armies pursues broken remnants of Russian and Polovtsian army to the Dnieper River, but are then ordered to rejoin the main Mongol army north of Transoxania; western Mongol army marches up the Volga and attempts to impose Mongol suzereinty on the Volga Bulgars but suffer a reverse at the hands of the Bulgars; main Mongol army in Transoxania spends summer resting its horses north of the Hindu Kush mountains.
Autumn & winter, Western Mongol army under Jebei and Sübodei marches east through the steppes north of the Caspian Sea and defeats the Qangli Turks.

1224

Western Mongol army under Jebei and Sübodei rejoins the main Mongol army under Genghiz Khan north of the Syr Darya river; new Russian princes of Kiev and Chernigov form an alliance with Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia and Köten Khan of the Polovtsians.

1225

February, Genghiz Khan returns to Mongolia.

1227

18 August, Death of Genghiz Khan.
Polovtsian tribe in Moldavia converts to Christianity.

1228

Death of Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia.

1229

Establishment of a Christian Bishopric of Cumania (western Polovtsian territory).

1236

Mongols launch their second invasion of the western steppes, commanded by Batu and Sübodai.

1237–42

Second Mongol invasion of Russia and eastern Europe.

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OPPOSING COMMANDERS

Reproduction of a damaged wall painting of a Russian prince, in the Cathedral of Santa Sofia in Kiev. He is portrayed in Byzantine style, looking almost exactly like a Byzantine emperor. It was, of course, from the Byzantines that Kievan Russia received its religion – Orthodox Christianity – and a large part of its high culture, though not its folk culture, which remained fundamentally Slav with strong Scandinavian, Turkish and Finnish influences.

MONGOL LEADERS

Jochi eldest son of Genghiz Khan was, in accordance with Mongol custom, eventually given a loosely defined *ulus* or appanage on the exposed frontier of the state. Though the term *ulus* applied as much to a group of people to be governed as it did to a geographical area, Jochi's *ulus* would extend from western Siberia and Turkestan to the Volga River. Jochi had by then already proved himself a fine general, particularly when he led a daring Mongol feint attack across the Tien Shan mountains from Kashgar to the Farghana valley before the main Mongol invasion of Khwarazmian territory. He then commanded a sizeable independent column during the Mongol conquest of Transoxania. Clearly Jochi was trusted by his father, Genghiz Khan, but his position within the Mongol heirarchy remained a rather delicate one. His mother, Genghiz Khan's chief wife Bortei, had been kidnapped by the Merkit tribe just nine months before Jochi's birth and so there were inevitable doubts about Jochi's true parentage. This would later cause serious problems for the Mongol ruling dynasty. In fact Jochi died shortly before his father in 1227 and the title of Great Khan of the Mongols went, in accordance with Genghiz Khan's expressed wish, to Genghiz's third son Ögedei. Jochi's younger son, Batu, inherited the western *ulus*, which included all western lands as far as Mongol horses had trod. This became the 'Golden Horde' and it was Batu's armies which conquered Russia during the second Mongol invasion. Meanwhile Jochi's eldest son, Orda, founded another khanate to the east of the 'Golden Horde' which became known as the 'White Horde'.

Sübodei Bahadur eventually became Batu's most important general and would himself subdue the powerful Volga Bulgars in 1236. He is regarded by some modern historians as one of the greatest generals in military history and as the equal of Genghiz Khan himself. Born around 1176, Sübodei came from the Urianqut tribe of Dürlükin Mongols, who seem to have been reindeer breeders and hunters in the upper Yenisei River region. He first commanded an army before he was 25 years old and he proved particularly successful as a cavalry leader. He and Jebei Noyon were one of the so-called 'raging torrents' who fought loyally for Genghiz Khan. 'As felt protects from the wind', he reportedly said to Genghiz, 'so I will ward off your enemies.' Described as shrewd and resourceful Sübodei earned a reputation for cunning as well as courage. It was said that he had once ridden alone into an enemy camp where he pretended to be a deserter and persuaded the enemy that their foes were many miles away. As a result they were caught by surprise. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Sübodei was chosen by Genghiz Khan to plan the Mongol invasion of the Khwarazmshah's territory, and he continued to serve as a general until he was over 60 years old, eventually dying in 1248.

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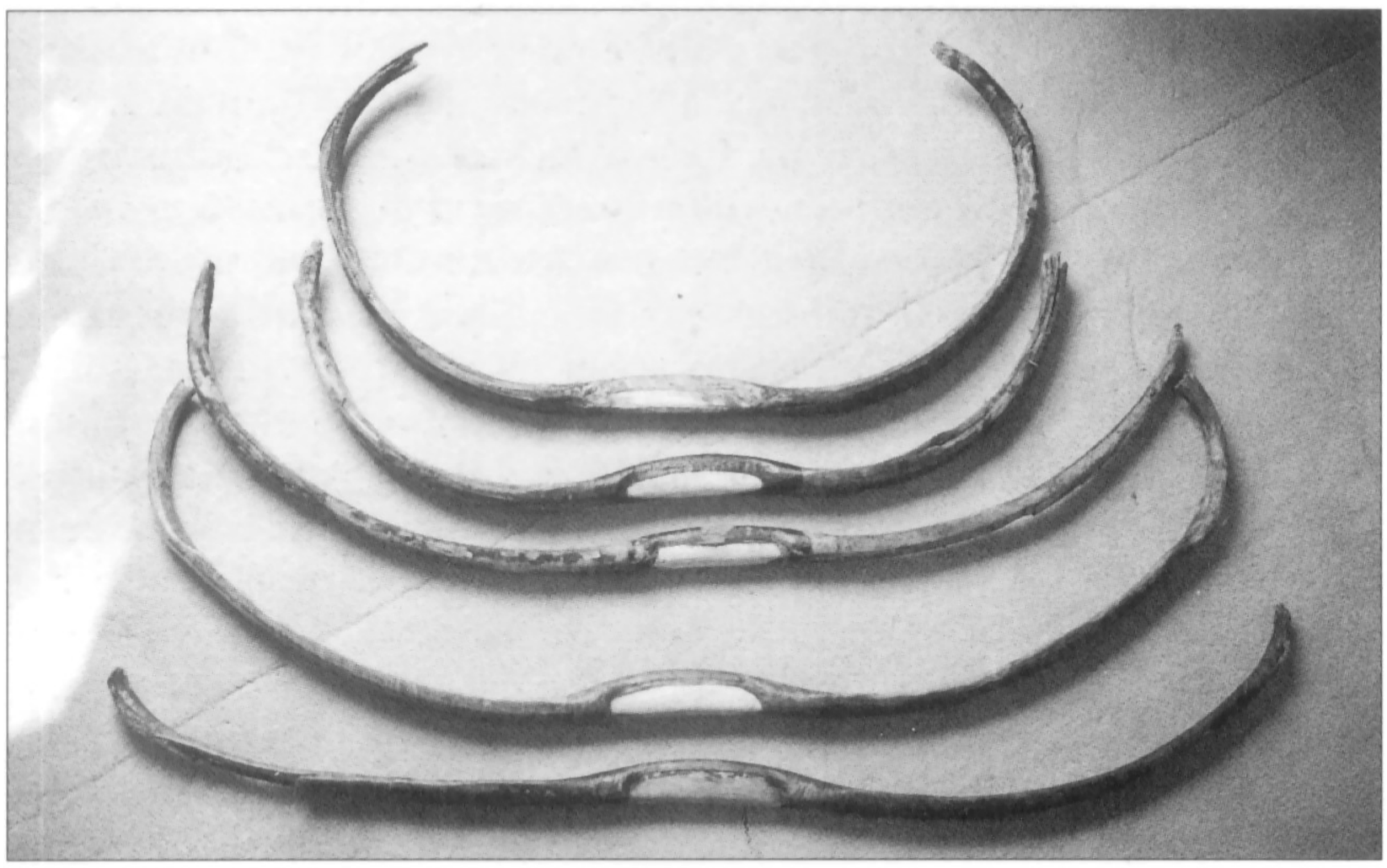
Whenever possible Mongol armies on long-distance campaigns ensured that their troops and the animals upon which they relied spent winters in the best available pastures. This was why Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur wintered in the steppes of north-western Iran and neighbouring Azerbeijan. Even in high summer, when this photograph was taken, the grass remains green whereas elsewhere in Iran it would have withered to straw and dust. (D. Nicolle photograph)



The powerful composite bow, made of wood, sinew and often horn, was the most famous weapon of the Mongols. It was, of course, also used by their Turkish foes as well as by many other peoples in Asia and the Middle East. Few medieval bows survive, though some fragmented examples have been found in frozen or desiccated graves in and around Mongolia. More recently the bows shown here were found in the Middle East. Carbon dating indicates that they are from the late 12th or early 13th century and so could have been used by or against the Mongol invaders.

Sübodei Bahadur's equally renowned younger colleague, **Jebei Noyon**, came from the Yesut tribe. Dashing and impetuous, Jebei fought against Temüchin (Genghiz Khan) during the first Mongol tribal wars and had even brought down Temüchin's horse with an arrow. When subsequently captured, Jebei expected to be executed but was instead taken into the new ruler's army with name of Jebei Noyon or 'the arrow'. Another story stated that when fleeing on foot, Jebei found himself surrounded by Temüchin's horsemen. He challenged them to a fair fight, one-on-one, if they would give him a horse. So Temüchin commanded that Jebei be given a horse with a white nose, whereupon Jebei suddenly galloped to safety in the nearby hills before Temüchin's men could decide who should fight him first. Some days later Jebei rode back unarmed into Temüchin's camp, offering to serve him or to die. Many years later, while conquering the Kara Khitai state, Jebei collected a whole herd of white-nosed horses and sent them as a gift to Genghiz Khan. This campaign in 1218 appears to have been the first occasion when Jebei Noyon rose to prominence in Genghiz Khan's service,

OPPOSITE **Some of the most distinctive of the balbal statues which once dotted the steppes appear to have been made by the Polovtsian Kipchaqs or Cumans. The male and female figures shown here both carry cups. Ceremonial drinking or 'cup rites' formed a central part of pre-Islamic pagan Turkish court ceremonial. (State Historical Museum, Moscow)**

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having been sent to stop Küchlüg, the last of the Naiman rulers and a long-standing rival of Genghiz Khan, from persecuting the Muslims who lived in his realm. Naiman territory was nominally a continuation of the long established Kara Khitai state, which had been a bitter enemy of Islam for centuries. Jebei overthrew Küchlüg and restored freedom of worship to the Muslims while also incorporating Kara Khitai lands within the expanding Mongol state. This conquest brought Mongol territory into direct contact with the Islamic frontier and the realm of the Khwarazmshah – thus paradoxically triggering the Mongol invasion of the Islamic world. There are, in fact, numerous heroic stories about Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur in the famous *Mongol Secret History.*

RUSSIAN COMMANDERS

Mstislav Mstislavich, Prince of Galicia, was one of the most restless, energetic and enterprising of Russian princes. Known as Udaly or 'the Daring', he was a leading member of the Rostislavichi dynasty, one of the great princely families who competed for control of the various Russian principalities. As a nephew of Ryurik Rostislavich, the Grand Prince of Kiev, Mstislav Mstislavich was made governor of the strategic garrison town of Torchesk. This was the headquarters of various Turkish nomadic or ex-nomadic auxiliaries who formed a vital part of the army of the Grand Prince of Kiev. Torchesk was also a major centre of resistance against Polovtsian raids. In 1207, however, Mstislav Mstislavic clashed with the ruler of Kiev and was forced to surrender Torchesk. So he moved to Toropets, the northernmost city in the Russian principality of Smolensk. Next he got involved in northern Russian affairs and even took control of Novgorod the Great for several years, thus dominating the whole of north-western Russia. But Mstislav Mstislavich was eventually ousted from Novgorod as well, and so instead he made the south-western Russian principality of Galicia his power base by 1221. He had also married one of the daughters of Köten Khan, ruler of the neighbouring Polovtsians. It is interesting to note that Polovtsian women enjoyed a high reputation for their beauty amongst the Russian aristocracy. Such marriages were, of course, also political, and that between Mstislav Mstislavich and Köten Khan's daughter helped preserve peace between Galicia and the Polovtsians. On the other hand he is said to have had a 'great feud' with the Princes of Kiev and Chernigov, both also named Mstislav, during the Kalka campaign. Following this disastrous defeat, Prince Mstislav Mstislavich remained firmly entrenched in Galicia, eventually dying in 1228.

Daniil Romanovich, the Prince of Volhynia, was a son-in-law of Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia. He was also the son of Roman Mstislavich, an earlier prince of both Galicia and Volhynia who was called the *Rex Russiae* by French chroniclers. Roman had been a highly capable and vigorous ruler whose rapidly increasing power frightened the other Russian princes. When he died 1205 he was succeeded by his two infant sons, Daniil and Vasil'ko, though in reality their principalities were ruled by their mother, a highly intelligent Byzantine princess named Anna. She realised that she could not control the entire territory, and so concentrated on Volhynia, which left Galicia prey to outside interference

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and invasion from both east and west. But after Mstislav Mstislavich installed himself in Galicia, mainly to keep the neighbouring Hungarians out, Anna agreed to the marriage of her 18-year-old son Daniil to Mstislav's daughter, also named Anna. At this stage Daniil himself was only prince of the town and surroundings of Vladimir-in-Volhynia. Nevertheless, he hoped to follow in his father's footsteps by creating a powerful union of Volhynia and Galicia. During the Kalka campaign there is evidence that Prince Daniil accepted the leadership of Prince Mstislav Mstislavich, though they remained rivals back home. Like his father-in-law, Prince Daniil survived the battle of the Kalka River and continued to rule Volhynia until his death in 1264. During the later years of his reign Daniil seems to have become something of a peacemaker during the petty wars between rival Russian princes, he himself now being one of the most powerful. This did not stop him seizing control of Kiev for a short period before the Mongols returned and took the city in 1240. Prince Daniil subsequently travelled to the Mongol capital and offered his submission to the Great Khan in 1245. The following year his own army in Galicia was described as being equipped in a new Mongol fashion. For several years Daniil was recognized as ruler of all Russia under Mongol suzerainty but eventually he chose to defy the Great Khan's authority, while hoping for western and Lithuanian support. This failed to materialise and once again Prince Daniil submitted to the

The Mongols prepare for battle. Mongol armies included a variety of different troop types, including both heavily armoured and more lightly equipped cavalry. The arms and armour used by these men also varied in its appearance and origins. Here, for example, a Mongol heavy cavalryman (left) is equipped in a purely Central Asian style. The minimal kit of a light cavalry horse-archer (centre) is similarly entirely Mongol, but the arms and armour of the third man, another heavy cavalryman (right), includes several items manufactured in China. A few years later the western European missionary and traveller Plano Carpini described the panoply of Mongol cavalry in detail, and it is unlikely to have changed much since 1223. (Victor Korolkov)

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No illustrations of Mongol soldiers survive in Islamic art from the time of the Kalka River campaign. But the earliest existing copies of a Persian epic called the *Shahnamah* date from around 1300. They are called the 'Small Shahnamahs' and were probably made in Shiraz or Baghdad. Many of the soldiers, rulers and courtiers in these manuscripts clearly wear Mongol costume and, as here, some carry large Mongol-style bows. (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)

Mongols, even taking part in Mongol raids into Lithuania. Thereafter he remained an obedient vassal of the Khan until his death.

Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich, called Starii or 'the Old', was ruler of Kiev. Like Mstislav Mstislavich, Mstislav Romanovich was a nephew of Grand Prince Ryurik of Kiev and as such was a leading member of the Rostislavichi princely dynasty. Earlier in his career he had been Prince of Smolensk and had captured the strongly fortified town of Belgorod in 1206, at the time when Ryurik temporarily lost control of Kiev. In fact the Rostislavichi clan lost and regained Kiev more than once. Smolensk remained Prince Mstislav Romanovich's power-base until he himself took over Kiev in 1212. But other rival princely dynasties continued to threaten his position and efforts to solve the problem by forging marriage alliances largely failed. Meanwhile Prince Mstislav Romanovich had to fight the Hungarians, who were threatening Galicia. Here he led his army in person and won a notably victory over the Hungarians in 1221. This greatly strengthened Russian self-confidence and as a result the Rostislavichi dynasty enjoyed firm control over most of southern Russia, including Galicia, Kiev and Smolensk, by 1223. Other rival principalities in this part of Russia were either small and weak or were falling apart. On the other hand the Rostislavichi dynasty and Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich had far less authority and even influence in northern Russia. He himself would be killed after surrendering to the Mongols three days after the disastrous battle of the Kalka River.

Köten, Khan of the Polovtsians, probably had less authority over his tribal followers and their minor chieftains than did a western European ruler or even a Russian prince. The eastern and western Polovtsian tribal confederations had only recently been united into a loose union by Könchek Khan. He had been the leader of the eastern or 'wild' Polovtsians and two of his daughters had married Russian princes in the late 12th century. This Könchek Khan also changed the old Polovtsian

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system of government whereby rulership went to the most senior tribal leader; instead passing it on to his son Köten. Not surprisingly, unlike the Russians, Köten Khan had good information about events in the steppe lands to the east. In fact he heard about the Mongol campaign of expansion from the Qanglis, who were a related eastern Kipchaq Turkish tribe. Many of their warriors had served in the Khwarazmshah's armies, and similarly alarming news also came from the fleeing remnants of the king of Georgia's élite Kipchaq Turkish guard. Köten Khan's brother Yuri and his son Daniil commanded the Polovtsian army, which faced the Mongols as the latter emerged from the Caucasus Mountains in 1222. They were then defeated by the Mongols after the Polovtsians abandoned their Alan and other Caucasus allies. After fleeing to Russian territory, Köten Khan told the assembled council of Russian princes in Kiev: 'Today they have taken our land, tomorrow they will take yours.' For reasons which remain unclear, some of these Russian princes insisted that Köten step down as Khan of the Polovtsians as the Kalka campaign began, though he may have accompanied the Polovtsian troops during this campaign. Clearly he became Khan once again immediately afterwards and Köten Khan supported an alliance of the principalities of Kiev, Chernigov and Galicia in the wake of the Russian defeat at the battle of the Kalka River. He led his troops in support of various western Russian princes in 1225 and 1228, and was probably in command of those Polovtsians who helped the Ol'govichi princely dynasty take control of Kiev in 1235. Köten was still Khan of the Polovtsians when the Mongols returned in a far more serious invasion in 1238. By then Köten Khan realised it was useless to challenge the Mongols in battle. Instead he led those of his people who wished to leave the western steppes across the Carpathian Mountains into Hungary to seek refuge. Some Polovtsians had already fled to Hungary, where they were known as Cumans. Köten Khan also promised that he and his 40,000 warriors would convert to Catholic Christianity if they were allowed into Hungary. King Bela IV of Hungary was very enthusiastic and agreed to be Köten's godfather at his christening. But when the Mongols menaced Hungary in 1241, many Hungarian barons blamed the crisis on Köten, demanding that he and his Polovtsians be expelled. In fact Köten and his family were arrested along with other Polovtsian noblemen. When the Mongols invaded Hungary, Köten Khan realised that they would be handed over to the enemy, so he killed his wives then killed himself. When Köten Khan's Polovtsian warriors heard of this they not surprisingly turned against the Hungarians and left the country, refusing to help fight the Mongol invaders.

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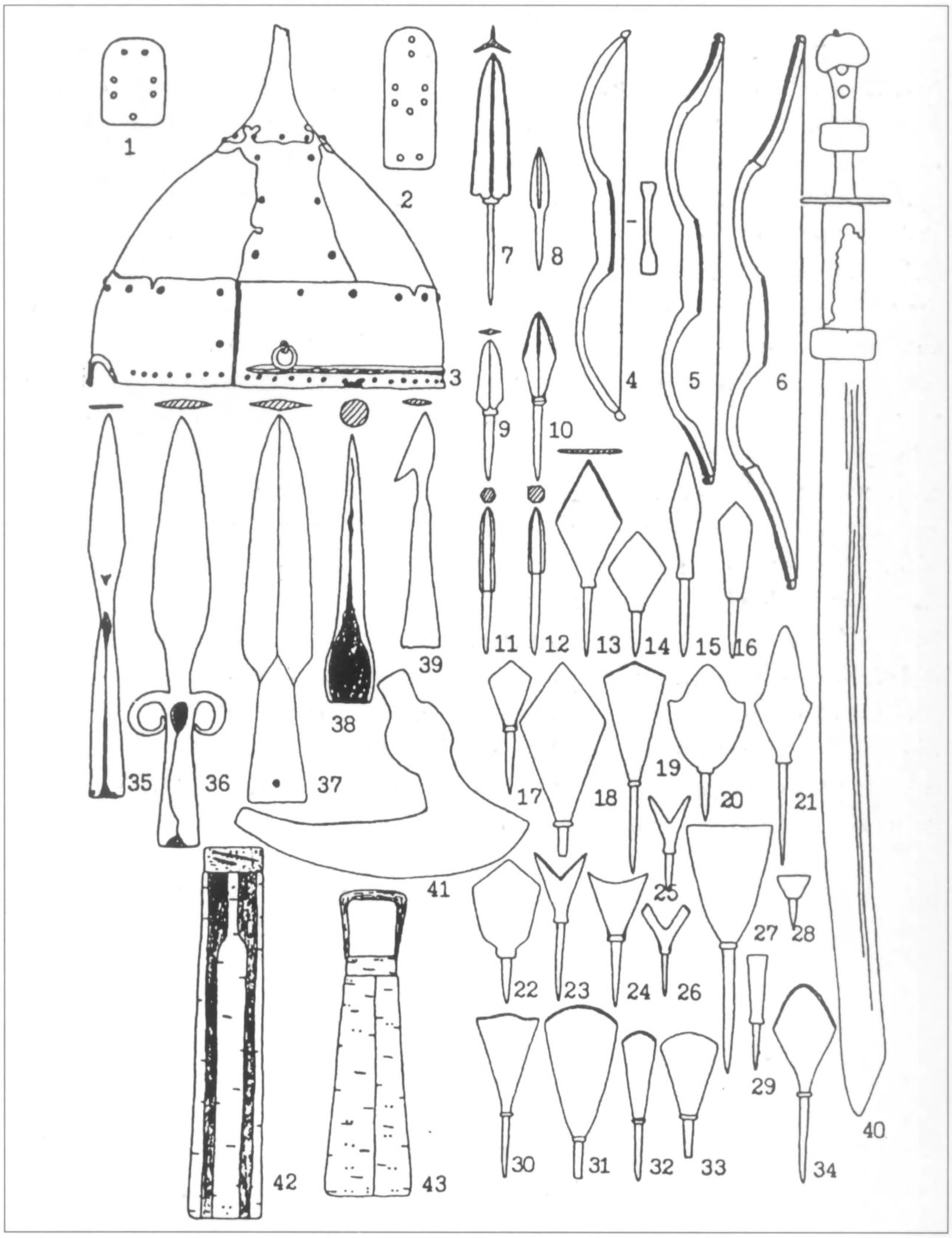
OPPOSING ARMIES

THE MONGOLS

For a long time military historians in Russia, and elsewhere in Europe, have tended to believe that the Mongols or Tatars had only primitive military skills and technology. School textbooks normally portray Mongol warriors as simple horsemen clad in sheepskins. The reasons for this biased and inaccurate impression of the Mongol warriors' armament and harness lay in medieval written sources



Mongol military equipment from the Altai Mountains and Mongolia, 13th–14th century: 1–2 – Individual lamellae from a lamellar cuirass; 3 – Helmet; 4–6 – Bows of composite construction; 7–34 – Arrowheads of various shapes; 35–39 – Spearheads of various types; 40 – Sabre; 41 – Axe, probably for work rather than warfare; 42–43 – Quivers.

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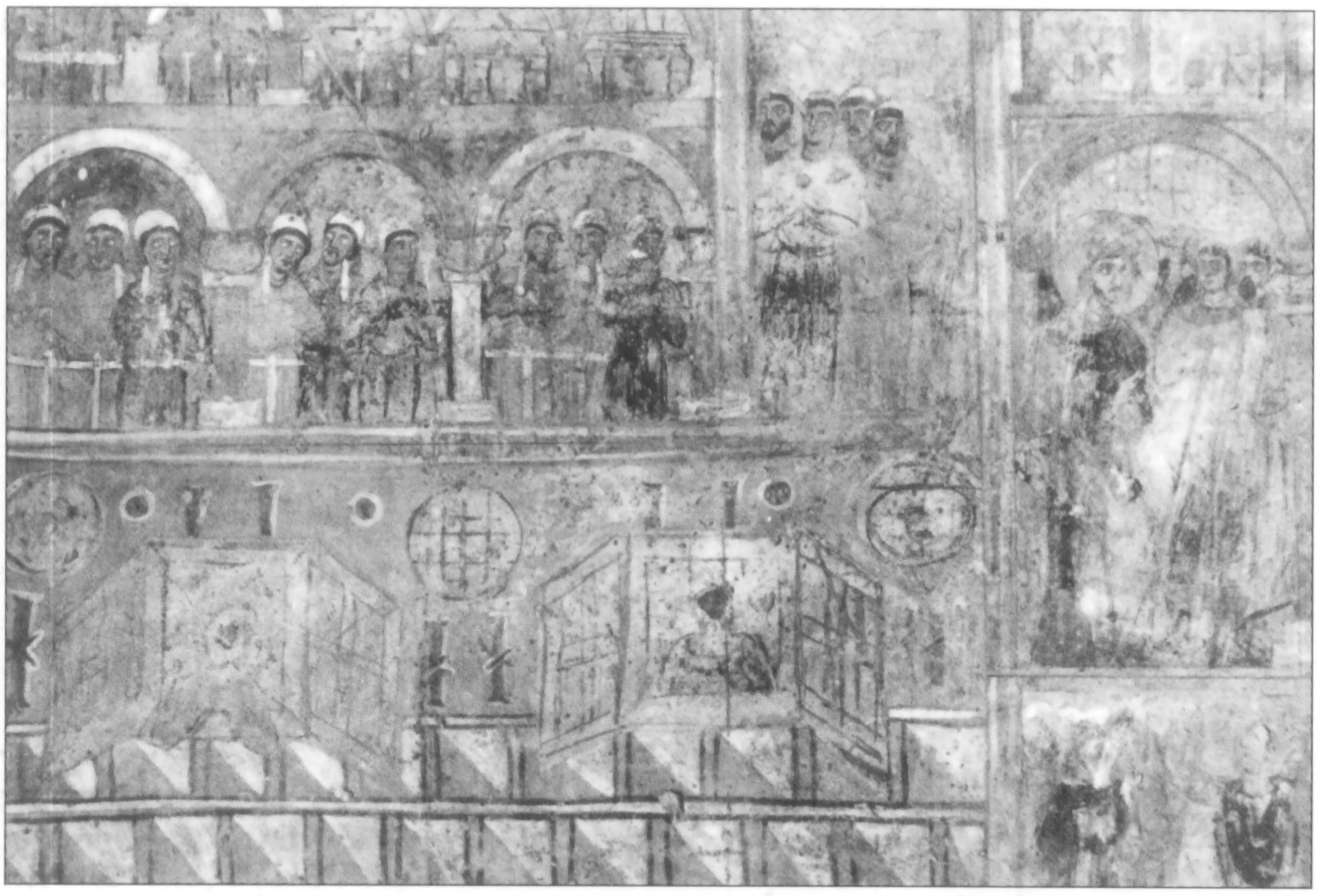
Mongol archery equipment from the western steppes, 13th–14th century: 1 – Carved bone plaques that probably formed part of a quiver or bowcase;
2 – Reconstruction of a bowcase from archaeological fragments;
3–7 – Sectional elements of the bowcase from the top-plate (3) to the base-plate (7).



One wall in the Cathedral of Santa Sofia in Kiev had a painting of a palace or court scene. It was made between 1113 and 1125 and seems more likely to have illustrated some event in the Byzantine imperial capital of Constantinople, such as the Palace of Kathisma with the Imperial Box, rather than in Kievan Russia. Nevertheless, the rival princes of medieval Russia did base a great deal of their own court ceremonial, as well as their ceremonial dress, upon that of the Byzantine Empire.

and the extreme rarity of surviving military objects of Tatar or Mongol origin. Most of the latter were, in fact, merely arrowheads from those territories that had been subdued by Mongol armies. More recently new and more varied archaeological material has emerged from eastern Trans-Baikal, that part of the Russian Federation which lies immediately north-east of the modern Republic of Mongolia where the Mongol

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people and their state originated. This, when seen in conjunction with more recent ethnographical parallels and with excavated material from earlier periods, has greatly expanded our knowledge. As a result we can form a reasonably clear picture of the military equipment used by the majority of Mongol warriors. When this is studied in association with the medieval chronicles it becomes clear that the basis of Tatar-Mongol armies consisted of both heavily armoured and light cavalry.

Almost all the medieval peoples of Central Asia, including the Mongols' own predecessors and their contemporaries, used armoured cavalry as their main military striking force. Nevertheless, the fact that archaeologists had found so little Mongol-Tatar armour had, until recently, led to the erroneous conclusion that the majority of Genghiz Khan's warriors were no more than lightly armed horse-archers. Of course a complete armour is a very rare find in any culture. Nor was such armour necessarily made of metal. Some was clearly made of leather, as was also the case amongst the Mongols' predecessors, the Khitans, who ruled northern China as the Liao dynasty until displaced by the Jürchen or Chin dynasty. Part of the defeated Khitans reappeared further west as

Two warrior saints on a wall painting at Nereditsa in northern Russia, made in 1199. Here the saints are shown in a purely Byzantine style and their arms and armour are unlikely to reflect any aspect of that used in Russia at the time.

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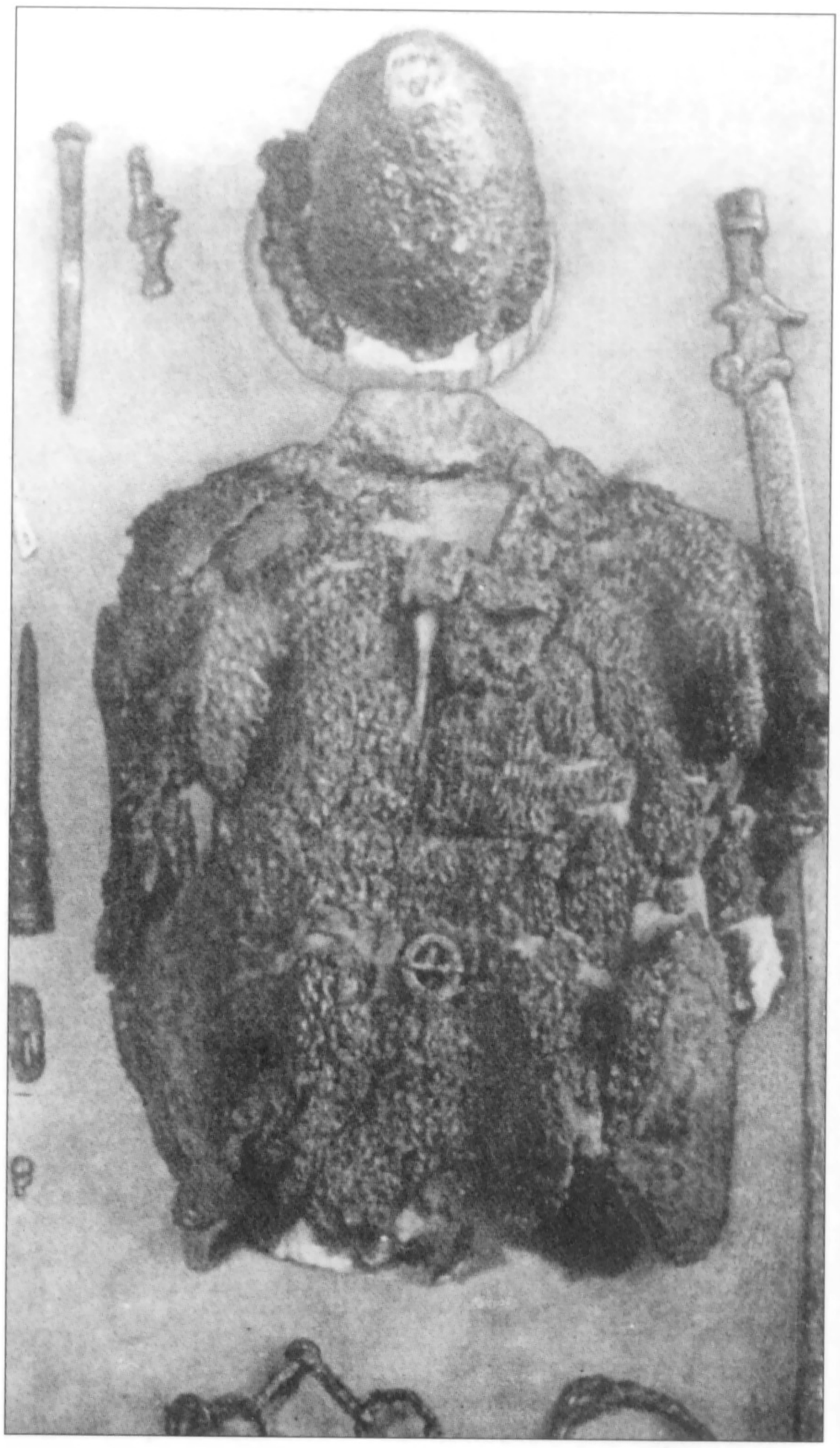
the Kara Khitai, who would again play their part in the early days of Genghiz Khan's conquests.

It should also be noted that the Mongols rarely if ever left weapons on the battlefield after a victory – this being regarded as a crime which could be punished by execution. Instead armour was collected, sorted and distributed amongst the warriors. When a warrior died his military equipment was inherited by his descendants, and was only rarely buried with him in his grave. Fragments of Tatar-Mongol armour have, however, been found in some graves. In eastern Trans-Baikal, for example, it has been discovered in the burial grounds of so-called Dvortsy or 'palaces'. These fragments include iron plates or lamellae of two types; round and rectangular with rounded edges. The rectangular form consists of narrow (1.5cm wide) and thin (1 to 2mm thick) strips of metal which are generally around 2.5cm long. These also normally have three pairs of equidistant holes. They were found in association with the second type which is in the form of convex disc about 5cm in diameter.

As medieval writers inform us, the Mongols joined these plates together by means of thin laces, tying them into a form of iron lamellar cuirass known as a *khuyad*. According to research by armour specialists, these cuirasses came in two main versions. The first was a 'corset-cuirass' made in two sections; these sections going down each side of the body or more rarely across the front and back. In addition there were rectangular shoulder protections hanging as far as the elbows, and thigh-protection reaching to the knees or to the mid-shins. The second form of cuirass was more like a jacket with sections from the throat to the hem in front and from the base of the skull to the hem at the back. These again had rectangular or more rarely semi-circular shoulder protections reaching the elbows or sometimes further down the arms.

In addition to this form of iron armour, the Mongols used wooden shields to protect exposed parts of a warrior's body such as the lower legs, lower arms and hands, and to provide additional protection for the chest and shoulders. Such a shield was called a *khalka*. Although none of these shields survive today, we can suppose that such things were comparable to those used by neighbouring peoples in, for example, southern Siberia. Certainly there is clear evidence that styles of armour were copied or borrowed. Another vital component in the defensive panoply of heavily armoured Tatar-Mongol troops was, of course, the helmet, which was called a *duuga*. As in all Central Asian styles, it was normally made of several metal sections, though the resulting patterns could vary. For example the Jürchen apparently made their helmets of seven plates while the Yenesi Kirghiz Turks made theirs of eight plates, all being riveted together at the top. The resulting helmet was of a



This is an almost complete array of a western steppe nomadic warrior's military equipment, including a helmet with the remains of an aventail, a mail hauberk with a buckle, a sabre, dagger, spearheads and even horse-harness. It probably dates from the late 12th or 13th century and the man who was burried in this grave is likely to have been Polovtsian.

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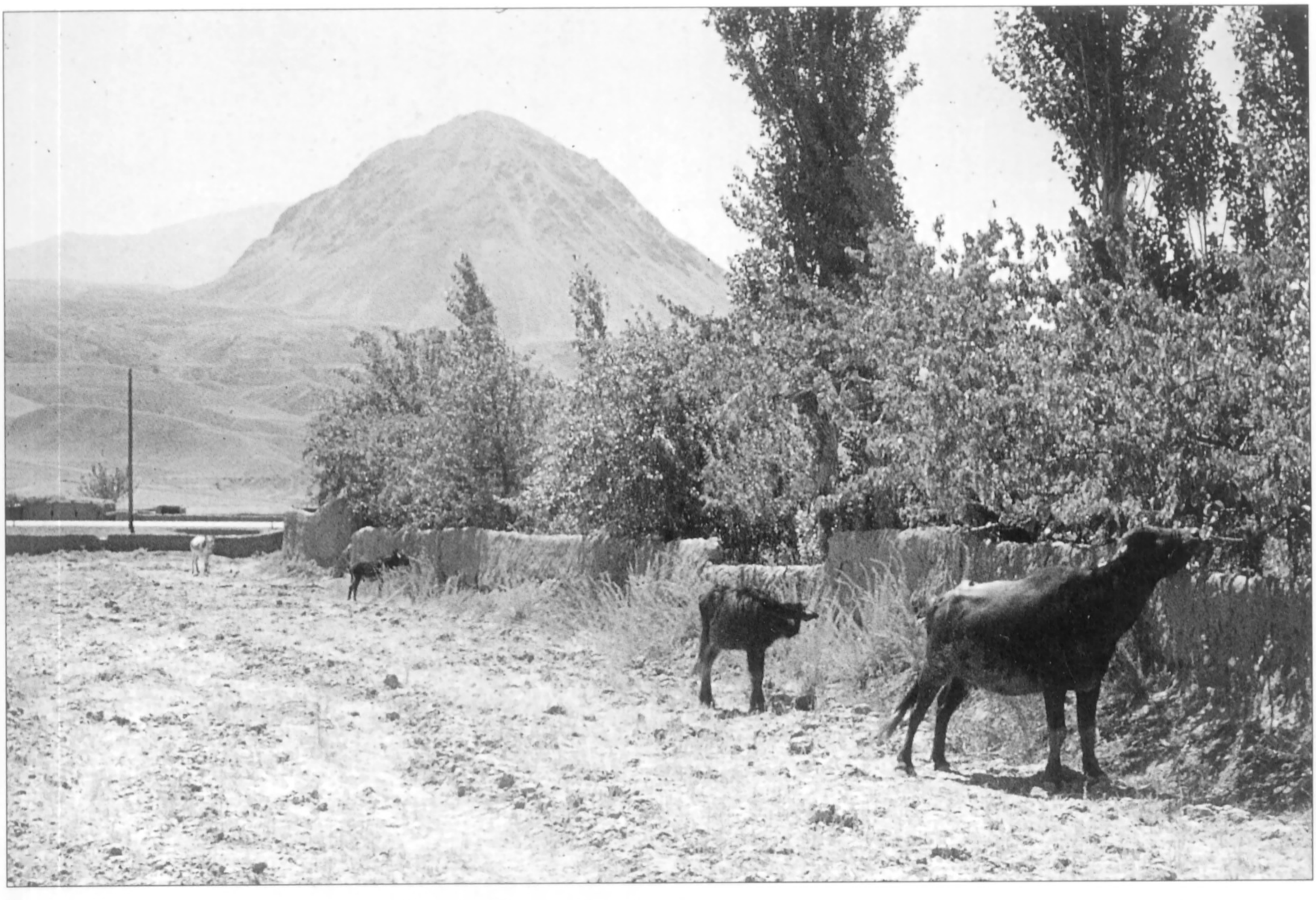

Once the Mongols left their winter quarters in the upland steppes of north-western Iran they almost immediately entered tangled mountain ranges. At first, as here near Maku in Iran, the mountains were low and rocky, but once they reached the Caucasus range itself the Mongols found themselves amongst some of the highest peaks in eastern Europe and western Asia.
(D. Nicolle photograph)

spherical-conical shape, between 18 and 22cm high, with a small plate and a sharp spike or plume holder on top. Horizontal or vertical brow-plates and cross-shaped visors appear to have been specific to the Mongols. In addition a warrior's neck was protected by a thick flap of iron plates adjusted to the size of his head, or his helmet could incorporate a mail face covering. Instead of iron lamellar cuirasses some Mongol troops wore so-called 'soft-armour' made of multi-layered cloth or felt, sometimes reinforced with metal discs.

A cloth coat or *tsuv* was another essential aspect of the Tatar-Mongol warrior's attire. It was like an ordinary coat but lacked any lining. There was also a slit at the back running from the waist to the hem, and in front the skirt of the *tsuv* reached only from the waist to the lap. This *tsuv* coat was comfortable for a warrior because it protected a horseman from the rain without obliging him to dismount. Furthermore he could make the coat even more weatherproof by turning over the lapels. Some coats also had a separate rectangular hood or cowl which extended to cover the collar.

A warrior wore boots or *gutals*, the design of which was particularly suitable for prolonged fast riding in a hard saddle with the feet in stirrups; in other words riding firmly in the saddle in a style that had been developed over several centuries. These boots were sewn from *yuft* or Russian-style leather, or from cloth, velveteen or suede. Each boot consisted of a straight shin piece with stiffer adjustable vamps, a thick sole made of layers of felt with a relatively stiff upturned toe. In winter such horsemen wore higher boots known as *boitog*.

The Tatar-Mongol rider's weaponry included a composite bow or *nomo*, which was kept in a special bowcase while on the march. This was

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called a *khaadak*. The arrows or *tumer bulsuu* had flat, three- or four-bladed heads and were kept in a birch bark quiver or *khegenyg*. This would also contain a *khure* or file. The razor-sharp sabre or *khelme* was sometimes substituted by a broader sword or *mese*, an iron mace or *gulda*, and a war-axe or *alma khune*, while a spear or *zhada* completed the warrior's armoury. All warriors, including the lightly armoured men, carried a knife or *khutug*, which was kept either in the shin part of his riding boot or in a special sheath called a *gerd*. Other equipment included an awl or *shubge*, a steel or *khete* to strike fire, a robe or *zeeli*, and hobbles for his horse. These were again of three types: the *tushaa* for the front legs, *urode* for the front or back legs, and *shuder* for the front and back legs together. Finally the man would have a horse-comb or *zulguur*, a needle or *zuun*, threads or *utas* and a whip or *tashuur*, and a simple tent or *mailkan*. Some men were also responsible for an *ovohoi*, which was the covering of a *yurt* or framed tent in which several men would sleep.

Each warrior had two or three bows and three containers of different length arrows, each containing 30 such arrows. The length of the bows when unstrung did not exceed 120cm. They had a flattened and curved 'M' shape when strung. Such bows have been found in two burial grounds at Malaya Kulinda near the River Onon. Bows of this kind were used with a bowstring or *nomonoi ooher* made of thin twisted strands of leather, ox-skin or wattled sheep's intestine. Literary sources described

A number of beautifully made complete lamellar cuirasses still exist in various museums and private collections. Most came from Tibet or western China and were thought to be no more than a century or so old. Recent scientific tests have, however, shown that some are actually of medieval origin. They had probably been preserved in the armoury-reliquaries of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, having originally been donated by Mongol chieftains. These armours are identical to those worn by Mongol warriors in both Chinese and Islamic paintings.

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The earliest copies of the Persian *Shahnamah* epic, made around 1300 in Shiraz or Baghdad, illustrate soldiers wearing Mongol-style armour. This is identical to that described in 13th-century documents and is very similar to fragments found by archaeologists. Two of the men shown here, second from the left and far right, have lamellar cuirasses. The three others, including the fallen man, wear what appear to be forms of soft armour, perhaps of felt with or without a scale lining. (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)

bows, identical to those found by archaeologists, as Mongol bows. This was because, although they were used by several other peoples, the first appearance and then the spread of such bows across much of Europe and Asia coincided with the appearance and political domination of the Tatar-Mongols. In fact the so-called Mongol bow was popular because it was convenient to use as well as being highly effective from the steppe nomad's point of view.

Since the 13th century the style predominated over earlier types of composite bow unless special geographical or climatic reasons inhibited its spread. In the forest-steppe regions of eastern Trans-Baikal and along the Amur River, for example, another type of bow continued to be used in spite of the emergence of the Mongol bow. This was known as the Tungus-type bow. Its elements were glued with fish glue and dried for two years. The Tungus bow also incorporated two pieces of wood, usually fir or common spruce wood, birch, larch, Siberian pine or cedar. In the middle of the bow a square or oval wedge was inserted. The bow was then covered with birch bark, the birch ends of the bow being partially wrapped with tendon or sinew. Sometimes a bow was covered with strips of bird-cherry (*padus*) tree while the additional pieces at the ends of the bow which had notches for the bowstring were similarly made of *padus* wood. The bowstrings of these Tungus bows were made of hemp fibre and strips of leather, sometimes being wrapped with a thin layer of birch bark. Bows were sometimes also made with a double-curved shape.

The use of the Tungus-type bow alongside the Mongol type was quite possible amongst heavily armoured Tatar-Mongol cavalry. Clearly Genghiz-Khan's troops formed a multi-national or multi-ethnic army which included men of Mongol-speaking, Turkish-speaking and Tungus tribal origins. Archaeological excavations also prove that the latter were involved in long-distance Mongol campaigns. As for the Jürchens, there were 46 brigades of them in 1213, each armed with their own traditional

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Two basic styles of medieval mail shirt or hauberk have been found in southern Russia. Both are short sleeved. While one has the front hem shorter than the back, for comfort while riding, the other has a slit in both the front and the back hems as was also seen in western Europe. Almost all come from the graves of nomad Turkish rather than Russian warriors, but some may actually have been manufactured in Russian workshops. In any case it seems likely that essentially the same forms of armour were worn by both Russians and Polovtsians.

weaponry. Bows of both types were, however, carried by Mongol warriors in a special leather or cloth bowcase which was attached to the waist-belt by straps.

Bows, of course, required arrows. Although iron and bone arrowheads were equally represented amongst archaeological finds from the eastern Trans-Baikal region dating to the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, bone arrowheads obviously could not deal with an armoured opponent. Nevertheless, they were used by, and perhaps against, lightly equipped horse-archers. Flat arrowheads were very common amongst Tatar-Mongol warriors, these probably being used at short range and whilst shooting at a rapid rate. A flat arrowhead with a horizontal blade of this sort could inflict a wide, debilitating wound on an unprotected man or animal. These arrows are, in fact, supposed to have been used against cavalry, particularly against their horses. Of course only the heavily armoured cavalry rode armoured horses. Otherwise horses were a favourite target for the archers and these wide wounds could disable them very quickly.

It was said that the Tatar-Mongols were unenthusiastic about hand-to-hand combat when they could avoid it, and preferred to injure or kill their opponents' horses and weaken their enemies with arrows. Only when an enemy's horses were weakened did the Mongols engage in close-quarters fighting. Nevertheless, this sort of broad flat-headed arrow has often been found in the Mongol cultural or archaeological layers within Mongolia itself and in eastern Trans-Baikal towns, as well as in the towns of eastern Europe. This is particularly the case in those places which are known to have fallen to a Mongol siege and subsequent assault, all of which testifies to a wide use of such arrowheads even when fighting on foot.

Another characteristic of many Mongol arrows was a hollow bone container. Placed beneath the arrowhead, this formed a whistle with two oval-shaped holes. Such whistles could be of barrel or biconical shape and were normally between 2.8 and 7.5cm in size, the dimensions being directly related to the size of the arrowheads. The purpose of these objects was to create a frightening noise, though they might also have had other functions. Some scholars have suggested that whistling arrows were a luxury item amongst the Mongols but this was clearly not the case. In fact excavated graves of the 12th to 14th centuries suggest quite the opposite, since arrows with whistling heads were clearly used by a great many ordinary nomad tribesmen.

The Tatar-Mongols made the shafts of their arrows from the wood of bushes and trees that grew alongside rivers and lakes, usually willow but also birch and juniper. This was similarly done by many Central Asian peoples during the second millennium AD. According to fragments of arrow shafts found in various Mongol burial grounds in eastern Trans-Baikal, especially those from the villages of Kunkur and

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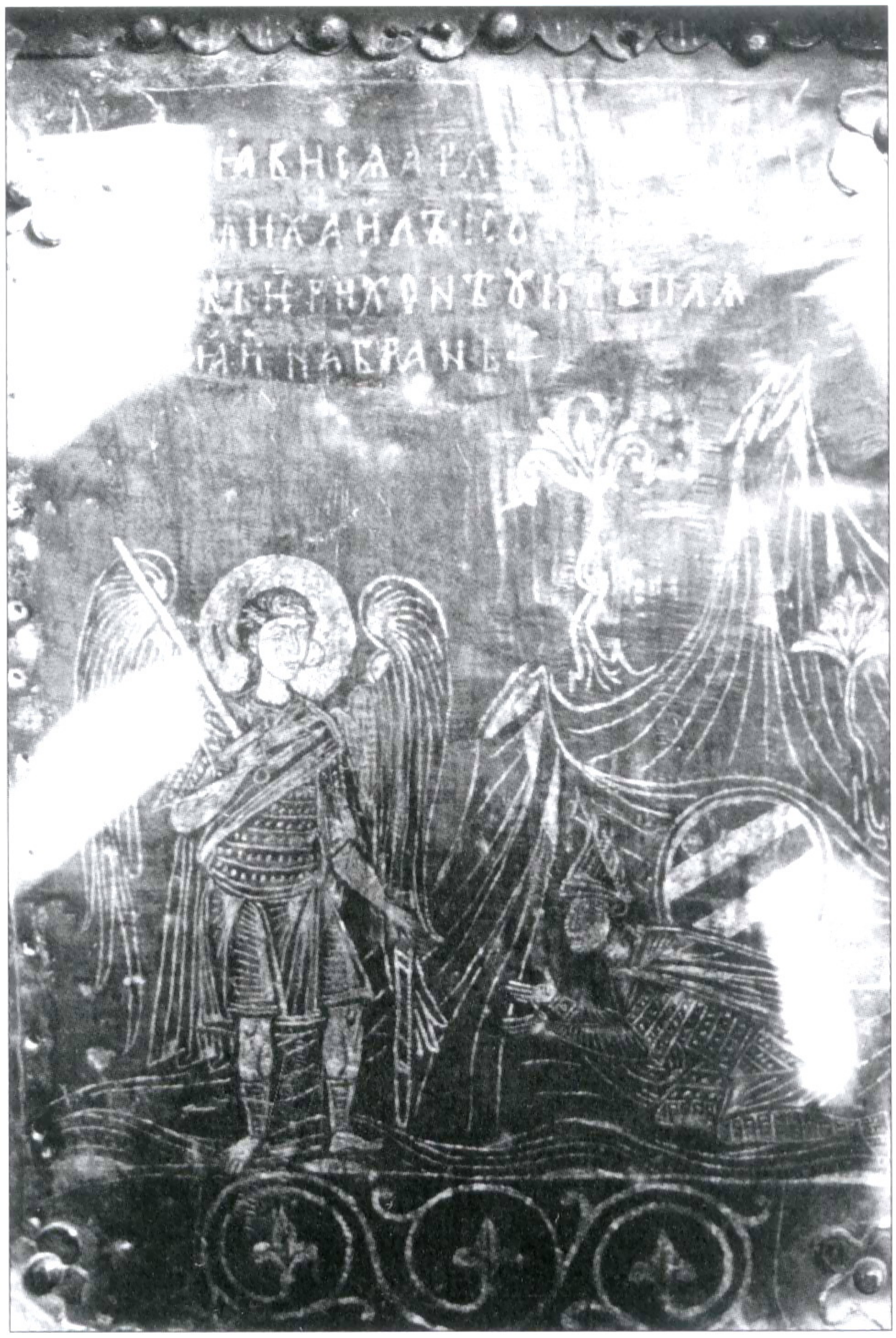
Malaya Kulinda in the valley of the River Onon, these consisted of a cylindrical wooden rod which became thinner towards the notch of the arrow, though with an average diameter of 0.8cm. The length of the arrow-shaft was usually no more than 70 or 80cm, this estimate being based upon descriptions of Mongol arrows in the written sources. Such sources usually described these arrows as being the length of 'two feet, one hand and two fingers'.

The tanged iron arrowheads were probably fixed to the arrow shafts by hammering the pointed tang into the shaft without splitting it, then binding strong thread around the top of the shaft. Alternatively the top of the shaft may have been split then bound with cord after the tang had been inserted. The binding was itself then sometimes reinforced with a layer of birch bark glued to its surface. That particular method of fixing arrowheads was discovered in a burial ground at Malaya Kulinda, but was also found in excavations from periods earlier than the Mongols. The flights or feathering of an arrow were known to the Mongols as *ude khomon*. During the 12th to 14th centuries the Mongols used eagle feathers, though they probably also used the feathers of geese, kites, blackcocks and woodpeckers, as did various other peoples in Central and northern Asia. It is interesting to note that an arrow with feathers taken from the right wing of a bird tends to spin to the right during flight, whereas arrows with feathers from the left wing do the opposite.



Two pairs of so-called Golden Doors can been seen in the superb 12th-century Rozhdestvensky Monastery Church at Suzdal. This, the older, illustrates a prince kneeling before an archangel. The latter wears a short-sleeved mail or perhaps lamellar cuirass, reflecting the influence of Byzantine art. But the prince has a full-length armour plus leggings of the same material. Despite its highly stylised pattern, this probably represents mail. Note also the typically European kite-shaped shield behind the prince which even has a western European style of heraldic pattern. (D. Nicolle photograph)

The Mongols sometimes used poison or *khoron* on their arrowheads, several written sources referring to Tatar weapons 'filled with poison'. Central and northern Asian military technology knew of two such poisons. The first was a vegetable extract and arrows were reportedly smeared with it during the 'seventh and eighth Moons' or lunar months of the year. Anyone wounded with this poison died almost immediately and when the poison was heated even its fumes could kill a man. The second kind of poison was called *mogain khoran* and it was extracted from the steppe viper or adder. These snakes were caught in spring when their venom was at is most dangerous. It was then dried for future use. Before battle a little water was added to the dried and concentrated poison which was then smeared on the arrowheads. This type of poisoned arrow could apparently kill a man even if it only scratched his skin.

Since a bow and arrows formed an essential part of the Tatar-Mongol warrior's armament, a quiver was similarly essential. But to date only one type of Mongol quiver is known. It had a wooden frame covered in birch bark with an oval opening cut into it to form a mouth near the top. The shape also broadened gradually from the top towards the base. The material from which the base was made is unknown, probably leather or

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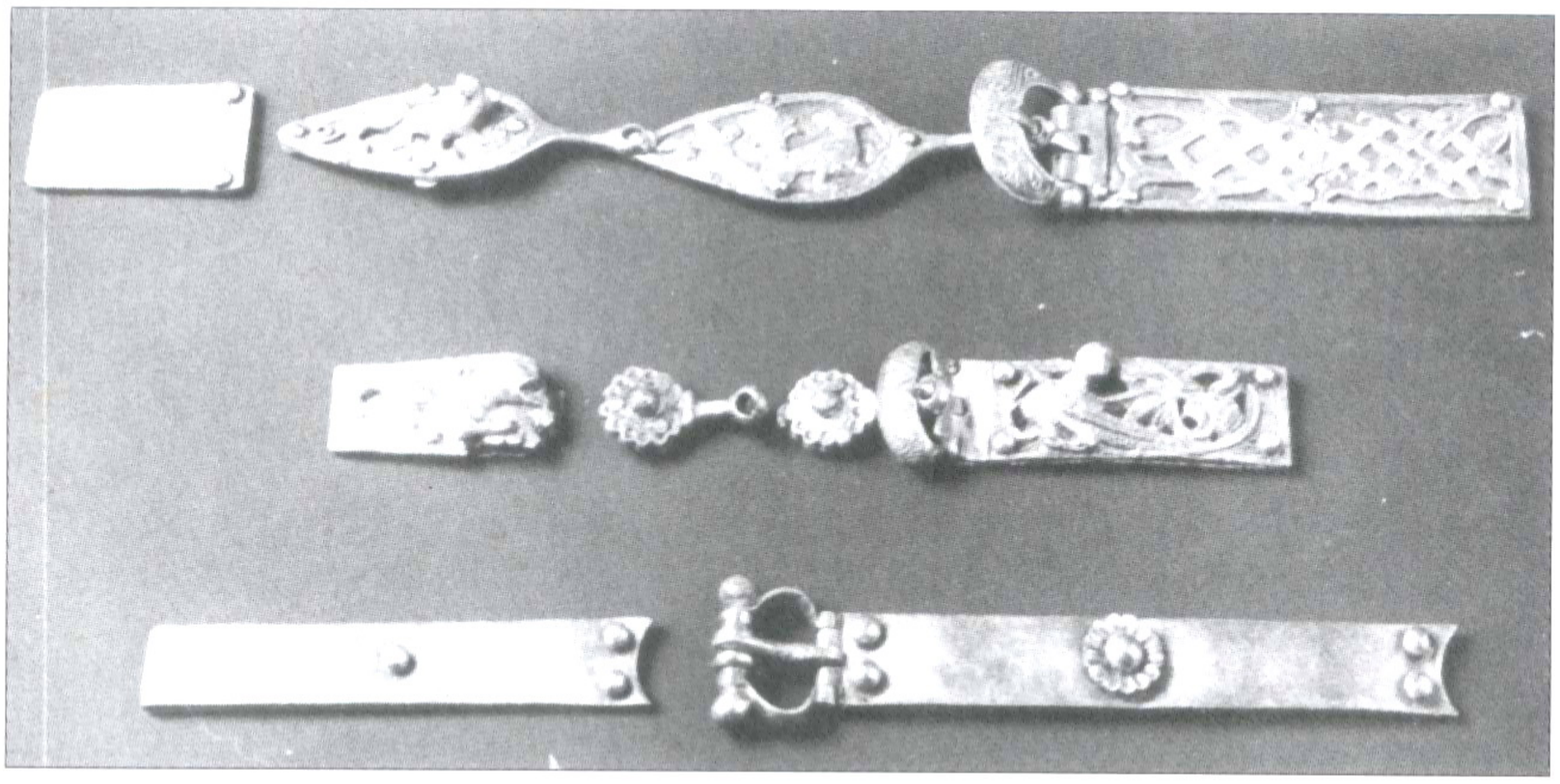

The superb decorated metallic elements of a Polovtsian khan's or prince's belt are made of silver. The belt dates from the 12th or early 13th century and was found in the Cingul-Kurgan. (State Historical Museum, Kiev)

One of what were perhaps originally a mirror-image matching pair of horse-archers in carved stone relief. It comes from 12th- to 14th-century Kubachi, in what is now the southernmost Russian Federated Republic of Daghestan. Although this region was by then fully converted to Islam, the ancient Turkish tradition of figural carving did not die out for several centuries. This representation would probably have been an accurate reflection of the horse-archery equipment used at the time of the Kalka campaign.

felt, but none survive in the graves so far excavated by archaeologists. The birch bark used in these quivers was taken from a tree trunk as a long strip. The edges were laid over one another and sewn together with strong threads. Arrows were placed in this type of quiver with their heads downwards and no more than 30 in each quiver. The quivers were themselves attached to a waist belt by means of iron hooks. As far as we can judge from quivers so far excavated, they were worn on the left side of the body.

Another essential element in the equipment of a Tatar-Mongol horse-archer was a file. This was made of iron and was in the form of a quite heavy plate with a wedge-shaped tetrahedral tang to which a handle was attached, and had a characteristic lug or projection at the butt end.

To date the shields of the Tatar-Mongols, which were so important to protect head and body, have been poorly studied because neither complete shields nor even their constituent parts have been found in Mongol archaeological sites. Consequently we have to rely on written

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At the eastern end of the steppes, Chinese artists also made extremely accurate drawings of Mongol tribal warriors. This picture probably dates from the 14th century, and the horse-archer would seem to be dressed for the scorching summer of Central Asia judging by his turban and the fact that he has taken his left or bow-arm out of his coat.

sources. These indicate that such shields were round, about 20cm in diameter, and were often made of glued wooden planks attached to a wooden cross-piece. The outer surface of the shield was covered in hard leather to which metal bosses or even plates were attached, particularly when the shield was used by heavily armoured warriors. The inner surface had a layer of felt. The edge of the shield had a strengthened rim while there was a domed metallic boss at the centre.

Close-combat weapons varied in form and function. Those for cutting and stabbing included the sabre and various types of sword. Others included the axe and the thrusting spear.

Surviving sabres from the Mongol capital of Karakorum are of steel construction, slightly curved with slender points. They are about one metre long and from 3 to 3.5cm across. At first glance, since their curviture is so slight, they do not differ from other comparable swords, except in having only a single cutting edge. Hence medieval European authors often described them as the 'slightly crooked swords' of the Mongols. In the hands of a skilful cavalryman a sabre was comparatively more effective than an ordinary sword because of its lightness, which permitted quicker movements of the sword-arm than were possible with a heavy sword such as that used in most of 13th-century Europe. At the same time the sabre, despite its lightness, could deliver blows just as powerful as the heavy straight sword. This was a function of the sabre's different centre of gravity.

In addition to such sabres, the Mongols also used ordinary swords. These were of two basic types. The first had two sharpened edges and a rounded tip which made it look similar to the European swords of the Carolingian period. The second was more massive and had a pointed rather than rounded tip. As such it had similarities with European

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No portraits seem to survive showing those Russian princes who took part in the disastrous battle of the Kalka River. This wall painting of Prince Yaroslav Vsevolodovich was painted about 23 years after the battle and is in the Church of the Saviour at Nereditsa in northern Russia. Nevertheless, the princely costume that he wears is unlikely to have changed over the previous quarter century.

swords of the 13th and 14th centuries. In addition to the above examples, Mongol cavalry also used straight, narrow-bladed, single-edged swords. These were usually about 3cm wide.

Other close-combat weapons included rounded maces described in some sources as 'rods of good iron' as well as axes and spears. Spear blades came in various designs including rhomboid-shaped blades around 12cm long, a pike-like weapon with an 18cm blade and even blades in the shape of a bird's feather. One written source indicated that spear shafts were sometimes painted red, these being called *nean zos* by the Mongols. This may have been to symbolise the quality of the weapon and also its effectiveness in battle.

Special attention was paid to the protection of war-horses. According to the written sources, 'one takes a strip (of leather) from an ox or any other animal, which has a width equal to an arm, then three or four straps are covered with resin (or tar) and tied with ropes. On the upper strap, ropes are located at the end, at the lower they are in the middle, and so it is done up at the end. Thus when the lower belts are being bent, the other ones are introduced and so they are doubled or put three times on a body.' This appears to be a rather confused description of the manufacture of leather lamellar armour. The horse protection was divided into five parts: one on each side of the animal, one across the throat and chest, another across the back, and finally one around the rump. There was a hole in the latter through which the horse's tail was pulled. All the parts extend as far as the horse's knees or shins. The animal's forehead was covered by three linked iron plates. Such lamellar horse-armour was shown in Iranian and Japanese painted miniatures of Tatar-Mongol cavalrymen, but a form of soft armour was also used during this same period, again in conjunction with the three-plated horse's head protection or chamfron.

The cavalryman's saddle or *emeel* was similar to those used by Mongol horsemen until the recent past. It had a wooden frame and arched

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saddle-bows. These were decorated with carving, painting and brass attachments. Both saddle-bows were fixed with iron straps while the saddle-boards with joined by iron plates, the front bow being higher than the back. The saddle was then covered first with felt and then with leather. A sweat-cloth was placed beneath the saddle. This was decorated with ornaments and metallic horse-brasses in addition to a leather saddle cloth. The colour of the saddle itself was normally dark brown.

Bridle, bit, buckles or clasps and saddle rings could all be decorated in addition to those decorative elements on the harness straps. The latter, according to burial finds from eastern Trans-Baikal dating from the 12th to 14th centuries, included copper 'horse-brasses', which were sewn to the throat and breast straps, as well as to smaller straps; other decorations were made of bone. Different kinds of knots were used to decorate horse harness in combination with the plaiting of some of the thinner straps.

One notable feature of the Tatar-Mongol cavalry warrior was the absence of spurs. It should, however, be pointed out that Mongol horses were sometimes fitted with horseshoes, despite the commonly held opinion that these were not used by the Mongols. Numerous horse-shoes of a type called *takhs*, which lacked nails, have been found in Karakorum. They were probably tied to the horse's hooves.

In contrast to a heavily armoured cavalryman, a lightly equipped horse-archer did not have such an abundant arsenal. He wore only a hat, often sewn from sections of sable fur. Hats were also made of wild goat skin or fox fur or from wolf's paws. They had a pointed or rounded crown to which an animal's tail might also be attached. The horse-archer might, however, have a form of soft armour consisting of a long jacket with leaf-shaped shoulder protections made of layers of felt, or of felt and good quality cloth. It could also be reinforced with metallic scales. Otherwise such light cavalrymen wore a quilted coat which wrapped at an angle across the front of the body and had long, relatively narrow sleeves. Leather mittens or gauntlets called *arkhan*, plus quilted trousers and high boots completed his clothing. In addition to his bow and arrows with iron or bone heads, this light cavalry horse-archer's weaponry included a sabre and a lassoo made of animal hair.

RUSSIAN ARMIES

The core of each Russian prince's army was undoubtedly his own bodyguard. These were élite units consisting of freely recruited mercenary warriors but their size could vary from only a few dozen men to three or five thousand soldiers in one of the larger or richer principalities.

The most important constituent of these units was heavy cavalry and it was called the 'oldest' or 'best' guard. The 'youngest' section consisted of lightly armed archers. The troops in these two sections differed in their military experience and skills as well as in their status within the complicated feudal heirarchy. Furthermore the guard unit was split between professionals and auxiliaries, the former providing the backbone of every princely army.

The Russian bodyguards' armament derived from both the steppe and European traditions. These included swords, which were almost

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Russian cavalry. A member of the Prince of Suzdal's heavy cavalry bodyguard (left), a Russian prince (centre) and a member of the Grand Prince of Kiev's heavy cavalry bodyguard (right). It was now quite characteristic for Russian helmets to incorporate partial face-masks with nasals, or even sometimes complete face-masks. These were used in addition to the mail aventail which protected a warrior's face and neck. The most important armament was still a sword and spear. The Russian prince's clothing was distinguished by its richness and the brightness of its colours. Another distinctive characteristic was the fur hat, which was worn even in summer, and also a distinctive coat called a *korzno*. This continued in use up to the 15th century in Russia. A *kaftan* could be trimmed with beaver, sable or marten fur, which again indicated the high status of its wearer, the prince. On the march the princes wore mail armour beneath their *kaftans* more often than did ordinary soldiers, since the danger of enemy assassins or conspiracies amongst their supposed allies was ever present. (Victor Korolkov)

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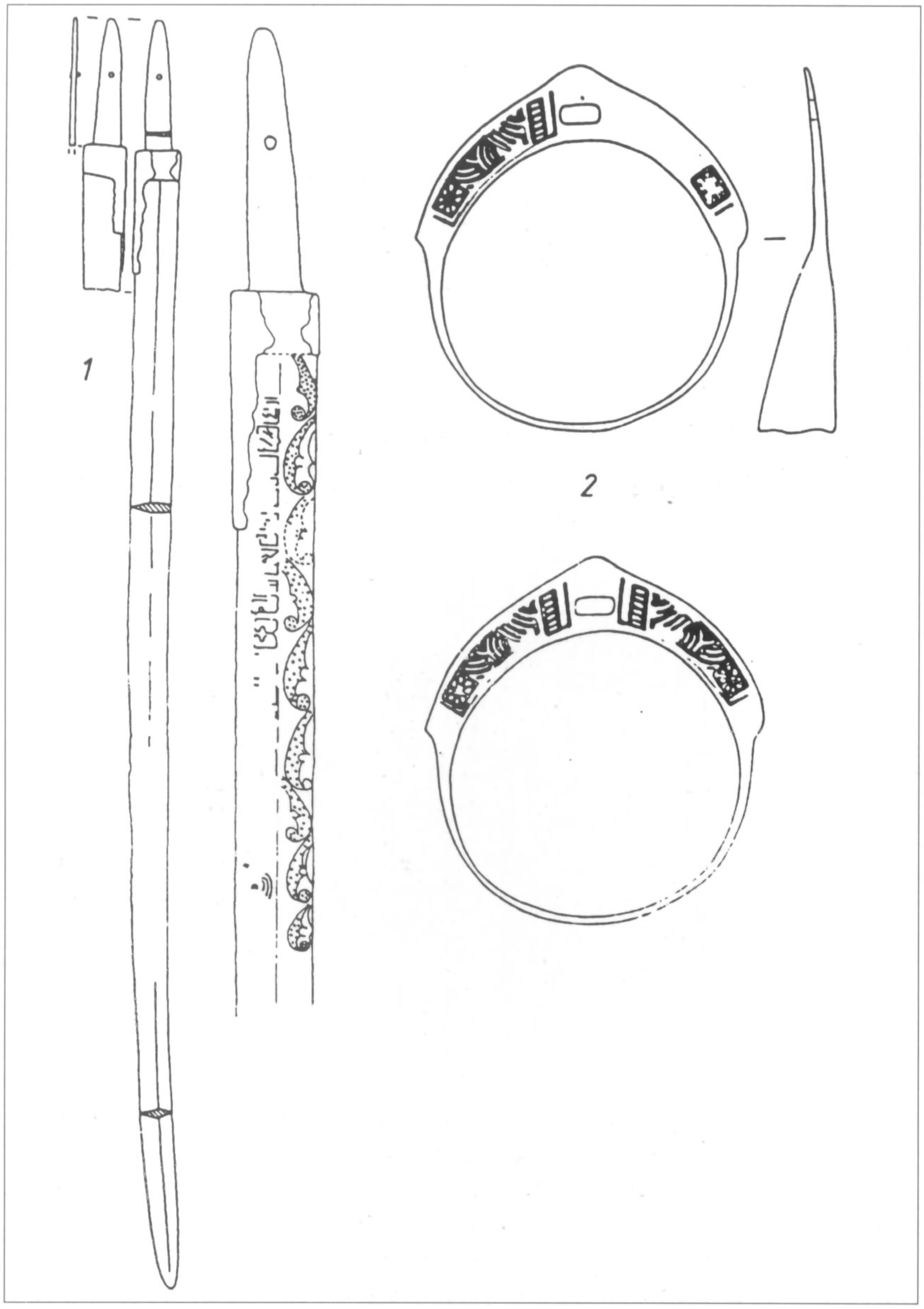

Weapons and horse harness from Nezin, near Chernigov, 12th–13th century. Though essentially nomad in style, this sort of military equipment would also have been used by many Russian cavalrymen:
1 – Sabre, almost certainly imported from the Islamic world as the blade is inlaid with an Arabic inscription; 2 – Stirrup with inlaid decoration.

identical to those used in the rest of Europe and were sometimes imported from the west; also war-axes, spiked maces, sabres, fighting knives and smaller daggers. The mace or *kisten* had been copied from the nomads of the northern Black Sea coastal regions. This *kisten* had a metal head, sometimes hollow with moulten lead poured inside it. A leather strap was attached to its wooden handle. A blow from a *kisten* could stun an enemy in battle and could kill a wolf. Since this sort of weapon was cheap and readily available it was also popular amongst poorer people. Some of the simplest had heads made of bone and these crude weapons continued in use, in the hands of robbers or bandits, well into the 17th century. As a result of fighting numerous wars against peoples of the steppes, archery had also spread throughout Russia.

The basic defensive panoply consisted of a mail hauberk, though by the 13th century almost all élite warriors also wore a lamellar or scale

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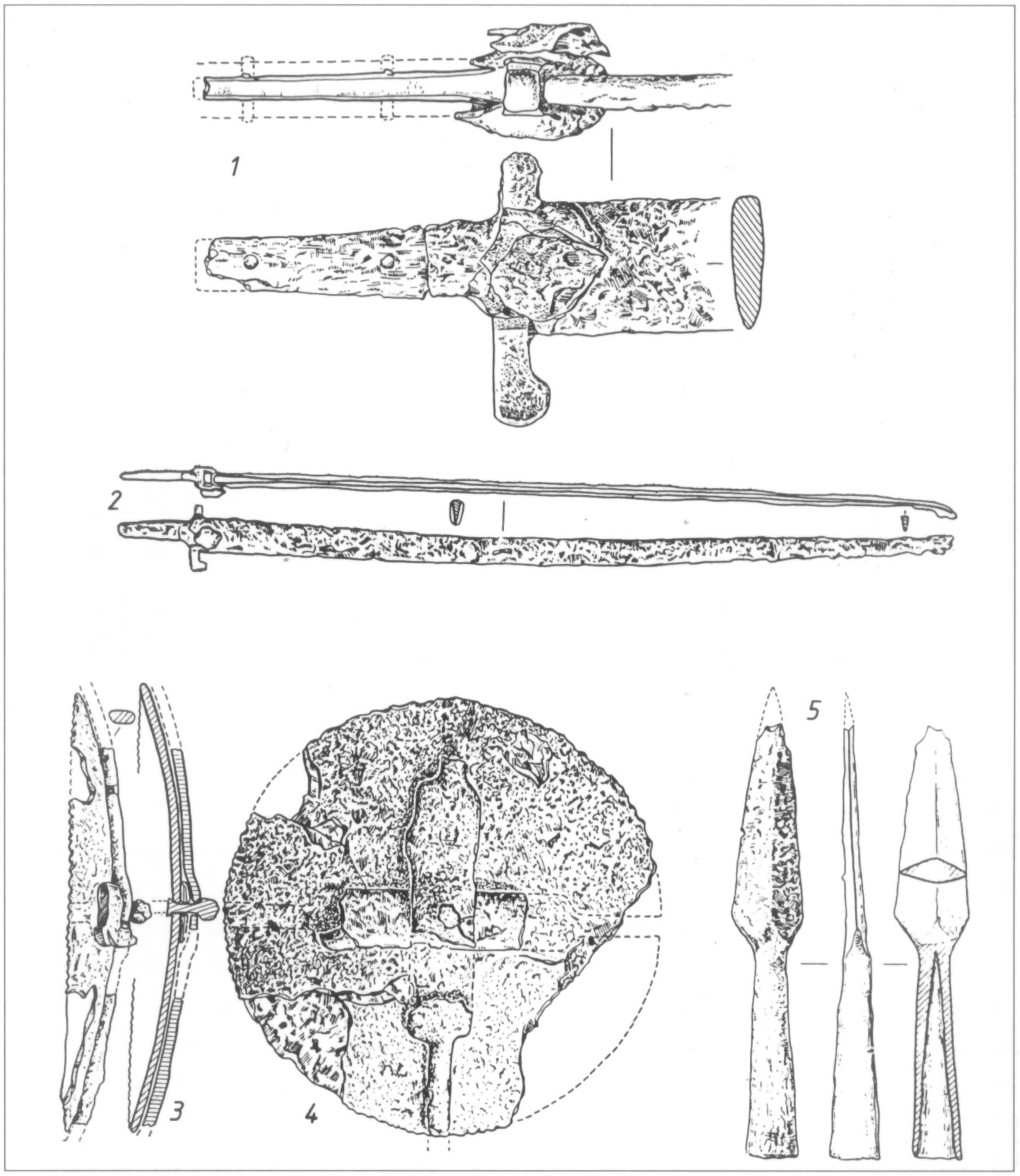
Military equipment from the Rus River area, a region near the southern frontier of the Russian principality of Kiev, 12th–13th century. It was found in the graves of nomad warriors who had entered the service of the Grand Prince of Kiev: 1–2 – Sabre; 3–4 – Iron shield-boss seen from the front and side with a sectional view; 5 – Spearhead seen from the front and side with a sectional view.



cuirass over their mail. The cuirass itself was of laced lamellar construction like those seen in Asia and the Byzantine Empire, or sometimes of scales attached to a cloth or leather base. European-style mail chausses were also used to protect the legs. Shields were either round or of the elongated Byzantine type. The rest of a warrior's equipment consisted of a helmet, often with a half-mask across the face. From the end of the 12th century a sort of full face-mask with two eye-holes became fashionable. This had parallels in both Europe and Asia. In battle the warrior's clothing was normally worn under his armour. The colours of such clothing can be seen in surviving manuscript miniatures and other such paintings. A knee-length shirt, worn beneath a mail hauberk, with blue, green, red or brown being common colours. High boots of dyed leather and mittens in cold weather – these being essential in the Russian winters. Warriors did not normally wear armour on the march although some chronicles refer to the practice, this being known amongst their contemporaries as 'marching in the manner of the Rus'.

Horses were also sometimes protected by mail armour and chamfrons. On the other hand such horse-armour was never common or typical, only being used in those areas of south-western Russia that were most vulnerable to raids by nomadic peoples from the steppes. It was known both before and after the Mongol invasions.

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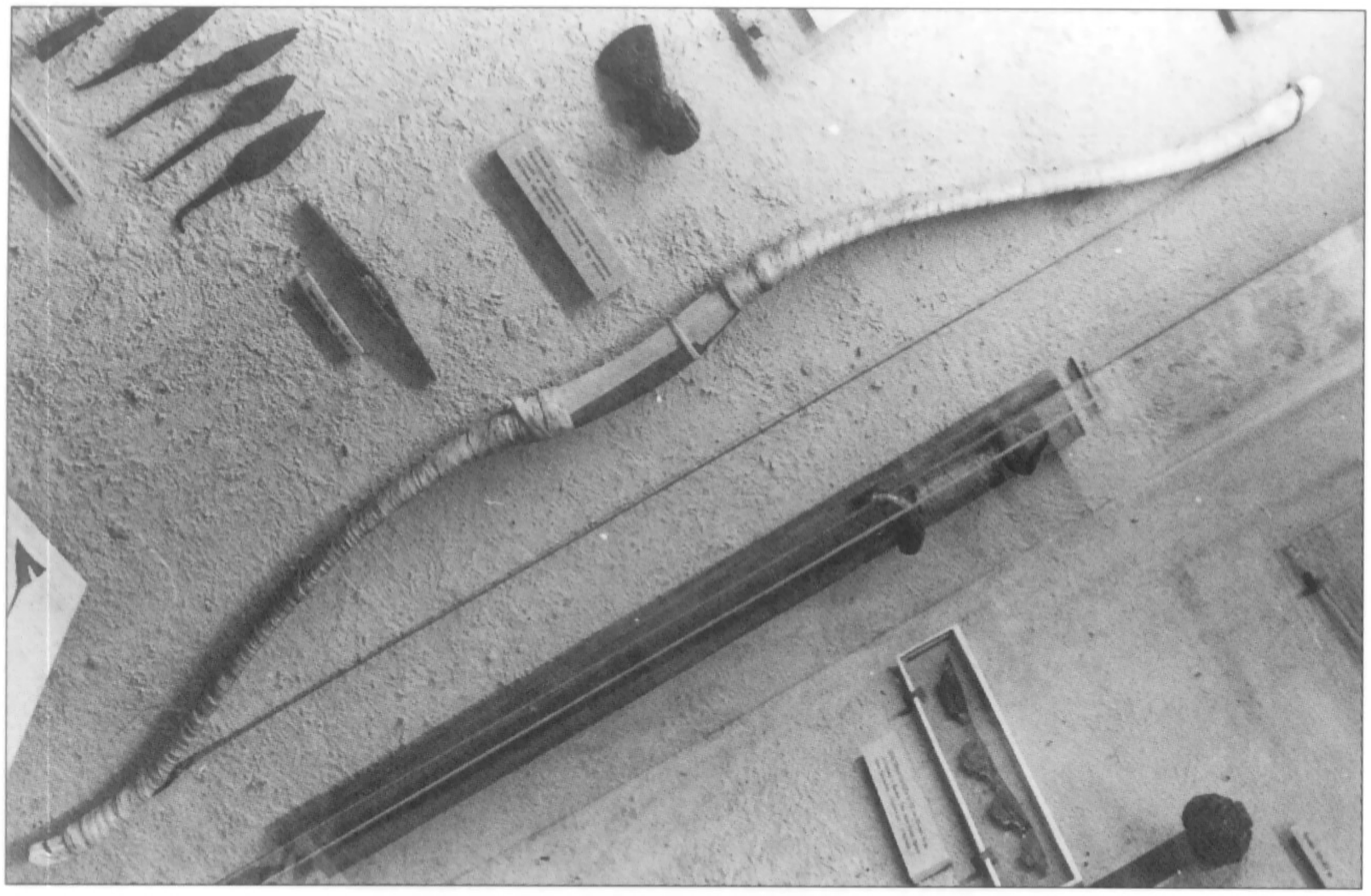

While relatively short composite bows of Turkish and Mongol forms were the typical weapons of steppe nomad warriors, archery was also important amongst Russian infantry. The latter, however, often seem to have used a larger semi-composite bow made of layers of glued wood and often covered in birch bark. The reconstructed example shown here is based upon an almost complete though fragmented medieval Russian infantry or hunting bow. (Kremlin Museum, Novgorod)

In addition a Russian prince could demand military support from his subjects in the form of a levy of urban militias from towns under his control. These were sometimes called the 'black people'. The primary responsibility of the rural populations was to provide food, and so they were not usually called up. The 'black people' or urban militias and the 'young bodyguards' got their weapons and armour from the prince or from the town arsenals. This military equipment was naturally neither as varied nor as rich as that of the 'old guard' military élite, and seems to have consisted of mail hauberks, helmets, swords and spears. Various other kinds of people could be hired by a prince as a complete unit. But in this case the soldiers were expected to provide their own arms and armour, which resulted in great variety in their military equipment.

The Russian princes clearly had no idea of the nature or seriousness of the threat which they were about to face in battle. Nevertheless, the forces they led against the Mongols were large and well equipped and benefited from considerable military experience. By 1223 the nature of military power in the Russian principalities, including those that took part in the Kalka campaign, was very different from that of the 10th, 11th and even 12th centuries. This was as true of its operation at the strategic level as at the tactical level. Such strategy varied, of course, and was seen in its simplest form in defensive campaigns. To defend their territories against nomads from the steppes, the principalities had constructed a number of frontier fortresses. Most were garrisoned by men from further north, but they were also defended by Torks and Berends who were themselves Turkish ex-nomads, invited to serve in defence of the Russian frontier. Furthermore, long earth ramparts had been constructed, surmounted by wooden fences. Sometimes these 'sentry units of the Russian lands' were organised so that several princes shared the responsibilities of defence, maintaining watch throughout the dangerous summer season. Above all they were expected to keep an eye on those directions from which Polovtsian raids were most likely to erupt. Some Russian princes clearly realised that the Polovtsians were their common enemy and that the principalities could not afford to fight them individually. All too often, however, maintaining such

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cooperation against the fragmented background of medieval Russia's feudal political structure proved impossible. As a result there was usually no common defensive strategy.

To mobilise and then organize an army to take the offensive against an enemy, even an army from a single Russian state, was a very difficult task. This was despite the fact that a prince was supposedly the personal leader of his troops. Instead many military detachments considered themselves to be the retainers of individual *boyars* or senior noblemen. Thus they followed only their *boyar* and tended to ignore orders from any other source – even from the prince himself. During the 12th century fewer princes had, in fact, personally led their troops in battle. Only when a prince had sufficient authority, which was increasingly rare, could he exercise direct control over all his troops. One such man had been Andrei Bogolubskiy, the autocratic prince of Vladimir. In contrast it was said by one chronicler of Yaroslav Osmomysl, an earlier prince of Galicia, 'when he is insulted the prince does not go with his troops but sends a *voivode* [designated commander] to lead them.' As a result, when large-scale military coalitions were assembled by several principalities, there were frequent quarrels between the participating princes. These could even result in fighting between the separate princes and their bodyguards – with an inevitably negative impact on the outcome of a campaign! When important strategic or tactical questions arose they were normally decided at a meeting between a prince and his bodyguard. But even here the atmosphere was not always calm and in the case of disagreements, the entire bodyguard might leave the service of that particular prince.

Troop mobilisation was carried out in accordance with feudal principles. Hence a prince would send couriers and public criers into the country estates of his bodyguards and to the towns with the orders to muster. Troops were actually summoned by beating a tambour-drum or sounding military trumpets in the town squares, while a unit living in nearby villages could be expected to assemble within two days. On the other hand there were occasions when the troops did not want to go to war, and in such circumstances the prince was effectively helpless. Even a powerful prince like Andrei Bogolubskiy was forced to wait for two weeks, when he was preparing to fight the Volga Bulgars in 1172, for the arrival of various units at the agreed muster point at the mouth of the River Oka. Those *boyars* who disagreed with Andrei's policy dragged their feet and, as the chronicler put it, they 'hurried without haste'.

Russian armies normally moved during summer or winter. Each season had its advantages and disadvantages. In summer the horses could graze easily, and it was possible to undertake long-range or difficult campaigns. In winter the rivers froze and places surrounded by water were easy to reach. During this time of year it was also easier to fight against the Polovtsians, and they could be taken unawares. Night marches were often used in order to make sudden appearances in front of the enemy position. The tempo of a march was arranged beforehand and its speed was to some degree dependent upon the army's train of loaded wagons. These carried its food, forage and sometimes also the armaments. Armour was usually only donned just before a battle. In contrast to the normally accepted image, Russian warriors never marched in full mail armour, cuirasses and helmets. That sort of heavy

Saint George, as a subsidiary or marginal figure in a larger icon of Saint Climacus. This painted panel was made in Novgorod in the second half of the 13th century and although the warrior saint's armour and costume are based upon Byzantine art, his massive sword might reflect current Russian weaponry. (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg)

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The verdant and almost meadow-like western steppes of south-western Russia and the eastern Ukraine. This was where the Mongol army under Jebei and Sübodei spent the winter of 1222–23. These extensive pastures had also been the heartland of the wealthy and prosperous Western Polovtsian Khanate, and the Polovtsians were not going to abandon them without a fight. (V. Shpakovsky photograph)

equipment was brought along with them but was only put on when danger was near.

A rapid winter march was carried out without sledges. A normal one-day march by mounted men was around 50 kilometres, though a maximum of 120 kilometres could be achieved in a single day. Of course, this could only be achieved by lightly equipped men without a baggage train to slow them down and supplemented with additional mounts.

An army on campaign may have to perform several functions including repairing bridges and strengthening roads. In addition each army had its own guard and scouts. A reconnaissance unit was sent ahead to fight the enemy's outposts and if possible to capture a 'tongue' – in other words a living prisoner who could provide information about the enemy, their movements, numbers and so on. When a march was conducted with light equipment it was necessary to provide the troops with food and forage. That function was carried out by 'prospectors', who were similarly sent ahead to seek out supplies, at the same time carrying out reconnaissance. In fact the reconnaissance service was considered very important by many Russian princes. Couriers came to them from all parts of the Russian lands, constantly day and night, informing the prince about enemy actions. Major arteries of trade such as rivers helped greatly in this respect. Hence Galicia, being on the River Dnester, was fully aware of what was going on in distant forested lands to the north and west. Similarly the Grand Prince of Kiev received good intelligence about his enemies even when the latter were marching though forests far from the major roads. In addition to couriers, merchants were also employed as messengers.

Russians tended to take a harsh view of failures of reconnaissance. Prince Vladimir of Galicia, for example, enquired with some surprise of Andrei Bogolubskiy, 'How could you be unaware that troops from Vladimir were marching towards you?' A well-organised information service allowed a prince to react quickly to an enemy invasion, depending upon the nature and direction of the threat. Bridges and fords were kept

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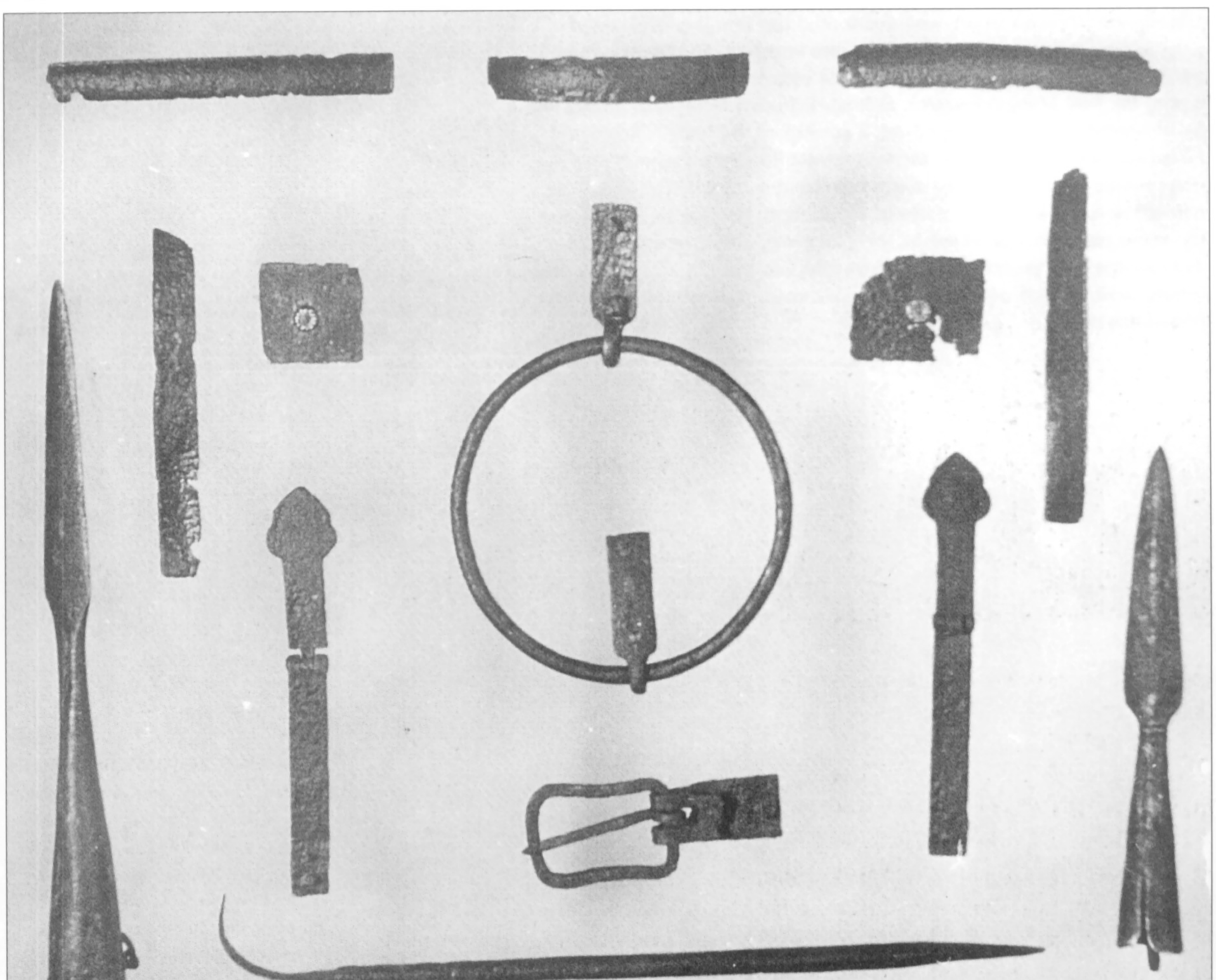

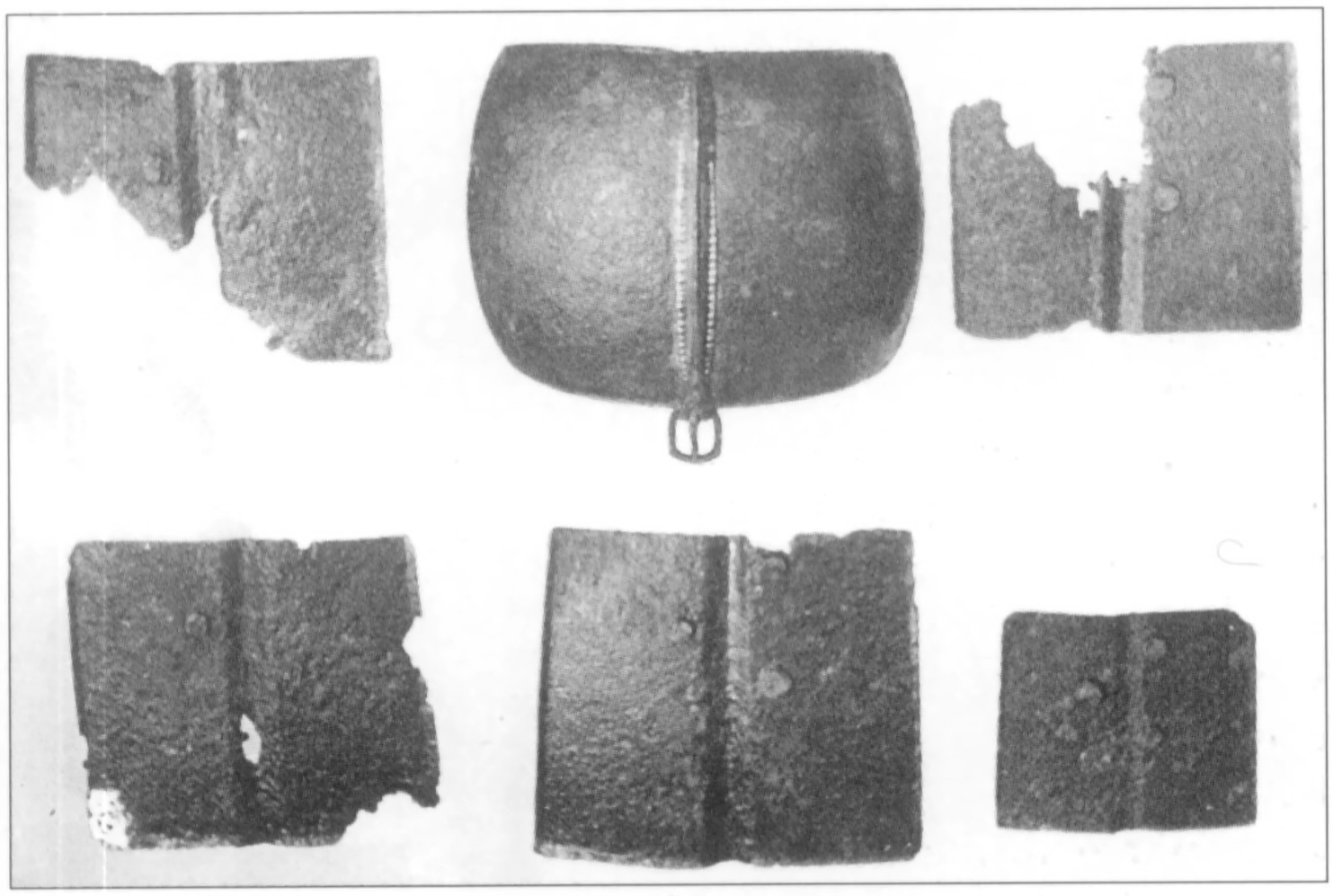

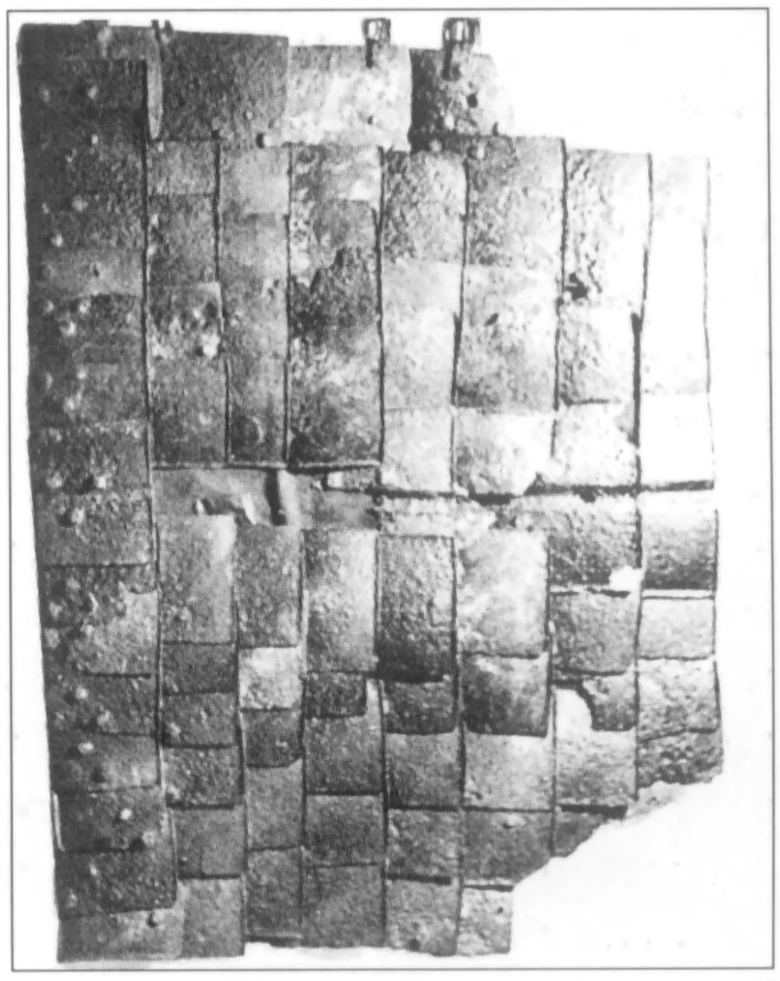

Until recently very little military equipment which could definitely be identified as medieval Mongol was known to exist. However, some years ago a remarkable cache of weapons and armour was found in a cave in the Tuva region of eastern Russia, just north of the current Mongolian frontier. It was not only of extremely fine workmanship, but several items were found to be made of high grade steel, perhaps indicating strong technological influence from China.

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The Kipchaq Turkish tribes who dominated the western Steppes of what is now Russia and the Ukraine were known to the Russians as the Polovtsians. They formed an alliance with the Russian princes during the first Mongol invasion of Russia. Here a Polovtsian force, led by a Polovtsian Khan or ruler (left), a warrior of the heavily armoured Polovtsian élite (centre), and an aristocratic Polovtsian woman (right), ride past some of the carved stone figures or *balbals* which the nomads erected in various parts of the steppe. Women, of course, led the same nomadic way of life as their menfolk, and they could ride and use the bow excellently. It is, however, hard to say whether these female archers took part in battle or only used their bows for hunting. (Victor Korolkov)

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Assorted forms of spiked mace so typical of steppe nomad warriors have been found throughout the western steppes, Russia, central Europe and even into Scandinavia. Most were of bronze, like these 13th-century examples from Hungary, and all are quite small. (National Museum, Budapest)

under a special watch, guards being permanently on duty in such places. To provide security for his own bodyguard, a prince might send sentry detachments up to 100 kilometres away from his residence. In his *Exhortations*, the famous Prince Vladimir Monomakh paid special attention to the need to protect those conducting reconnaissance, and he should know since he himself made no less than 83 major expeditions, excluding the minor military excursions.

Russian infantry were usually ignored by the chroniclers because the magnificent horsemen seemed more interesting. Nevertheless, infantry played a major role, operating quite deep into the steppe lands during campaigns against the Polovtsians for example. On long-distance campaigns, such infantry were often transported in river boats. On occasion princes even decided not to fight due to a lack of infantry support. Furthermore the infantry could defeat cavalry. The infantry's main weapon was a short spear, which was used like a modern bayonet, while shields, swords and bows supplemented the infantry's armoury.

THE POLOVTSIANS

The warlike and numerous Polovtsy are believed to have originated as a tribal offshoot of the Kimaks. The latter were another Central Asian Turkish tribe most noted for their use of skis in winter warfare and their prominent role in the international fur trade. The Polovtsians eventually became a very important tribe in the western steppes, having ousted the Pechenegs and Oghuz who preceded them. These Polovtsians were nomads and the organisation of their state and society was generally typical of that of peoples throughout the Eurasian steppes. It has also been suggested that the remarkably wealthy and sophisticated Polovtsians had a significant influence upon the arms, armour and military styles of the Mongols, though only after the Mongols had in turn defeated and absorbed the Polovtsians. In addition to raiding and finally becoming allies of the Russians, the Polovtsians also developed

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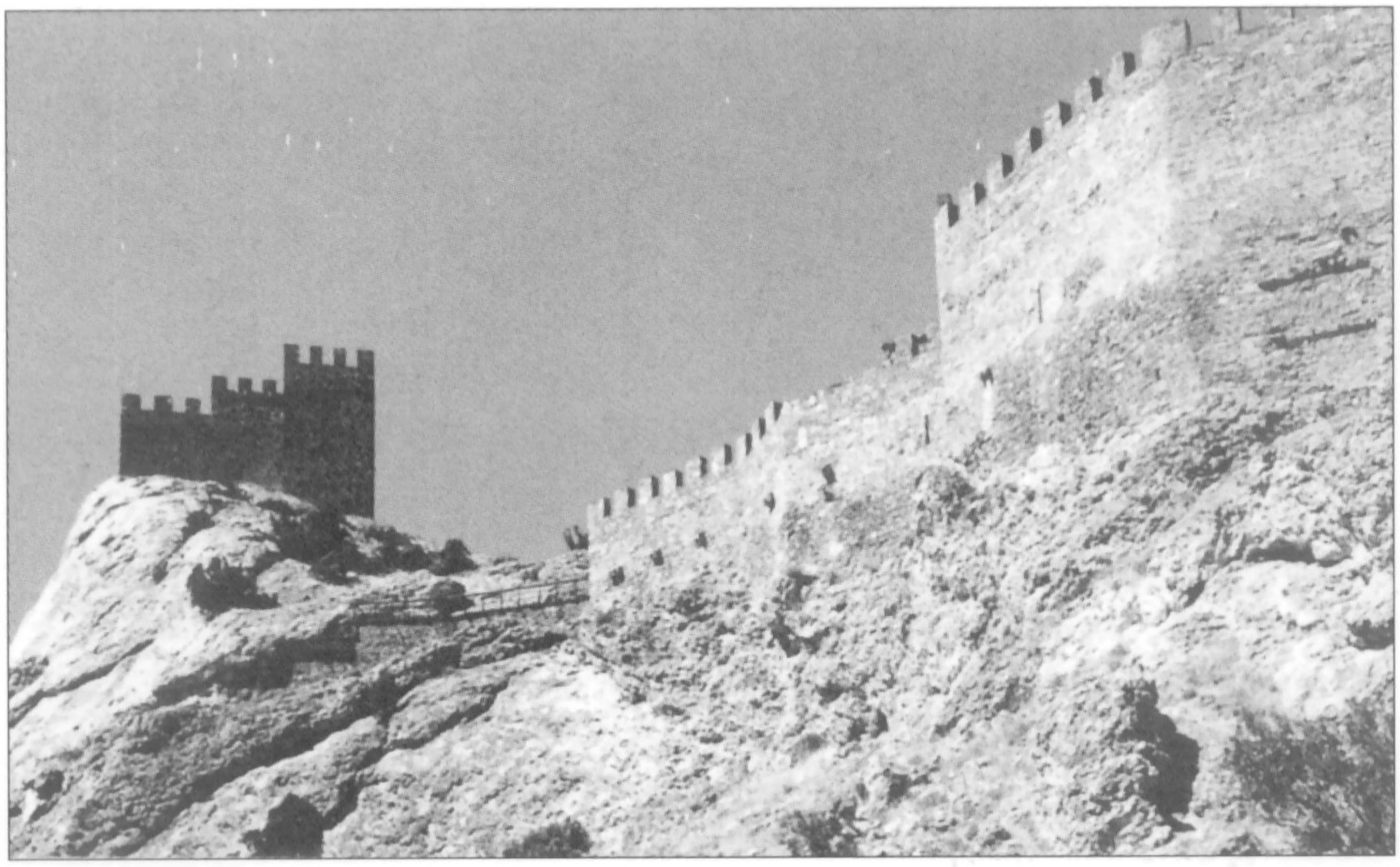
The impressive fortifications of Sudak in the Crimea largely date from the 14th and 15th centuries when this was one of Genoa's most prized trading outposts. But even in the early 13th century the defences of Sudak were capable of defying a Russian-Polovtsian assault – though not the Mongol attack which came only a year later.



close relations with the Christian Kingdom of Georgia in the Caucasus mountains to the south.

With all these international connections, and the fact that many of their best warriors formed guard units for the Georgians as well as fighting alongside Russians, Byzantines and others, it is not surprising to find that by the late 12th century the Polovtsians had a very sophisticated army. They used fire-weapons, stone-throwing mangonels and large crossbows mounted on carts. Nevertheless, the great majority of Polovtsian warriors still relied on traditional horse-archery tactics while also using javelins, spears, sabres and other close-combat weapons. The sabres used by these 12th- and early 13th-century steppe warriors were only slightly curved compared with those seen in later centuries. Their quivers were made of leather and birch bark, sometimes decorated with bone plates. The richest and most honoured warriors amongst the Polovtsians also had sabres and spears with slender, pointed blades. Such spears were characteristic of steppe warriors but were also found throughout medieval Russia. The Polovtsians wore a typically eastern or Central Asian form of costume. When equipped for battle they wore short-sleeved mail hauberks, and lamellar cuirasses to protect their chests and backs. In addition some of their élite warriors wore a style of anthropomorphic iron or bronze face-mask attached to their helmets. Such masks could also be decorated with embossed or engraved moustaches which were themselves traditionally regarded as symbols of fortitude. Horse harness was often richly decorated in accordance with eastern traditions.

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OPPOSING PLANS

THE MONGOL PLAN

The normal battle array of the Mongols included five rows of *dzaguns* or hundreds. The first two consisted of heavy cavalry, sword-armed men wearing armour. Light cavalry formed the rear three rows. Furthermore the army which Sübodei and Jebei led into the western steppes was much better armed than most Mongol forces. This was a result of its previous successful operations in Iran and the Caucasus. Here the Mongol warriors had probably acquired much higher quality weapons – and in larger quantities. This would have surpassed what the ordinary Mongol horsemen previously dreamed of. Consequently the proportion of heavily armoured cavalrymen in Sübodei's army was also larger than usual. It may even have reached two-thirds of his total cavalry.

In battle the rows of Mongol cavalry were divided into a chequerboard pattern of distinct units. There were large gaps between the units of heavy cavalry in the front rows, allowing the horse-archers to advance from deep inside the Mongol battle array. If this initial assault failed and the enemy counter-attacked, the lightly armoured Mongol horse-archers could retreat while the Mongol heavy cavalry renewed the attack, protected by their armour. If this also failed, then the entire process could be repeated again and again until the enemy was worn down and defeated. One Arab historian described the fighting methods of the Mongols as follows: 'They had the courage of lions, the patience of hounds, the prudence of cranes, the cunning of foxes, the long sightedness of ravens, the wildness of wolves, the passion of fighting-cocks, the protectiveness of hens, the keenness of cats, and the fury of wild boars.' After the battle of the Kalka River the Mongols also enjoyed something of a psychological advantage, since the Russians came to regard them as Gog and Magog, sent by God as a punishment for Russia's sins.

THE RUSSIAN PLAN

Russian medieval armies adopted a traditional battle array, and like most medieval armies based around knights or heavy cavalry, it required a broad area in which to deploy. It was practically impossible for an army such as this to fight in mountains or close valleys. In fact, if one prince's army took up a position on the high bank of a river, for example, the other would beg him to come down to an open area or lower river bank so that they could fight, as happened during a clash between two Russian princes in 1180. If a weaker force took cover in a forest, it would be quite safe from its enemy. The army of the principality of Suzdal used field fortifications in battle

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Medieval Russian art was not only influenced by Byzantium, Scandinavia and the peoples of the steppes. There was also a noticeable influence from the Islamic Middle East, particularly on Russian metalwork such as this engraved bronze bowl. The cavalryman at the top, however, rides in a typically European manner with straight leg and long stirrups while grasping his lance close beneath his armpit in the couched manner. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

more frequently than did other principalities. These defences included simple wattle fencing or pointed stakes rammed into the ground.

Before a battle the troops were normally divided into three sections. The most powerful section deployed in the centre with the commander, while the other two formed wings on either side. Ancient illustrations indicate that individual squadrons adopted a wedge formation, at least when attacking, but the exact structure of this wedge is not known. Losses were clearly greater in the leading detachment than elsewhere.

Russian cavalry were never as heavily armoured as those of western Europe. Nevertheless, experience against steppe nomads soon taught the Russians that heavy cavalry needed the support of fast-shooting horse-archers and horse-archers appeared in Russian armies as early as the 11th century. They would sometimes ride along an enemy's front line, showering it with arrows in the hope that the troops would react and expose their flanks to the other Russian units. Meanwhile infantry would attack the enemy's rear or assault his encampment. Feigned flight and ambushes were used and in 1150 Prince Izyaslav Mstislavich created an entire imitation camp complete with camp fires to deceive his enemy, Prince Vladimir of Galicia.

To maintain effective control of an army once battle was joined was exceptionally difficult. For this reason the entire battle plan was worked out beforehand by the princes and their *voivode* commanders. Elite bodyguard units were generally informed of the plan as well. The signal for the main army to engage the enemy was usually given with war-pipes or drums. It might also be signalled by the advance of the prince's own unit or the appearance of the prince in person.

One of the biggest difficulties was differentiating between friendly and enemy forces, except when fighting easily distinguishable foreign troops such as the Polovtsians. Since weaponry was constantly captured and recaptured, similarities between troops on either side were sufficient to make identification difficult. It was quite common in the heat of battle for warriors to confuse friends and foes. Consequently banners decorated with fringes or tassels played an important role. Princes would have a banner of this sort as their own personal standard, well known to their own followers and other leaders. This banner also indicated the rallying point for the bodyguard after combat, whether victorious or defeated. It marked the location of the commander and the centre of the army and was, as such, an important focus for the whole army. Playing such a vital role on the battlefield it is hardly surprising that these banners were sometimes reputed to have magical powers. Banners were often captured in battle and this could lead to confusion, particularly when the captors intentionally used the banner as a lure to deceive the enemy's troops. This happened in 1136 when the Ol'govichi raised one of Yaropolk's banners and consequently caught his bodyguard at a disadvantage. Crafty Izyaslav Mstislavich similarly fooled the Galician cavalry in 1153.

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THE CAMPAIGN

FROM THE CAUCASUS TO THE CRIMEA

After an epic march and the subsequent victory over the Khwarazmshah's 30,000 soldiers, and the defeat of a Persian army which came to their aid, the Mongol commanders were finally convinced of the Khwarazmshah's death. Only now did the Mongol army settle in winter pastures along the banks of the River Kür (the ancient Araxes) in the Mugansk steppes of what are now north-western Iran and southern Azerbaijan. Meanwhile Sübodei received an order from Genghiz Khan. His army was to march far to the north, crossing the Caucasus Mountains to attack the Polovtsian Khanate from the rear. After that they were to return around the northern side of the Caspian Sea to rejoin the main Mongol army in Central Asia. It was an epic plan.

After recruiting several thousand local Kurdish and Turkmen warriors, as well as receiving reinforcements sent by Genghiz Khan himself, Sübodei and Jebei crossed the River Kür in September 1222 and invaded Georgia. The Georgian tsar or king, George IV Lasha, attacked but the Mongol army pretended to flee and, in their usual manner, drew the enemy into an ambush where the Georgians were easily defeated and virtually wiped out. The towns of Ghanzha and Shemaha were taken by storm and plundered while further south the great Islamic city of Tabriz surrendered without a struggle.

Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur would obviously have needed the assistance of local guides in the tangled ranges of what are now eastern Turkey, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Once these guides escaped, however, the Mongols were in a very dangerous and unfamiliar position. (D. Nicolle photograph)

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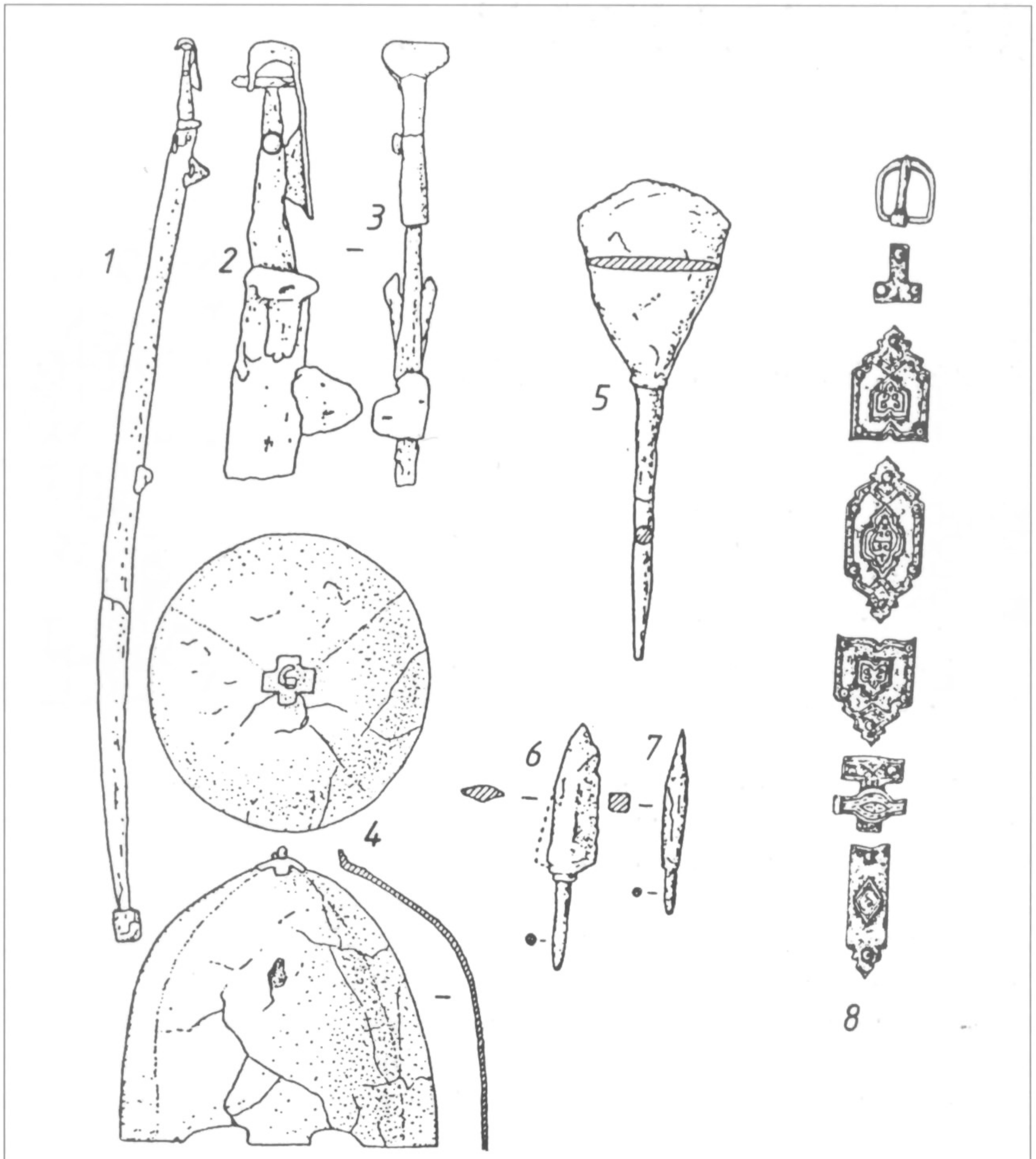
Military equipment from the north-western Caucasus region, 12th–13th century. This is the sort of arms, armour and costume that would have been worn by people such as the Kosogians and perhaps Alans as well as the Polovtsians of the neighbouring steppes: 1–3 – Sabre with detail view of hilt seen from side and back; 4 – Helmet seen from front and top with a section of one side; 5–7 – Broad and narrow arrowheads; 8 – Buckle, strap-end and decorative elements of a warrior's belt.



During this campaign the Mongols captured several local guides capable of leading them through the tangled ranges of the Caucasus Mountains. Intimidated by the execution of one of their number, these guides led the Mongols further and further. The mountains seemed to close around them until at last the mounted columns with their horses and camels slowly began to descend the Daryalsk ravine. At this point the guides escaped. Meanwhile news of the approaching Mongol army had reached the Polovtsians. In response they sent an army that combined with contingents of the Iasian people who inhabited the northern slopes of the Caucasus. This combined force took up positions on the Terek covering the points at which the passes of the Caucasus Mountains entered the lower valleys.

Sübodei and Jebei now found themselves in a very dangerous situation. Hemmed into narrow mountain passes, they were surrounded by their enemies. Their guides had escaped and they were in a region unknown to them, while facing them was a numerically greatly superior foe. The Mongols had no room to deploy for battle in their normal manner nor for their excellent cavalry to properly use their traditional skills and they could not bypass their enemy. The Mongol army was vulnerable and at the mercy of their enemies. Their one hope lay in deception. Sübodei and Jebei sent an embassy to the

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This famous 12th-century wall painting in the Cathedral of Santa Sofia in Kiev is believed to show Russian or perhaps nomad noblemen hunting horses on the steppes. Herds of wild or semi-wild horses seem to have still roamed the steppes and could have provided a useful additional source of mounts for Russian princely armies.

Polovtsian khans, convincing them that they were not seeking battle, that they were deeply religious, were opposed to bloodshed and merely wanted to get home.

These words were accompanied by generous gifts and had the desired effect. The Polovtsians mounted their horses and headed north, across the steppes to their homes. With the Polovtsians gone, however, the Mongol cavalry attacked the remaining local warriors, Iasians, Kosogians and Alans, destroying them with comparative ease in the open valleys of the northern Caucasus. The Mongols next attacked the local villages, seizing cattle and horses and ravaging the whole northern Caucasus region. With their own reserves of food replenished, and despite their treaty, the Mongols invaded Polovtsian territory, attacking so suddenly and unexpectedly that the Polovtsians were defeated in a great battle near the River Don and in some smaller engagements. Several of the older Polovtsian leaders were killed while the remainder fled westward, across the River Dnieper.

THE RUSSIAN AND POLOVTSIAN REACTION

It seems to have been at this point that the Russian princes first heard about the Mongol newcomers. Now, however, far from being enemies, the Russian princes and the Polovtsian khans often made treaties and concluded alliances. Their noble families had intermarried, and many amongst the two élites understood the language and customs of the other. This was particularly true in the southern borderlands of Russia where many of the Polovtsian fugitives sought refuge.

Winter was fast approaching and the steppes between the great Volga, Don and Dnieper rivers were a perfect place for the Mongol army to spend the harsh steppe winter. The Mongols did not use wheeled wagons or carts; on campaign everything was loaded onto the backs of a multitude of horses and Bactrian camels. In addition each warrior could

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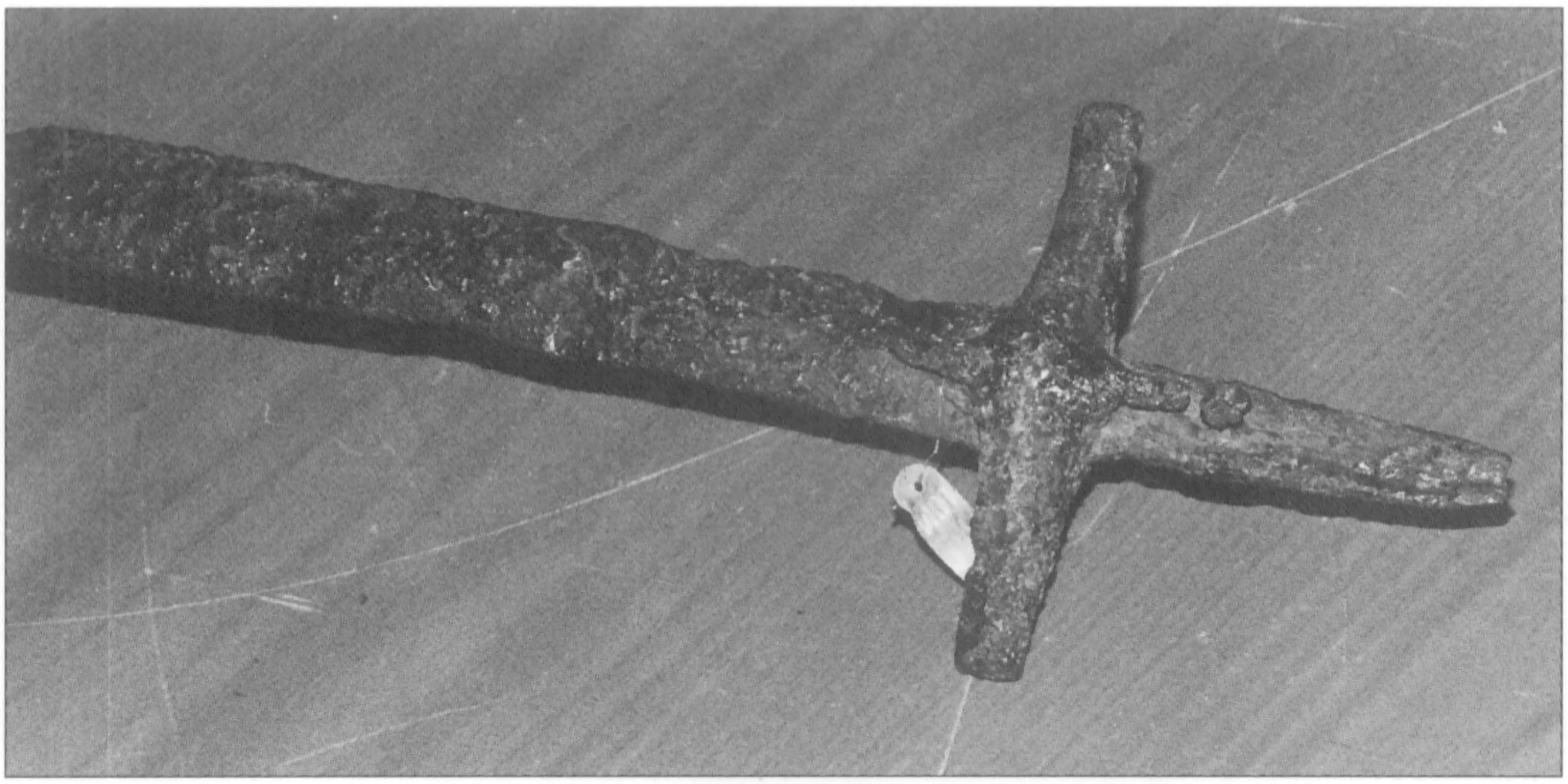

Sabre from the Kuban area, north-west of the Caucasus Mountains. It dates from the 13th or 14th century and is of a typical Mongol Golden Horde style. (National Historical Museum Conservation Store, Moscow)

have in excess of ten horses, and the army was accompanied by the herds of sheep which fed the troops. This enabled a Mongol army to move with great speed, faster than any other medieval force – an undeniable strategic advantage. On the other hand, when they were gathered together in one place feeding such enormous numbers of animals was a formidable difficulty. The scant vegetation of most areas of the steppe made this impossible and it was risky to exhaust the army by marching from one source of food to another. Here in the lush western steppes, however, the Mongols could rest and recuperate, dispersing around the relatively fertile but now largely abandoned western Polovtsian steppes.

Meanwhile the leader of the western Polovtsian tribal federation, Khan Köten, had found shelter with the Russian Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia. The Prince was, of course, husband to Köten's daughter and

The verdant springtime steppes of what is now the south-eastern Ukraine are largely flat, though there are some low rolling hills. These steppes are also criss-crossed by numerous small rivers as well as by the much bigger rivers that flow down from Russia. (V. Shpakovsky photograph)

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A variety of forms of helmet were used in Russia around the time of the Kalka campaign. Most were of conical shape, but while some only had a nasal (A & B), others incorporated a partial face-mask (C) and some already had the very tall pointed outline which would become typical of later medieval Russian helmets (D). (Kremlin Armoury, and State Historical Museum, Moscow)

Köten, on behalf of all the Polovtsians, asked Mstislav to help defend his people. The more junior Polovtsian khans were at the same time pleading with the other Russian princes. Unable to refuse this request from his father-in-law, Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia, who was nicknamed 'The Lucky', appealed to all the Russian princes to assemble for a council in Kiev. As the princes arrived the Polovtsians showered them with valuable gifts such as fine stallions and camels, while at the same time continuing to plead for Russian support. They insisted that after the Mongols, or Tatars as they were known to the Russians, had defeated the Polovtsians they would next devastate the Russian lands. Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia agreed with them and also reminded the other Russian princes that if they did not help, the Polovtsians might feel obliged to join forces with the Mongols. This would, of course, make the invaders even more powerful if they chose to attack Russia.

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This 12th-century wall painting in the Cathedral of Santa Sofia in Kiev is remarkable for a number of reasons. The horseman (who is fighting a bear) clearly does not use stirrups. Perhaps the scene is based upon a Byzantine manuscript picture, since stirrups had been used by both Russian and neighbouring steppe nomad warriors for several centuries.

Faced with the pleas and gifts of the Polovtsians, the horror stories of what the Mongols had already inflicted elsewhere and a general sense of looming danger, the Russian princes agreed to an alliance and to march together against the Mongols. As the wars of this period were characterised by the utter devastation and ravaging of lands through which armies marched, the Russians decided to take the battle to the Mongols before these invaders could appear outside the walls of Russian cities.

The Mongols had passed the winter, now coming to an end, on the Polovtsian steppe, although they had also raided the rich Crimean peninsula, plundering the western European trading outpost and town

The hills to the west of the Kalka River, though not high, were rolling and verdant. This was probably the route taken by retreating Mongols and advancing Russians before the battle. It may also have been in this area that the Kievans made their last stand after the battle. (Michael Zhirokhov photograph)

of Sudak (Sugdeya), which nominally belonged to the Republic of Genoa. In addition Sübodei and Jebei had strengthened their long and vulnerable lines of communication back to the main Mongol army in Transoxania. In their march through Iran and across the Caucasus during 1221 and 1222 the Mongols had, as was usual, left in their wake small units which formed chains of outposts through which mounted relay riders could carry orders and reports. The speed of such communications was astonishing and could sometimes achieve no less than 600 kilometres in a single day. It also enabled all Mongol senior commanders to maintain close links with the Great Khan himself.

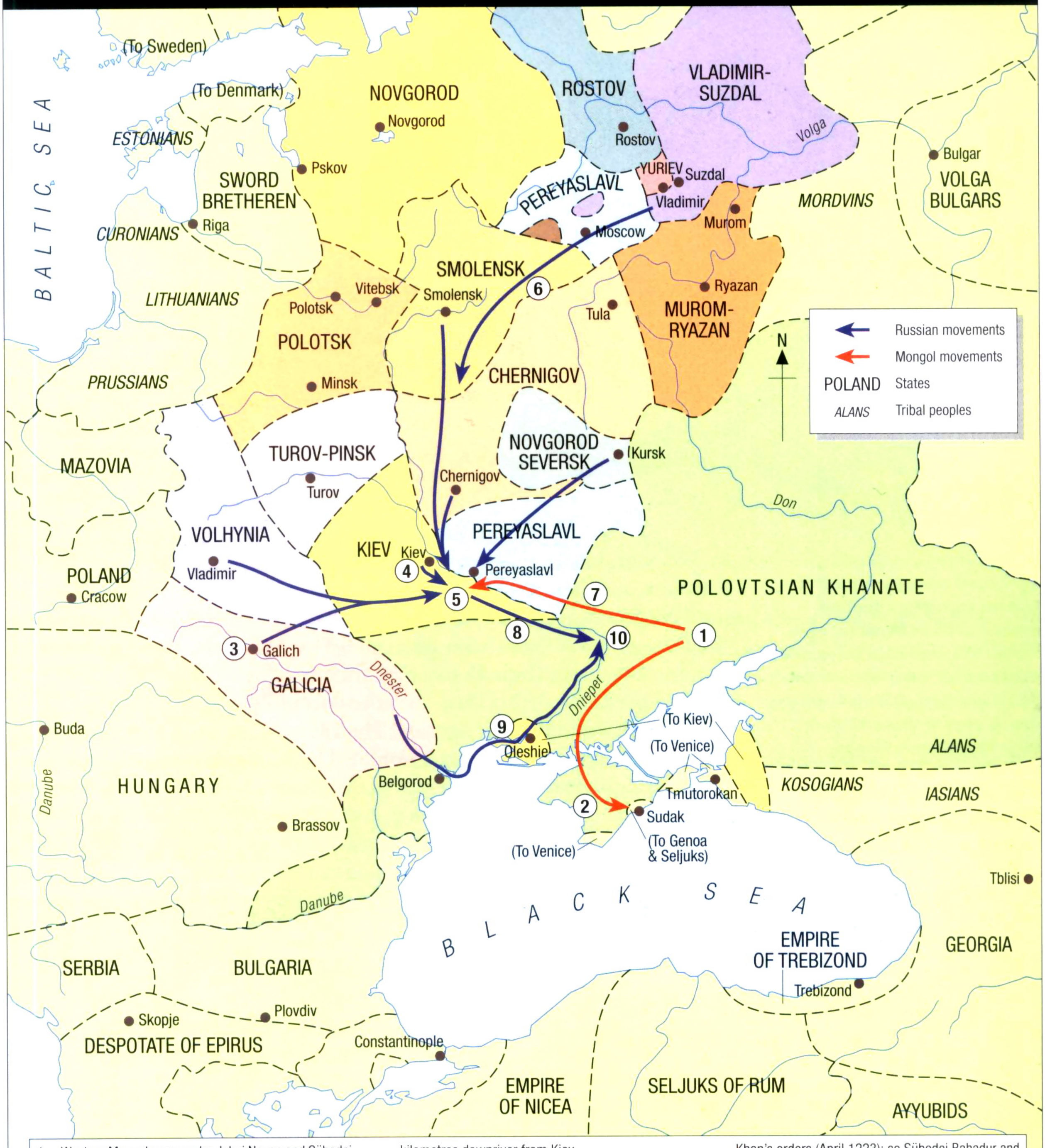
Quite when Sübodei and Jebei formed an alliance with the Brodniki of the Don River is unclear, though it probably happened during the winter of 1222–23. These Brodniki were Slav-speaking frontiersmen and simple warriors who had fled from the Russian principalities to live along the banks of the Don. As such they were forerunners of the future Cossacks and during the Kalka campaign they were recorded fighting as allies of the Mongols.

THE ALLIES ASSEMBLE

During the second half of March, 1223, the Russian princes rode back to their homes and began to prepare for the forthcoming campaign. At the beginning of April, with preparations complete, the princes led their separate armies from different parts of Russia towards the agreed assembly point. There were three main groups of princes taking part in the campaign. Kiev was represented by its Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich, his son Vsevolod, his son-in-law Prince Andrei, Svyatoslav of Shumsk and Yury of Nesvezh'. A second group from the Chernigov and Smolensk region was led by Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich of Chernigov, who was accompanied by Prince Oleg of Kursk, plus troops from Putivl' and Trubetsk. A third group came from the Galicia and Volhynia area, led by the architect of the coalition, Prince Mstislav Mstislavich with his son-in-law Prince Daniil Romanovich of Volhynia. The sources are contradictory as to whether another Mstislav, Prince Mstislav Yaroslavich Nemov of Lutsk, took part in the expedition. Several senior Russians including Izyaslav Ingvarevich and Izyslav Vladimirovich of Terebovl' certainly did not. Nor did Grand Prince Yury Vsevolodovich, ruler of the powerful principality of Vladimir-Suzdal, although he had been asked to join the alliance. Grand Prince Yuri was in fact preparing to launch a campaign against the Livonians, but he did agree to send a force commanded by his nephew, Prince Vasil'ko Konstantinovich of Rostov. In the event this force

The exact dating of this collection of nomad warrior equipment from a grave in the Ukraine is still a matter of debate. It consists of a short-sleeved mail hauberk, a tall helmet with an anthropomorphic visor, and a substantially curved sabre with an almost squared tip. This equipment might date from just before or quite soon after the Mongol invasions. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

THE RUSSIAN ARMIES ASSEMBLE, EARLY 1223



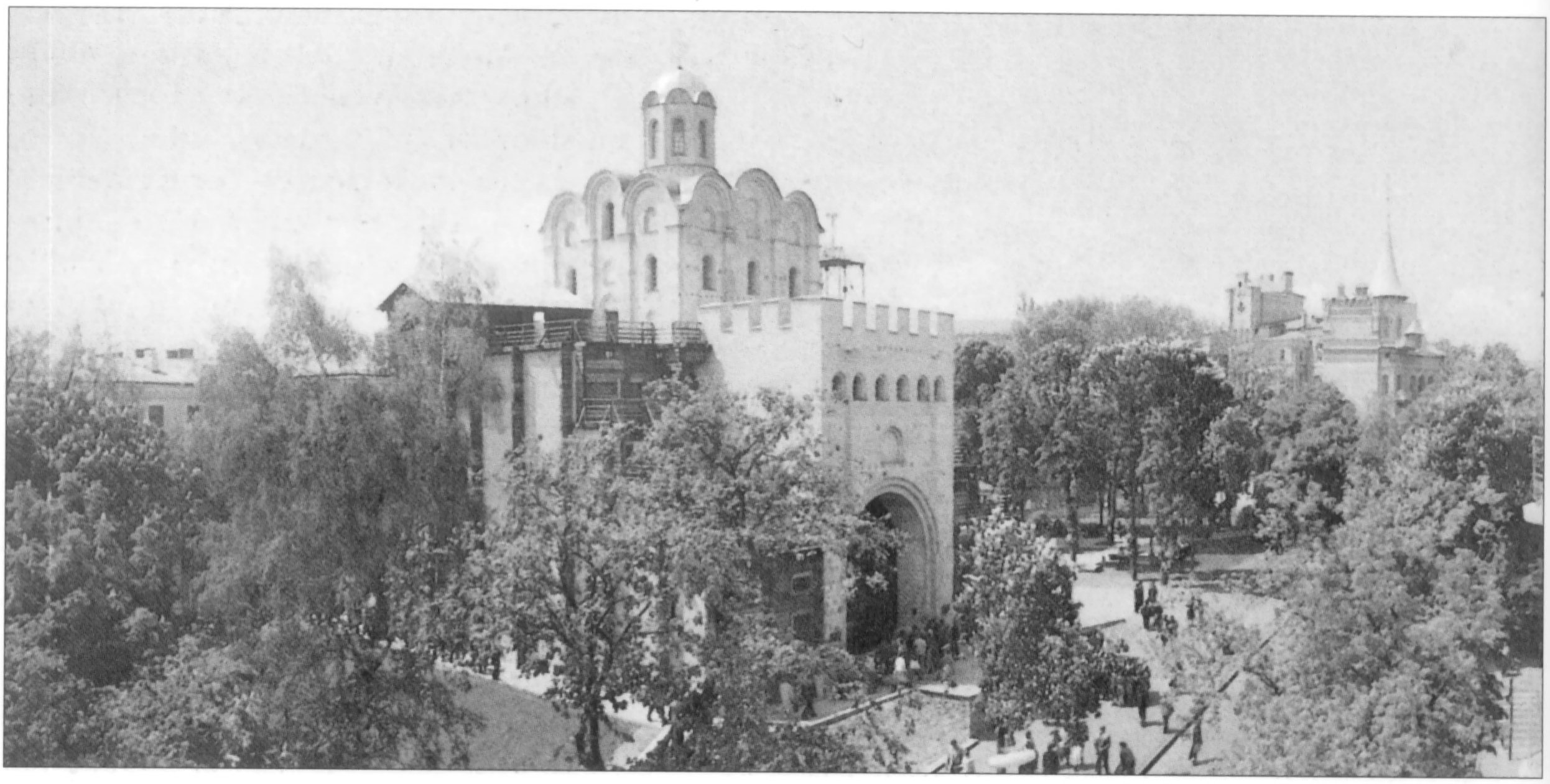
1. Western Mongol army under Jebei Noyon and Sübodei Bahadur spends winter (1222-1223) in the steppes north of Crimean peninsula.
2. Mongols capture the nominally Genoese trading outpost of Sudak (early 1223), probably with the tacit approval of neighbouring rival Venetian trading outposts in the Crimea.
3. Köten Khan of the Polovtsians convinces Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia to form an alliance against the Mongols.
4. A Council of Russian princes is summoned at Kiev; several princes are convinced by Köten Khan to assemble an allied army to drive back the Mongols (February-March 1223); the Russian princes then return to their principalities to raise forces.
5. Russian armies assemble near Zarub, fifty to sixty kilometres downriver from Kiev.
   - Kievan army under Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich, his son Vsevolod, his son-in-law Prince Andrei, Svyatoslav of Shumsk and Yury of Nesvezh.
   - Chernigov and Smolensk army under Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich of Chernigov, Prince Oleg of Kursk.
   - Galician-Volhynian army under Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia and Prince Daniil Romanovich of Volhynia.
6. Army from Vladimir-Suzdal under Prince Vasily Konstantinovich of Rostov arrives too late to take part in the campaign.
7. Mongols receive news that Jochi and his army camped north of the Caspian Sea will not be able to provide the expected reinforcements due to Jochi's reported illness or suspected refusal to obey his father Genghiz Khan's orders (April 1223); so Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon send an embassy to the Russian army offering peace and perhaps also attempting to break the Russian alliance with the Polovtsians, but these ambassadors are executed.
8. Russian and Polovtsian allies march down the west bank of the Dnieper (late April 1223); a second Mongol embassy arrives during this march.
9. Russian infantry arrives from Galicia by boat along the Black Sea coast and up the Dnieper river, commanded by Yury Domamerich and Derzhikray Volodislavich (late April 1223).
10. All elements of the allied army assemble on Khortytsya island at the mouth of the Khortytsya river, next to modern Zaporizhzhya (15 May 1223); the main Polovtsian army also joins the Russians here.

The coming of the Mongols introduced new elements of Far Eastern decoration into the metallic parts of horse harness, though this was often combined with decorative elements from the Middle East. Both influences can be seen in these 12th- or early 13th-century Mongol bronze harness buckle decorations. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

arrived at the muster late and did not take part in the march against the Mongols.

The Russian forces continued to assemble until the end of April. They gathered near the town of Zarub, between 50 and 60 kilometres south of Kiev. The cavalry marched overland but many of the infantry arrived in riverboats as did various provisions and the weaponry, which typically accompanied the army in carts. These were distributed amongst the soldiers shortly before the start of a battle. Some troops arrived on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River where it was felt that they were vulnerable to attack from the steppes to the east. The river was very wide at this time of year and the troops had to be ferried to the western bank in boats or on rafts.

It was at this point that an embassy arrived from the Mongol commanders and they were promptly taken to see the Russian princes. 'We did not occupy your land,' they told the assembled rulers, 'neither have we done anything to your towns or villages.' The Mongols did not wish to fight the Russians, claimed the ambassadors, but had been sent as by God to punish the Polovtsians. 'We have no quarrel with you,' they continued, 'but we do with those who are evil.' The Mongols, they announced, intended to drive their Polovtsian enemies out of this land and if the Polovtsians fled to the Russians, the Mongols would also drive them from there, and take their goods. The Mongol ambassadors were, by all accounts, eloquent and well informed. The Mongols may well have been trying to split the Russian-Polovtsian alliance. This is more likely as Sübodei and Jebei had learned that the expected reinforcements from Genghiz Khan's son Jochi would not be arriving. Jochi was north of the



Some of the warriors shown in the so-called 'Small Shahnamahs' made around 1300 in Iraq or southern Iran use what seems to be an earlier style of arms and armour. This may reflect the equipment used in this area before the arrival of the Mongols. Muslim troops using such military gear did, of course, join the Mongol army that went on to invade southern Russia. (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran)

Caspian Sea and claiming to be ill. The Russian princes honoured their agreement with their Polovtsian allies, however. But they went a step further; suspecting that the Mongol ambassadors were actually spies, they agreed to kill these strange men from the east – a task eagerly carried out by Köten Khan's followers.

The princes had miscalculated badly. The Mongol commanders apparently already had excellent intelligence. Whether the ambassadors were actually doubling as spies is not known, but after their murder the Mongol commanders were determined to take revenge. The killing of ambassadors contravened the traditional Mongol *Yasa* or code of law, as updated and reorganised by Genghiz Khan himself. The killing was regarded as an affront to the Law of Nature and as being against God's Law. The killing of the ambassadors thus made a war against the Russians inevitable, although the Mongols had not sought one.

The Russian forces were now fully assembled, except for the delayed detachment from Vladimir-Suzdal, and at the end of April the princes led their armies down the western bank of the River Dnieper. Within a few days of the march beginning, a second group of Mongol ambassadors appeared and again offered peace. According to the *Russian Chronicle*, when their offers were rebuffed the Mongol ambassadors told the Russian dukes: 'If you support the Polovtsians, kill our ambassadors and are marching against us, then do what you will. We did not attack you and God will be our judge.' The official declaration of war had now taken place, and this time the Mongol ambassadors were allowed to leave unharmed.

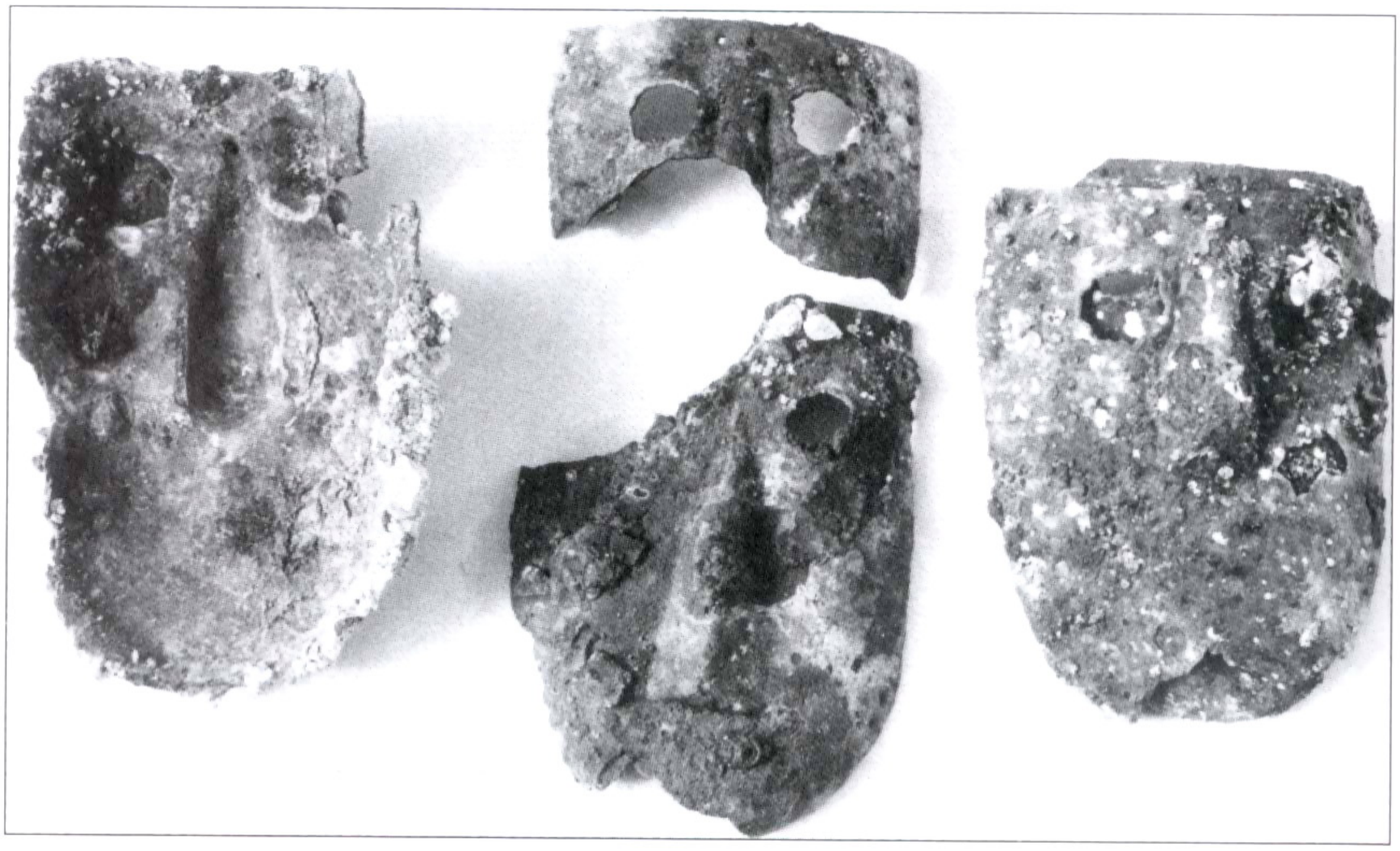
The Russian troops continued their march down the right bank of the Dnieper while from the south the infantry of Galicia was approaching under the command of Yury Domamerich and Derzhikray Volodislavich. These foot soldiers came in boats, having sailed along the

LEFT **The famous Golden Gate of Kiev was built between 1017 and 1024, first being mentioned in 1037. Destroyed by the Mongols in 1240, and subsequently covered by earth in 1750, the ruins were excavated and strengthened in 1837. In 1982 a pavilion was added to the top of the Golden Gate, based upon written descriptions, to restore its original appearance.**

RIGHT **Other late 12th-century relief carvings on the exterior of the Cathedral of Dmitri Sobor at Vladmir show horsemen, riding in the European rather than steppe style with almost straight legs and long stirrup leathers. (D. Nicolle photograph)**

The Uspenski Cathedral in Kiev was built in the late 11th century over the Kievan Cave Monastery complex. This was the centre from which Christianity spread across Russia. Sadly it was destroyed by Soviet forces as they retreated from the Nazis in 1941.

RIGHT **The late 12th- or very early 13th-century iron face-mask visors that were found in the ruins of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Istanbul were probably used by Polovtsian-Cuman-Kipchaq soldiers who formed one of the emperor's élite guard units. This type of visor has been found across much of the south-east European steppes, and as far north as Volga Bulgar territory. (St. Andrews University Library Photographic Collection)**

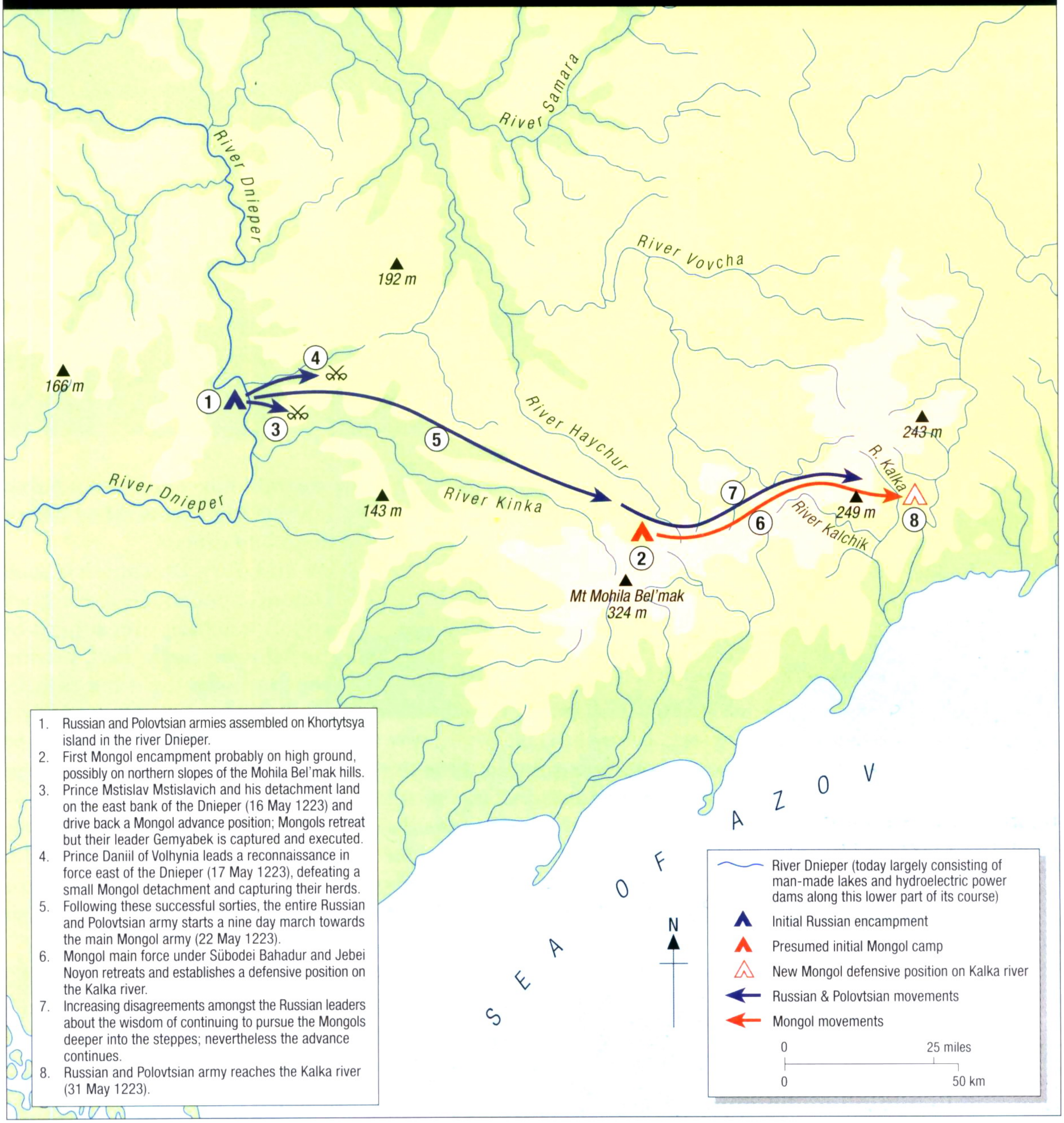


north-western shore of the Black Sea and then up the River Dnieper. On 15 May they reached an island called Khortytsya, where the little river of the same name joined the broad Dnieper. Here the various elements of the allied force finally joined together, including the main Polovtsian army, which consisted entirely of mounted archers.

THE MONGOL WITHDRAWAL

The combined strength of the allied army assembled on the River Dnieper was probably 80,000–100,000 fighting men, but only 15,000 to 20,000 of them were properly equipped and trained soldiers. At around this time the first groups of Mongol troops appeared on the eastern bank. They clearly did not impress the young Russian soldiers since the first Mongols to clash with them were unarmoured horse-archers carrying only bows, sabres and lassoos. The Russians later expressed their disgust, commenting that the Mongols looked even worse than the Polovtsians.

THE RUSSIANS AND POLOVTSIANS ADVANCE AGAINST THE MONGOLS, 16–31 MAY 1223



1. Russian and Polovtsian armies assembled on Khortytsya island in the river Dnieper.
2. First Mongol encampment probably on high ground, possibly on northern slopes of the Mohila Bel'mak hills.
3. Prince Mstislav Mstislavich and his detachment land on the east bank of the Dnieper (16 May 1223) and drive back a Mongol advance position; Mongols retreat but their leader Gemyabek is captured and executed.
4. Prince Daniil of Volhynia leads a reconnaissance in force east of the Dnieper (17 May 1223), defeating a small Mongol detachment and capturing their herds.
5. Following these successful sorties, the entire Russian and Polovtsian army starts a nine day march towards the main Mongol army (22 May 1223).
6. Mongol main force under Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon retreats and establishes a defensive position on the Kalka river.
7. Increasing disagreements amongst the Russian leaders about the wisdom of continuing to pursue the Mongols deeper into the steppes; nevertheless the advance continues.
8. Russian and Polovtsian army reaches the Kalka river (31 May 1223).

On the other hand the more experienced Russian troops noted that those Mongols were more skilful with their bows, which seemed more powerful than the ones the Russians had faced before.

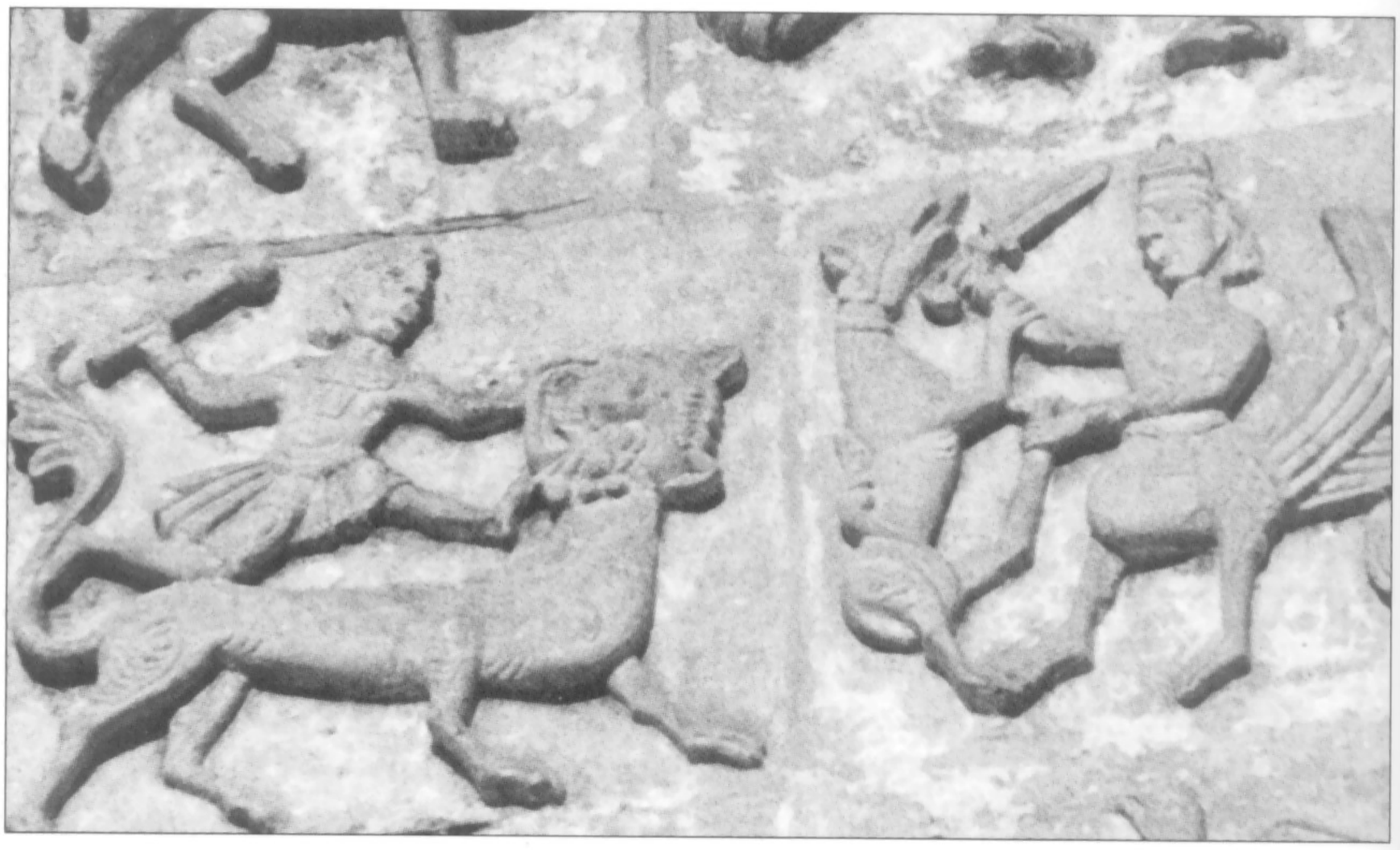
The next day, probably 16 May, Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia led a small detachment of his own men and some Polovtsians to the far bank of the Dnieper where they attacked part of the Mongol advance guard. The result seemed very impressive, the Mongols promptly fleeing into the steppes. Prince Mstislav of Galicia pursued them and even captured their commander named Gemyabek or Hamabek, who had

A very distinctive style of stone relief carving developed in Azerbeijan during the medieval Islamic period. In some ways it recalls pre-Islamic Sassanian carving, though here the costume, arms, armour and horse harness seem to reflect Mongol fashions.

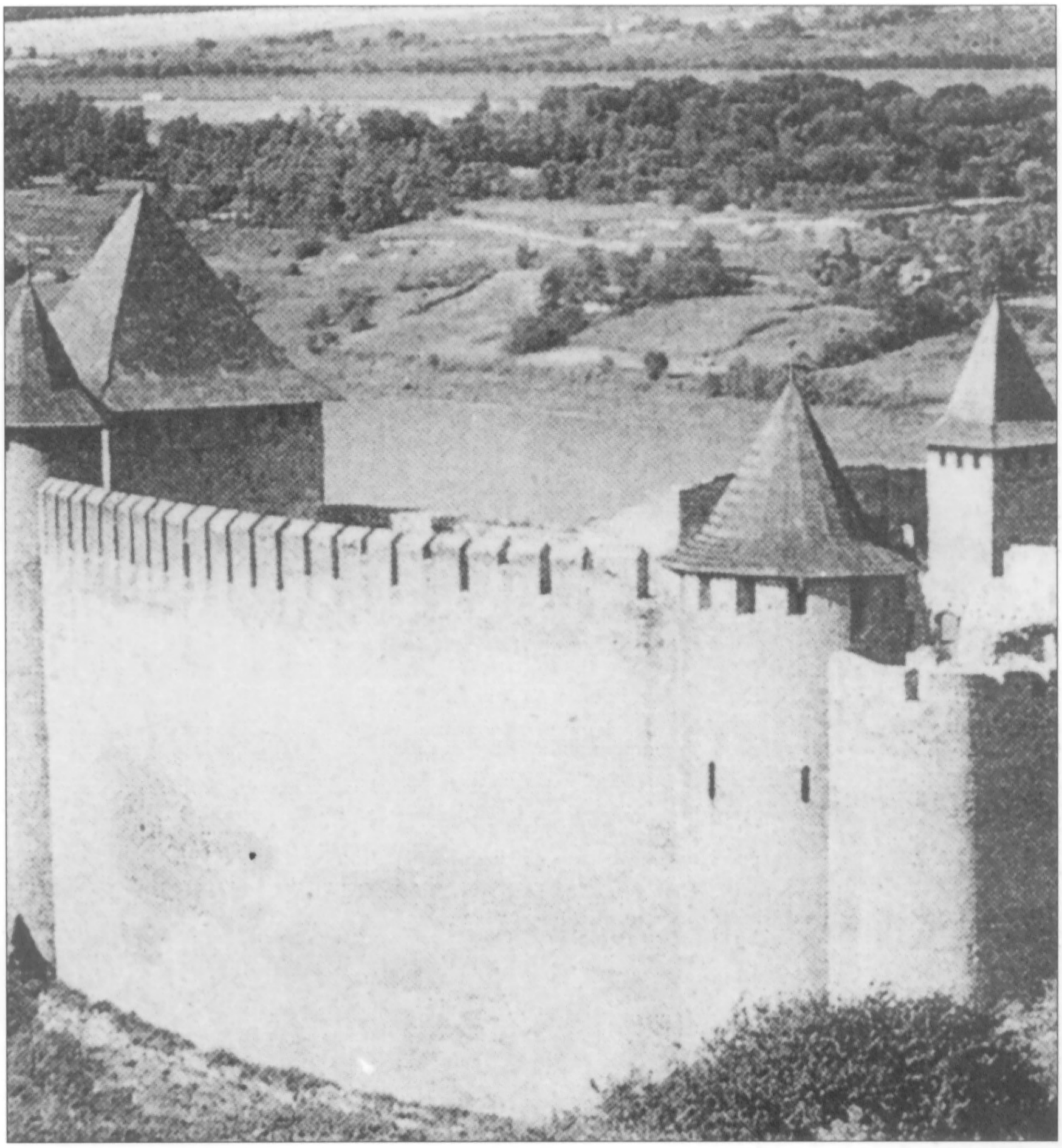
Unlike most medieval Russian painted icon panels, this example portraying St. Theodore may illustrate some aspects of the arms and armour actually used at the time. It was made around 1170. (Kremlin Museum, Moscow)

sought refuge behind the wooden fence surrounding a Polovtsian burial mound. The captive's fate was sealed when the Polovtsians asked Prince Mstislav Mstislavic to hand him over to them – to execute.

A day later Prince Daniil of Volhynia and Yury Domanerich took another detachment across the river to conduct a reconnaissance. They found little except a small group of Mongols watching over a herd of animals. When the Russians attacked, the Mongols again fled, leaving their herd to be captured. These successes convinced the other princes that the army could cross the Dnieper easily and safely, after which a general advance could begin. A bridge of boats was built and the army crossed the river without difficulty. These early successes had given the allies a dangerous feeling of superiority. Their combined army was undoubtedly very large by the standards of the 13th century, and in their encounters thus far the Tatars did not seem very frightening. With the army across the river they pressed on into the steppes – for the Russians if not for the Polovtsians 'unknown lands'. Ahead of them the small and



It is interesting to note that the realistic figure on the left in this photograph of late 12th-century relief carvings on the exterior of the Cathedral of Dmitri Sobor in Vladimir uses a simple small-headed mace. Meanwhile the fantastic half-man half-bird figure on the right has a sword. (D. Nicolle photograph)



The fortress of Khotyn looms above the southern bank of the Dnester River, close to the Ukrainian frontier with Romania. There was a wooden castle on this site in the 12th century, while the existing stone fortress dates from the 13th to 16th century. It was intended to face a threat to the principality of Galicia, not from steppes peoples to the east but from the powerful medieval kingdom of Hungary on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains.

outnumbered advance detachments of Sübodei's army continued to retreat when confronted by the allies. Sometimes the Mongols seem to have left captives and herds of animals to fall into the hands of their enemies intentionally. As the chronicles stated, as a result, 'The whole army was full of cattle and continued on its way.'

Command of the allied army was exercised by the council of princes, but opinions differed on how victory should be achieved, with arguments and quarrels beginning as far back as the banks of the Dnieper. The only point of agreement seems to have been that this would be a victory easily won. Meanwhile Prince Mstislav Mstislavich and those princes who supported him insisted on pursuing the enemy, but Prince Mstislav Romanovich of Kiev urged caution, arguing that the allies should not have crossed the River Dnieper in the first place. They should, he maintained, have made the Mongols fight there. As the decision had been made to cross the river the allies should advance very carefully and avoid pushing too deeply into the steppes. Nevertheless, the allies pressed on ever deeper into the grass-covered springtime steppe lands. The Polovtsians, who wanted to fight the Mongols and regain the territories from which they had recently been expelled, were delighted, particularly now they were supported by such large numbers of Russian troops.

For nine days the Polovtsians led the advance, accompanied by the younger troops from Galicia and Volhynia, the allied advance guard

The capture of Gemyabek. As they fell back, the Mongols were pursued by the Russians. One Mongol commander of the rearguard named Gemyabek fell from his horse and sought refuge within the fenced sanctuary of a Polovtsian burial ground, but was taken captive by the Russians. As a senior officer he would have posessed good-quality armour and equipment. The warriors who accompanied Gemyabek probably wore light equipment so that they could escape their Russian and Polovtsian pursuers. They may not have been Mongols at all but tribute-paying vassals, such as Uighurs, Tungus or even Turkish Muslim soldiers who had joined Jebei and Sübodei in Transoxania. Gemyabek, who is also called Hamabek in some sources, does seem to have a Turkish name. (Victor Korolkov)

being commanded by Duke Daniil. Ahead of them the Mongol outposts continued to fall back, loosing arrows as they retreated. Each time the Mongols' small, fast ponies enabled them to escape. Behind the allied advance guard came the vanguard of the main army under Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia. He was followed in turn by the troops from Chernigov while the Kievan forces of Prince Mstislav Romanovich brought up the rear.

Numerous heavy carts moved across the steppes, surrounded by cavalrymen who grew tired in the heat of day. Having lured the allies away from the River Dnieper and sent token forces to be defeated by the enemies' vanguard, Sübodei bided his time. He and Jebei Noyon selected ground from which, in the case of a defeat, the allies would find it difficult to retreat to the Dnieper. In the case of a mistake on the part of the allies, the Mongol blow would probably prove decisive. Meanwhile the arguments between the Russian princes grew daily worse, a fact the Mongol commanders were clearly aware of.

THE BATTLE

On 31 May 1223, the allied army reached the banks of the Kalka River. The precise location of the battle, and even the identity of the little river are not

known for certain. The Kalka clearly flowed into the Sea of Azov and was probably the stream of similar name north of Mariupol. Following another minor clash that morning, during which the Mongols were again defeated, the Russian princes again fell to quarrelling. This time the question was whether or not the army should move on or stop where it now was on what was a suitable defensive position. Having spent half the day arguing, the quarrel remained unresolved and indeed grew worse. So the princes went their separate ways without reaching agreement.

Back at the River Dnieper Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia had insisted that a certain Khan Yarun, rather than his father-in-law Köten Khan, be given leadership of the Polovtsians. Khan Yarun and the Polovtsians, accompanied by the Volhynian army under Prince Daniil, were now sent to cross the Kalka River and continue the offensive. They were followed by the Galicians and, a short while later, by Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich of Chernigov with his troops.

The Polovtsy were just as good at steppe skirmishing warfare as were the Mongols themselves and they easily drove back the Mongols' outposts on the far bank of the Kalka. The cavalry of Volhynia also managed to keep up with them with Prince Mstislav Mstislavic and the Galicians close behind, but the men of Chernigov only crossed the river slowly. Meanwhile the army of Kiev waited on the western side of the Kalka, probably at some distance from the bank.

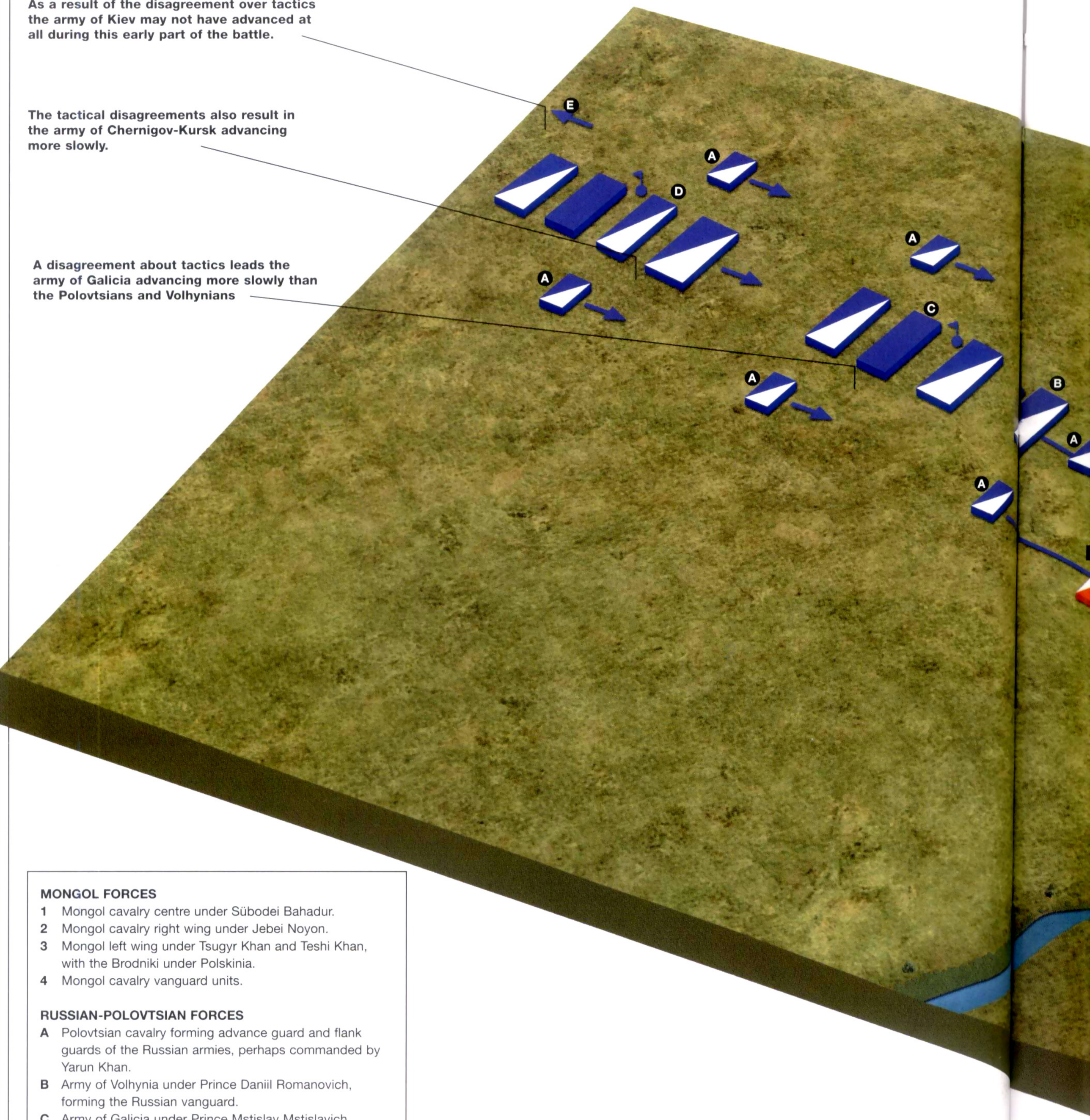
When the gaps between the separate divisions of the allied army had grown sufficiently large, Sübodei ordered his men to attack. As a

It is likely that the majority of Russian troops did not wear armour during the march to the Kalka River, which took place in the heat of May. Mail and other armour, as well as shields, were carried in carts, which in case of emergency could be circled into an ad hoc field fortification. Inside such a temporary defence the Russians could put up a stout resistance. It was normal for the Russians to go to war in what could be called their grandest and most colourful clothing. This included red shirts – the word 'red' in medieval Russian being synonymous with 'beautiful'. It was considered honourable to die in public wearing 'beautiful' clothing. Since the Polovtsians were riding ahead as a vanguard, and the main Russian columns were protected by cavalry flank guards, it was assumed there would be plenty of time to put on armour if the enemy appeared. (Victor Korolkov)

As a result of the disagreement over tactics the army of Kiev may not have advanced at all during this early part of the battle.

The tactical disagreements also result in the army of Chernigov-Kursk advancing more slowly.

A disagreement about tactics leads the army of Galicia advancing more slowly than the Polovtsians and Volhynians



MONGOL FORCES

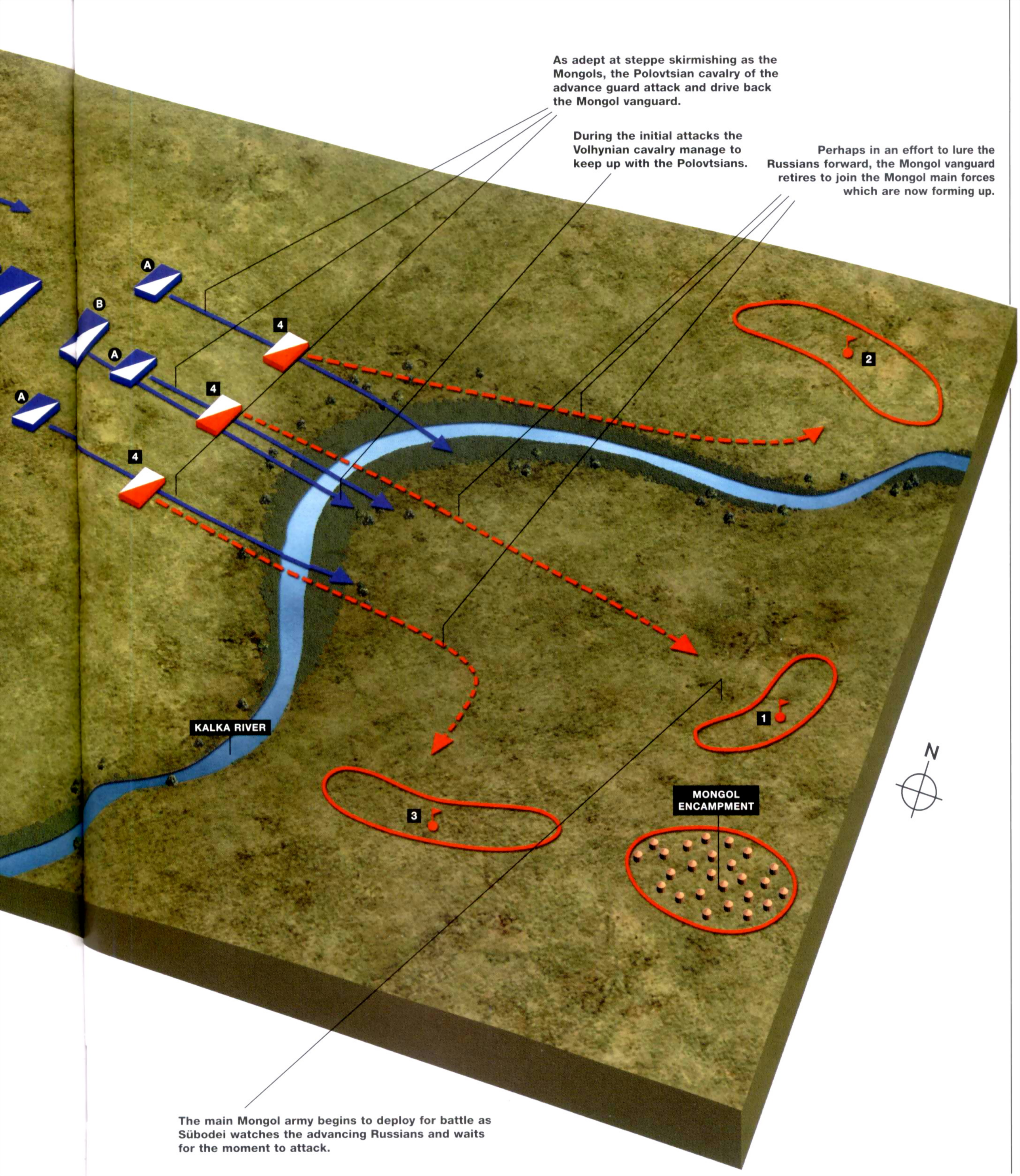
1 Mongol cavalry centre under Sübodei Bahadur.
2 Mongol cavalry right wing under Jebei Noyon.
3 Mongol left wing under Tsugyr Khan and Teshi Khan, with the Brodniki under Polskinia.
4 Mongol cavalry vanguard units.

RUSSIAN-POLOVTSIAN FORCES

A Polovtsian cavalry forming advance guard and flank guards of the Russian armies, perhaps commanded by Yarun Khan.
B Army of Volhynia under Prince Daniil Romanovich, forming the Russian vanguard.
C Army of Galicia under Prince Mstislav Mstislavich.
D Army of Chernigov under Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich, plus a force from Kursk under Prince Oleg.
E Army of Kiev under Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich some distance to the rear.

THE RUSSIAN ATTACK

Morning, 31 May 1223, viewed from the south-east showing the initial Russian attack and apparent success against the Mongol vanguard. The Russians fail to co-ordinate their attacks, advancing as separate formations and becoming divided by the Kalka River.


As adept at steppe skirmishing as the Mongols, the Polovtsian cavalry of the advance guard attack and drive back the Mongol vanguard.
During the initial attacks the Volhynian cavalry manage to keep up with the Polovtsians.
Perhaps in an effort to lure the Russians forward, the Mongol vanguard retires to join the Mongol main forces which are now forming up.
A
B
A
A
4
4
4
2
1
3
KALKA RIVER
MONGOL ENCAMPMENT
N
The main Mongol army begins to deploy for battle as Sübodei watches the advancing Russians and waits for the moment to attack.

Sübodei and Jebei watch the approaching Russians. Both one-eyed Sübodei and the younger Jebei, commanders of the Mongol army at the battle of the Kalka River, were experienced soldiers. This was why Genghiz Khan had entrusted them with the extraordinarily ambitious and far-ranging reconnaissance march to the 'last sea' in the west, in addition to their original task of hunting down Muhammad the Khwarazmshah. Here the two commanders are shown in purely Mongol costume, arms and armour. Jebei also wears a style of gilded armour that appears to have been a mixture of Mongol style and Chinese booty. (Victor Korolkov)

Though very crudely carved, this small stone icon of St. George provides what is probably one of the most realistic illustrations of 13th-century northern Russian military equipment. It was made around 1250 and shows the saint with a long-sleeved, long-hemmed mail hauberk, perhaps mail chausses on his legs, a spear and a normal European kite-shaped shield. (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg)

result the Russian forces that had crossed the Kalka were not prepared when the battle proper began. The actions of the army were not directed by a single commander and their reconnaissance had been entrusted to their Polovtsian allies, whose troops were spread across a large area.

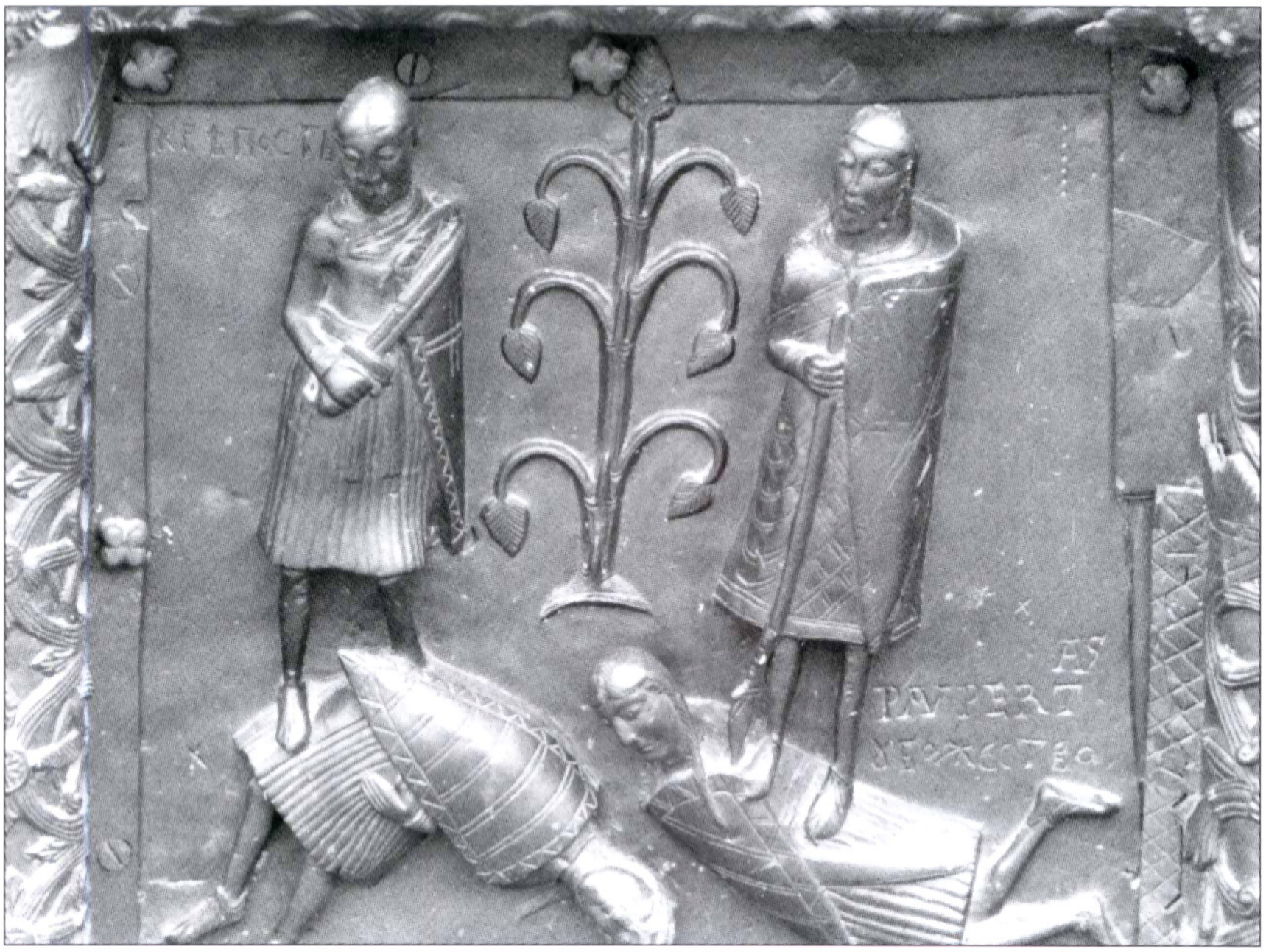
The Russians did have experience of fighting against steppe nomads and even of contested river crossings. In 1185 on the River Suyurly, Prince Igor' had crossed the river to defeat the Polovtsians. Here the Russian array had been led by horse archers, followed by ten units of light cavalry and finally three regiments of heavily armoured horsemen. Two of the latter remained in reserve and took no part in the action as the Polovtsians succumbed to the initial blow and fled. If the Tatar-Mongols at the Kalka River had organized their troops in the same way as the Polovtsians had in 1185, they would most probably have lost the battle. In the event the Mongols fell on the Russians as they were in the process of crossing the river.

Nor did Sübodei follow traditional Mongol tactics on this occasion. Instead of using lightly armoured cavalry and horse-archers in his first assault, he attacked the advancing Polovtsians with his own heavily armoured cavalry, defeating them very quickly. Then the Mongol horsemen attacked the cavalry of Prince Daniil of Volhynia, their archery proving both terrifying and effective. Daniil Romanovich rode at the head of his men with his *voivodes* or senior officers Semen Olyuyevich and Vasilyok Gavrilovich. As the chronicles recorded, 'there was killed Vasilyok by a spear and Daniil was wounded in the chest'. Clearly the Mongol cavalry fought the Russians hand-to-hand rather than relying purely on horse-archery. Seeing the disaster that was unfolding in front of him, Prince Mstislav of Lutsk rushed to help but

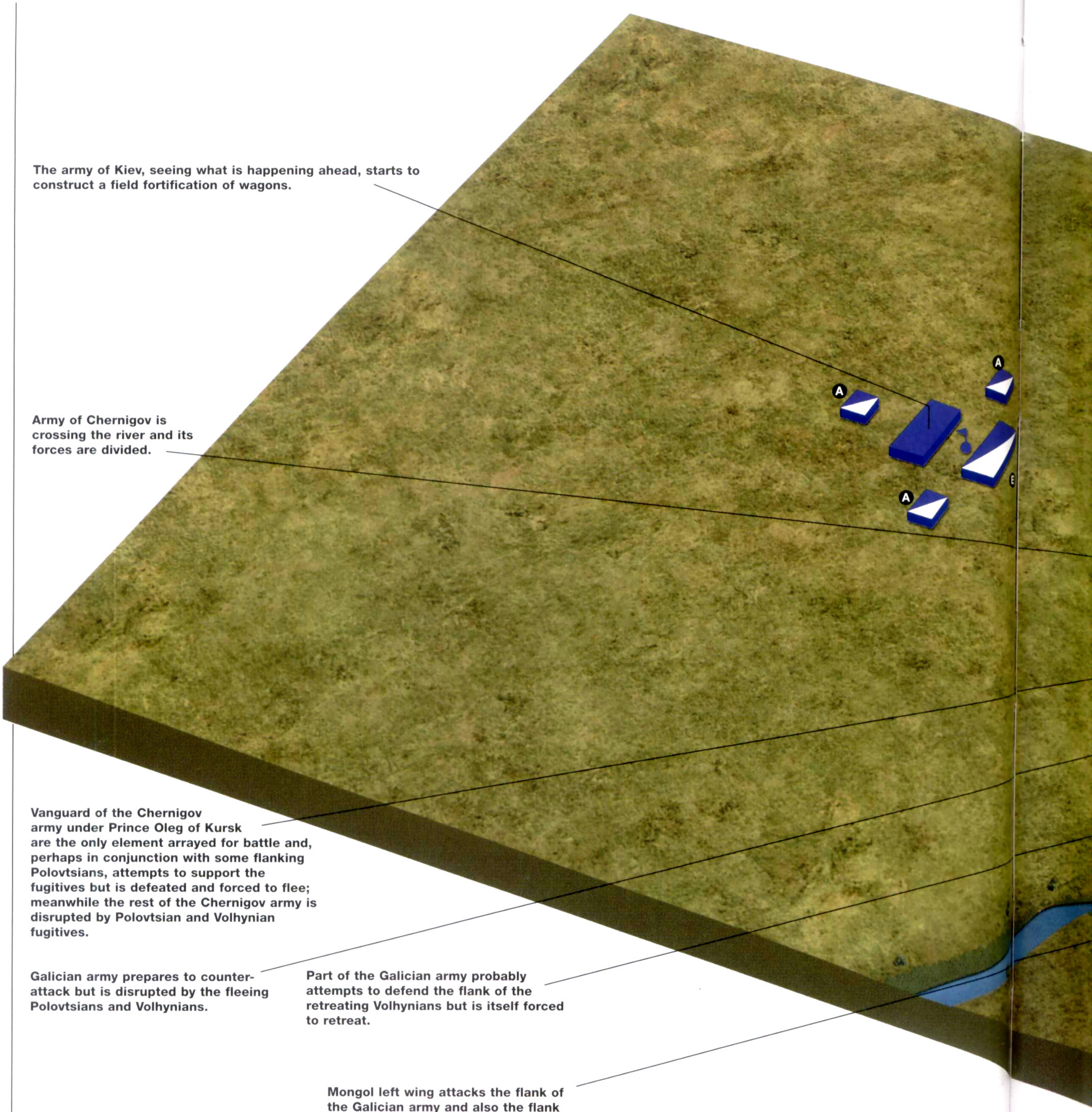
'Vasilyok was pierced by a spear ...' There has been an unjustified assumption for many years that Mongol warriors only fought from a distance using their powerful composite bows, and that they made little use of spears. However, the battle of the Kalka River shows them fighting in a totally different manner. It is clear from the chronicles that on this occasion, instead of making the initial attack with archery, spear-armed, heavily armoured Mongol cavalry charged into hand-to-hand combat with their Russian adversaries. The high May temperatures and gad-flies which swarm this area at that time of year must have been torture for the armoured cavalry of both sides. (Victor Korolkov)

the Mongol horse-archers were still shooting furiously and the troops of Volhynia were forced to flee.

Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia also learned what had happened and ordered his troops to prepare for battle. Pursued by the Mongol horse-archers, the Polovtsians and Volhynians were unable to halt their flight and swept the men of Galicia, including Prince Mstislav Mstislavich, along with them towards the River Kalka. There the army of Chernigov under Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich was yet to complete its crossing of the River Kalka and, unprepared for battle, was swept away by the wave of mounted fugitives. As the Mongol pursuers drove the wreckage of the allied army ahead of them, only Prince Oleg of Kursk succeeded in deploying his men in time to help the Galicians. His forces had been

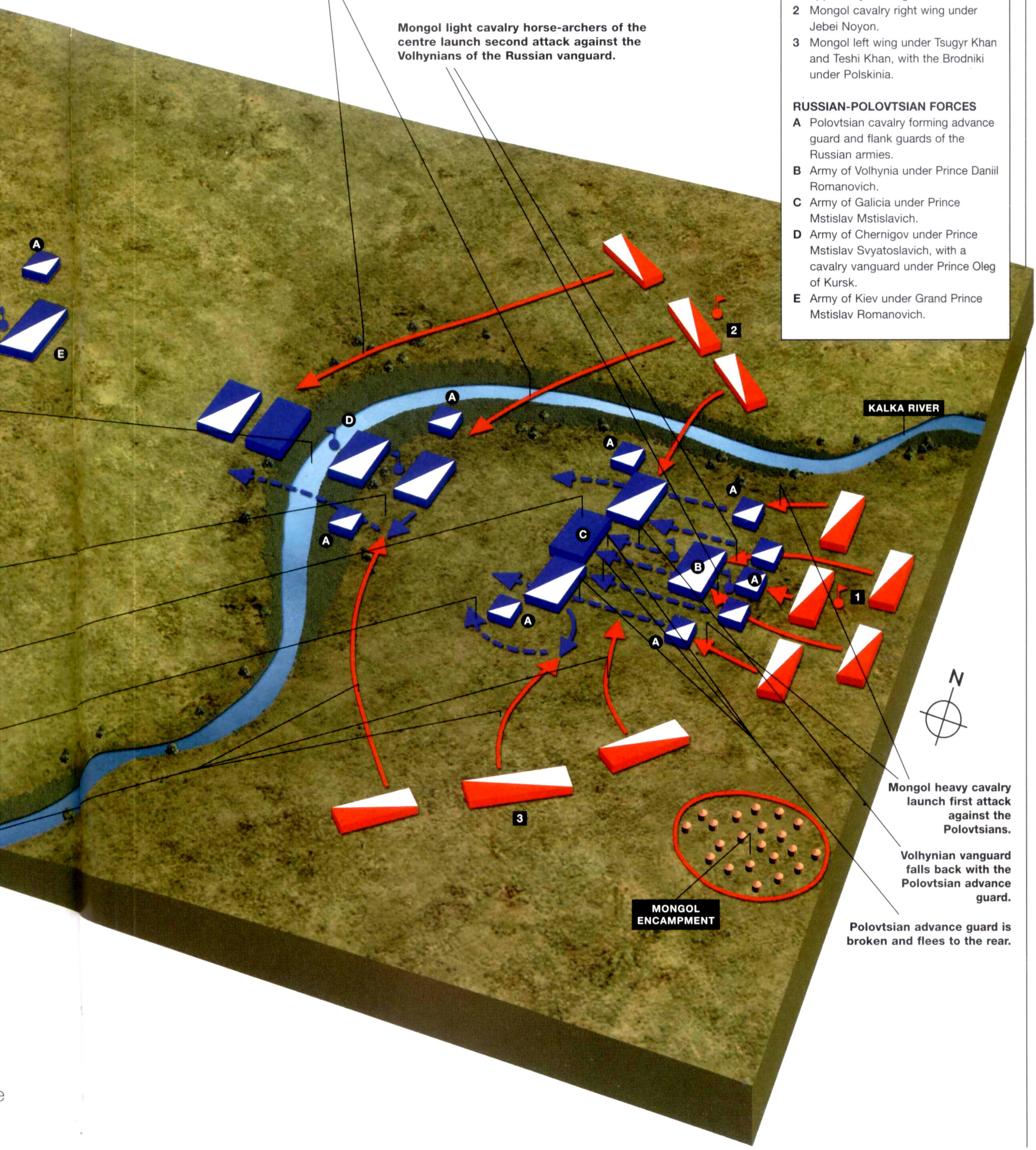


The famous bronze doors of the Cathedral of Santa Sophia in Novgorod the Great are believed to have been made in Magdeburg in Germany in the mid-12th century. As such the numerous military figures on this superb door panel are not thought to reflect the arms used in Russia. On the other hand a large number of the soldiers in the armies of western Russian principalities such as Volhynia and Galicia would probably have looked very similar to their Polish, Hungarian and German neighbours. (D. Nicolle photograph)



THE MONGOL COUNTER-ATTACK

Midday, 31 May 1223, viewed from the south-east showing the Mongol attacks which throw back the Polovtsians and the Volhynians. The armies of Galicia and Chernigov which are trying to deploy for battle are disrupted by the fleeing Polovtsians and Volhynians.


Mongol right wing attacks the flank of the Galician army and also the flank of the Chernigov army.
Mongol light cavalry horse-archers of the centre launch second attack against the Volhynians of the Russian vanguard.
MONGOL FORCES
1 Mongol cavalry centre under Sübodei Bahadur with heavily armoured cavalry in the centre and apparently forming a front line.
2 Mongol cavalry right wing under Jebei Noyon.
3 Mongol left wing under Tsugyr Khan and Teshi Khan, with the Brodniki under Polskinia.
RUSSIAN-POLOVTSIAN FORCES
A Polovtsian cavalry forming advance guard and flank guards of the Russian armies.
B Army of Volhynia under Prince Daniil Romanovich.
C Army of Galicia under Prince Mstislav Mstislavich.
D Army of Chernigov under Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich, with a cavalry vanguard under Prince Oleg of Kursk.
E Army of Kiev under Grand Prince Mstislav Romanovich.
KALKA RIVER
N
Mongol heavy cavalry launch first attack against the Polovtsians.
Volhynian vanguard falls back with the Polovtsian advance guard.
Polovtsian advance guard is broken and flees to the rear.
MONGOL ENCAMPMENT

The Mongols attack the camp of the Kiev army. Because of disputes between the various Russian princes and war-leaders, the forces of Kiev and Chernigov did not cross the Kalka River at the same time as the forces of Galicia and Volhynia. When the latter were overwhelmed, the men of Kiev sought to make a stand within a field fortification of wagons. This type of field defence was used for many centuries, proving particularly successful when used by the Czech followers of Jan Hus in the 15th century. Within this temporary protection the Russians and their prince, Mstislav Romanovich of Kiev, were subject to the full force of the Mongol assault when two regiments commanded by Tsugyr Khan and Teshi Khan surrounded their encampment. For several agonising days the Russians successfully resisted the attacks, while trying to gradually press westwards. But finally, with water running short and no prospect of escape, Prince Mstislav of Kiev accepted that surrender was inevitable.
(Victor Korolkov)

The escape of Prince Mstislav Mstislavic of Galicia. Only a fraction of those Russian rulers who fought at Kalka River survived the battle. Of the three Mstislavs who fought, Romanovich of Kiev and the Prince of Chernigov had been killed, but the Prince of Galicia survived. Ten other princes had also died and only one in ten of their men are said to have returned home. Most Russian armies on this sort of campaign were supported by river fleets; these having transported the infantry to the muster point. But the Kalka River battle took place a long way from the main rivers that flowed through Russian territory. In fact the Kalka itself was little more than a large stream flowing across part of the southern steppe and was certainly not wide enough to accommodate ships. After his return from the battle of the Kalka River, Prince Mstislav Mstislavic continued to rule Galicia for another four years. (Victor Korolkov)

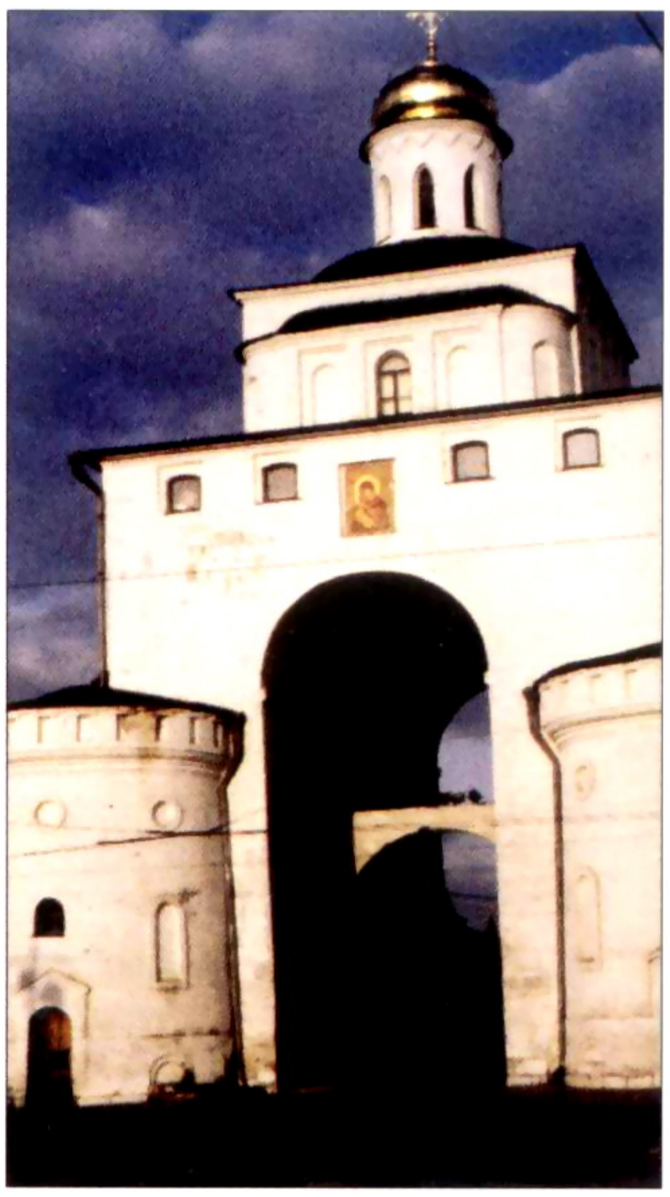
crossing with the army of Chernigov but, despite the courageous efforts of his men, they too were overcome and forced to flee.

A battle such as this could not last long and with his men now surrounded by a force outnumbering them two-to-one, Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia could not halt the Mongols and his troops suffered heavy losses. Inevitably they began to fall back and then, as the Mongol pressure mounted, dissolved into a mass of fleeing fugitives. Meanwhile, the army of Kiev under Prince Mstislav Romanovich saw what was happening on the far bank of the River Kalka. They just had time to snatch their weapons and establish a defensive position by surrounding themselves with their wagons before the Mongol storm burst upon them.

THE RUSSIAN COLLAPSE

The fleeing allies and the Mongols who were furiously pursuing them now swept towards the army of Kiev. Under the circumstances any counter-attack would have been futile so the men of Kiev retreated slowly, defending themselves behind the moving 'field fortification' of carts. Some of the fugitives tried to join the Kievans but the Mongols cut them off, driving them deeper into the surrounding steppes. Sübodei now sent forces under the command of Tsugyr Khan and Teshi Khan to keep the Kievans besieged within their carts while he continued to pursue the fugitives.

The defeated Russian princes retreated in different directions, the troops of Galicia and Volhynia fleeing back towards the crossing of the Dnieper where the Russian river fleet was still moored. They took enough boats for themselves, then smashed the bottoms of those that remained to prevent pursuit. The surviving Galicians and Volhynians then sailed down the Dnieper and escaped beyond the reach of their relentless pursuers with little further loss. Meanwhile the men of



ABOVE **The upper reaches of the Kalka River ran through a narrow valley, almost hidden in the rolling steppe hills. It was neither deep nor wide, but it remained a serious obstacle to an advancing army. (Michael Zhirokhov photograph)**

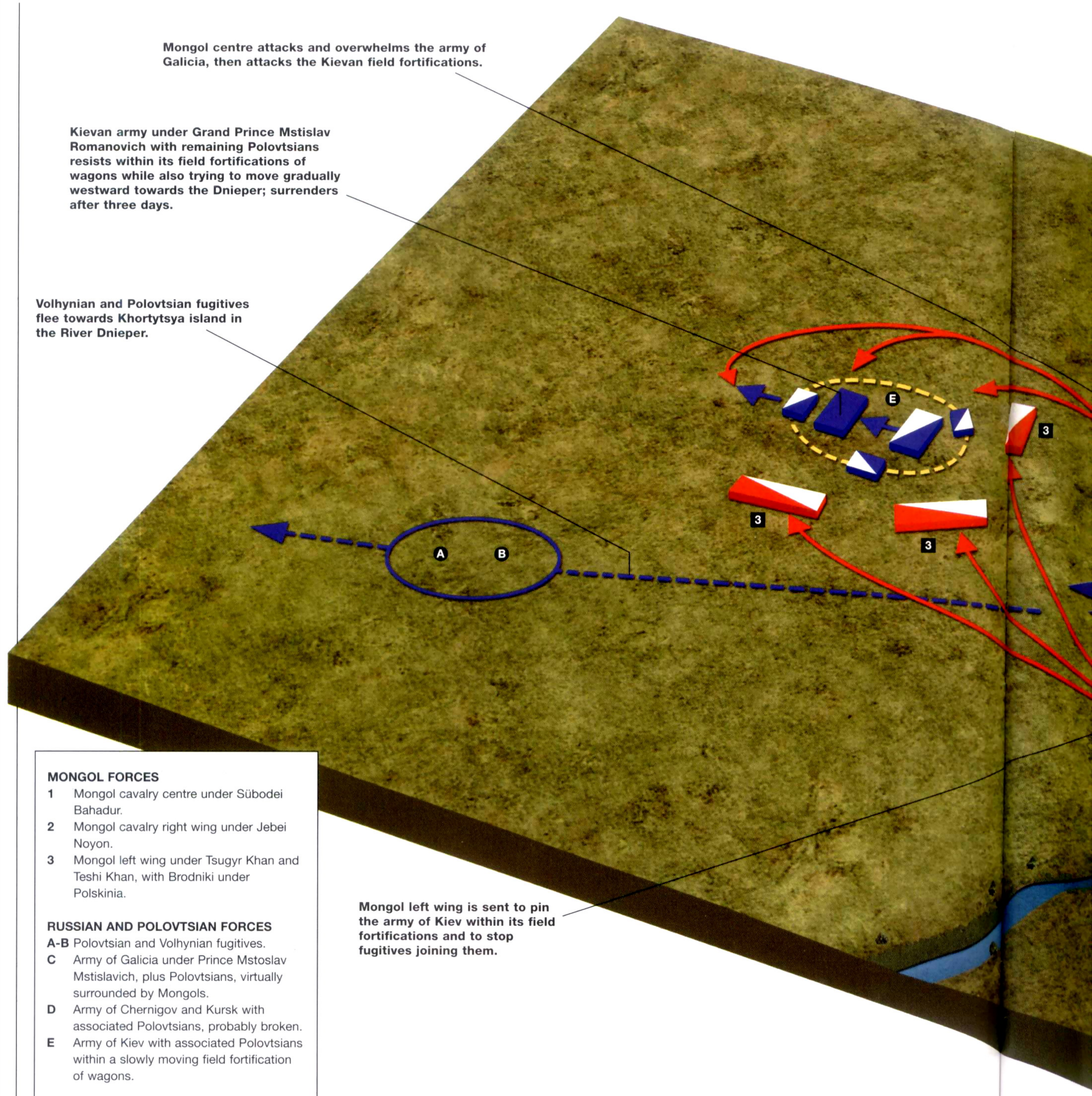
RIGHT **When the advancing Russians and Polovtsians reached the Kalka valley they faced quite a deep descent. There was also no way around the obstacle as the bluffs were even steeper and closer to the stream elsewhere. (Michael Zhirokhov photograph)**

Chernigov under Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich retreated northwards across the steppe. They aimed to reach their own principality as quickly as possible, but the pursuing Mongols were virtually on their heels and harrassed the fleeing army of Chernigov terribly. Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich and his son were both killed during the retreat.

The Prince of Smolensk was somewhat luckier. Retreating to the north-west with a detachment of 1,000 men, he managed to beat off those Mongols who closed in from time to time, eventually reaching the Dnieper, where they succeeded in shaking off further pursuit. Other scattered groups of fugitives suffered terribly at the hands of the Mongols, and some of the Polovtsians took revenge for the overthrow of Köten Khan by turning on the Russian fugitives, plundering and seizing their horses.

While this tragedy unfolded on the steppes around them, the army of Kiev, surrounded on all sides, crawled painfully westwards. The Mongols took great care, however, to ensure this particular prey did not escape the trap. Mongol arrows fell like rain, and yet for three days the

LEFT **The great Golden Gate at Kiev may have been destroyed and then reconstructed in modern times, but the slightly later Golden Gate of Vladimir survived intact. It was built in 1164 and, like the Kievan gate, has a chapel on top. This kind of elaborate stone fortification was, however, extremely rare in medieval Russia. Even here at Vladimir the defences on either side of the gate consisted only of an earth rampart topped by a large timber wall. (D. Nicolle photograph)**



MONGOL FORCES

1 Mongol cavalry centre under Sübodei Bahadur.
2 Mongol cavalry right wing under Jebei Noyon.
3 Mongol left wing under Tsugyr Khan and Teshi Khan, with Brodniki under Polskinia.

RUSSIAN AND POLOVTSIAN FORCES

A-B Polovtsian and Volhynian fugitives.
C Army of Galicia under Prince Mstoslav Mstislavich, plus Polovtsians, virtually surrounded by Mongols.
D Army of Chernigov and Kursk with associated Polovtsians, probably broken.
E Army of Kiev with associated Polovtsians within a slowly moving field fortification of wagons.

THE RUSSIAN COLLAPSE

Afternoon, 31 May 1223, viewed from the south-east showing the disintegration of the Russian army under continuous Mongol attacks. Harried by the Mongol cavalry the armies of Chernigov and Galicia collapse and flee the field. They are closely pursued by the Mongols to prevent the fugitives joining the army of Kiev which has taken refuge within its wagon field fortifications.

Army of Chernigov and Kursk. probably broken, flees to the north-west.

Part of the Mongol right wing pursues and harries the retreating army of Chernigov and Kursk in order to stop any fugitives joining the army of Kiev within its field fortifications.

Army of Galicia collapses and flees west towards Khortytsya island in the River Dnieper.

Part of the Mongol army, probably from the centre, is sent to pursue the Russians heading towards Khortytsya island in the River Dnieper, and to stop any fugitives joining the army of Kiev within its field fortifications.

D

2

3

2

KALKA RIVER

1

C

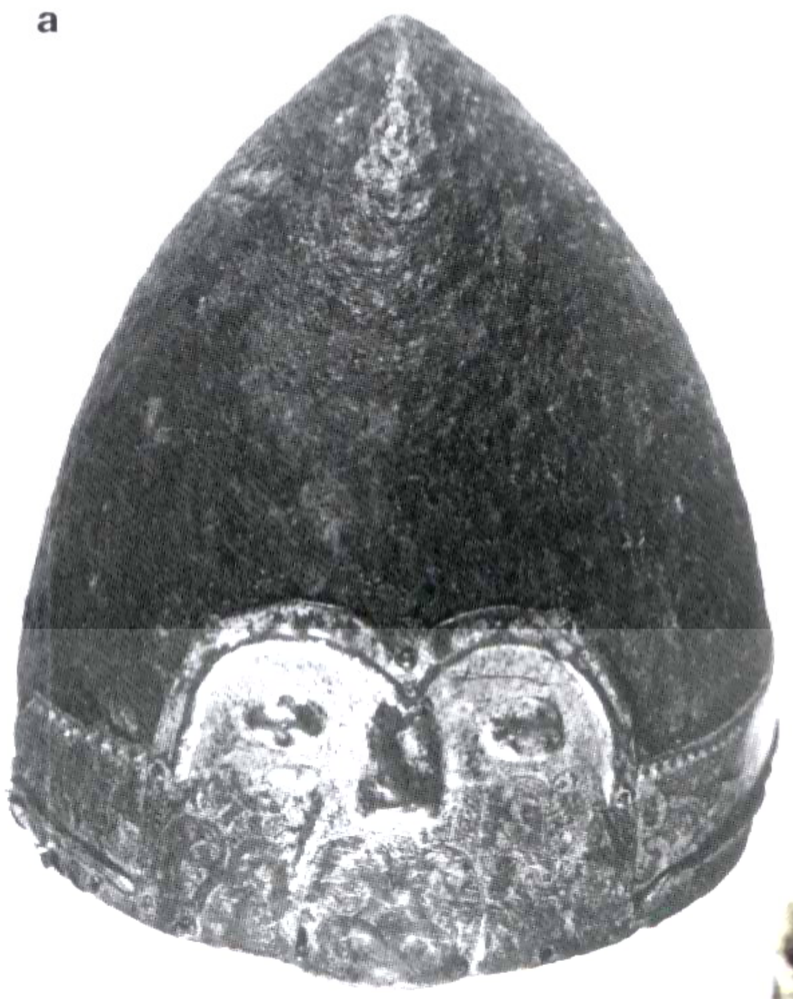
1

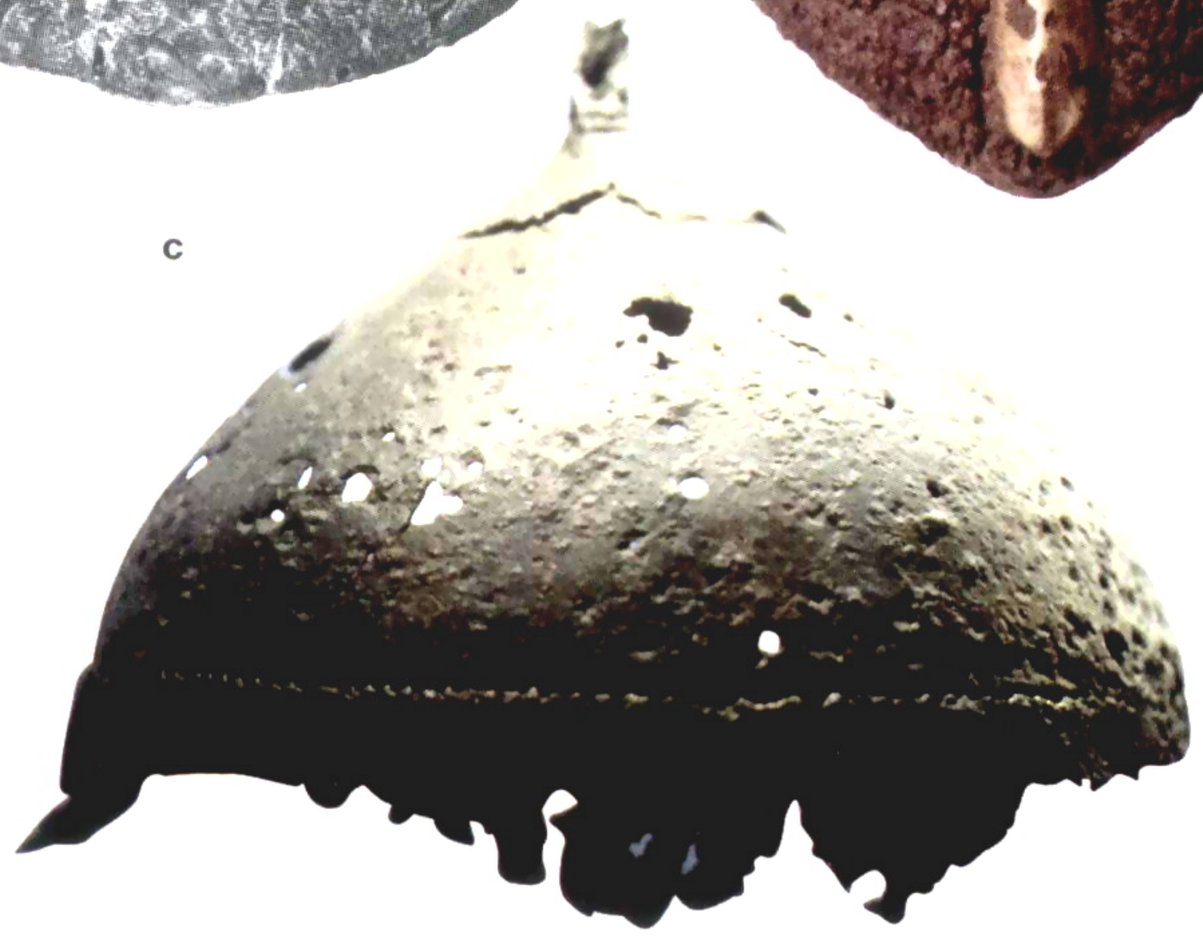
1

N

MONGOL ENCAMPMENT

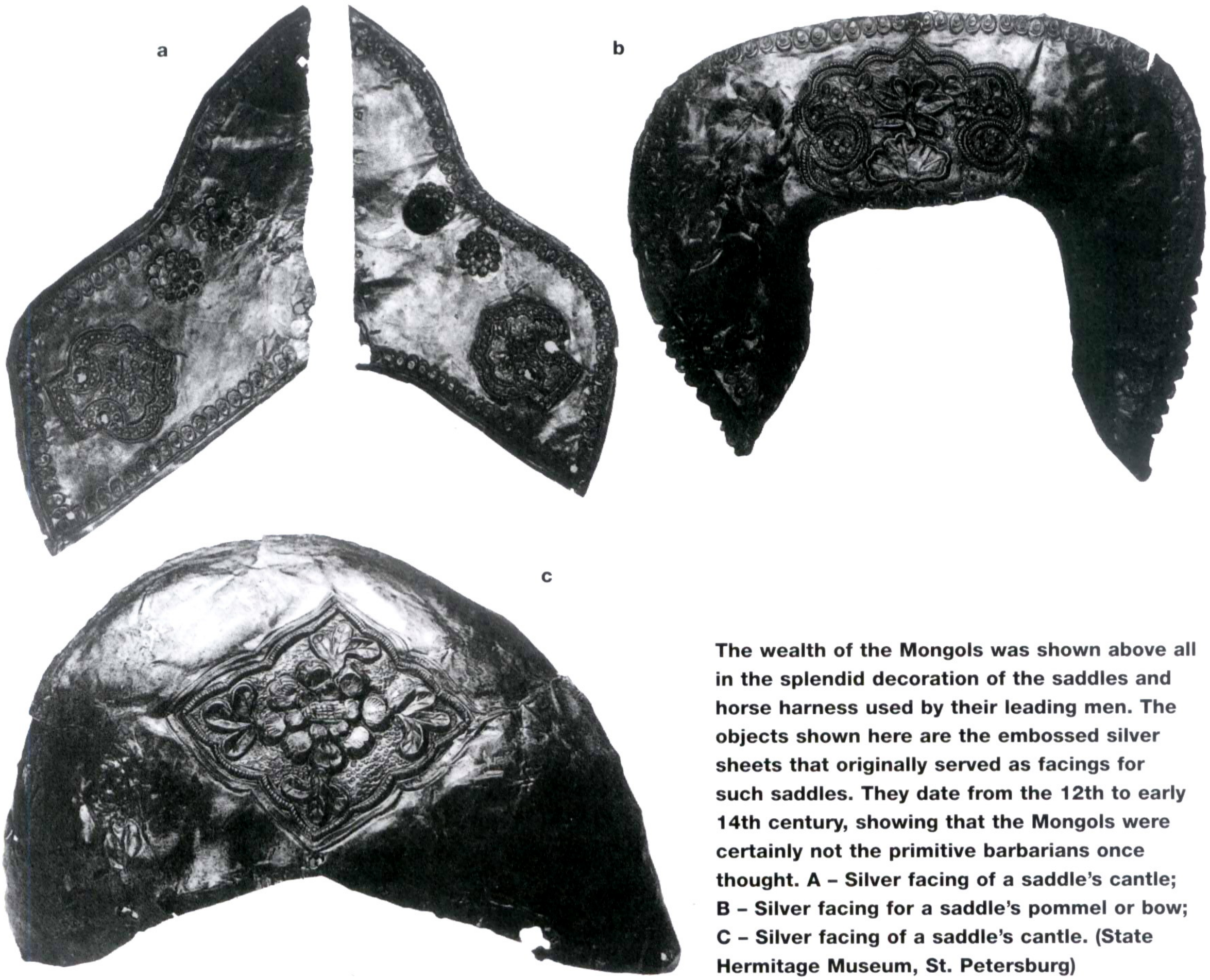
The Mongols feast on top of the bodies of their defeated foes. The end of the battle was truly terrible for the men of Kiev. Part of their army was killed in the fight, others surrendered, believing the Mongols' promises that their lives would be spared. Immediately they surrendered some were slaughtered while others were enslaved. The victors then prepared a feast which they enjoyed seated on a platform of heavy planks under which lay the captured Russian leaders. While their captors celebrated their victory the Russian leaders slowly suffocated to death. (Victor Korolkov)





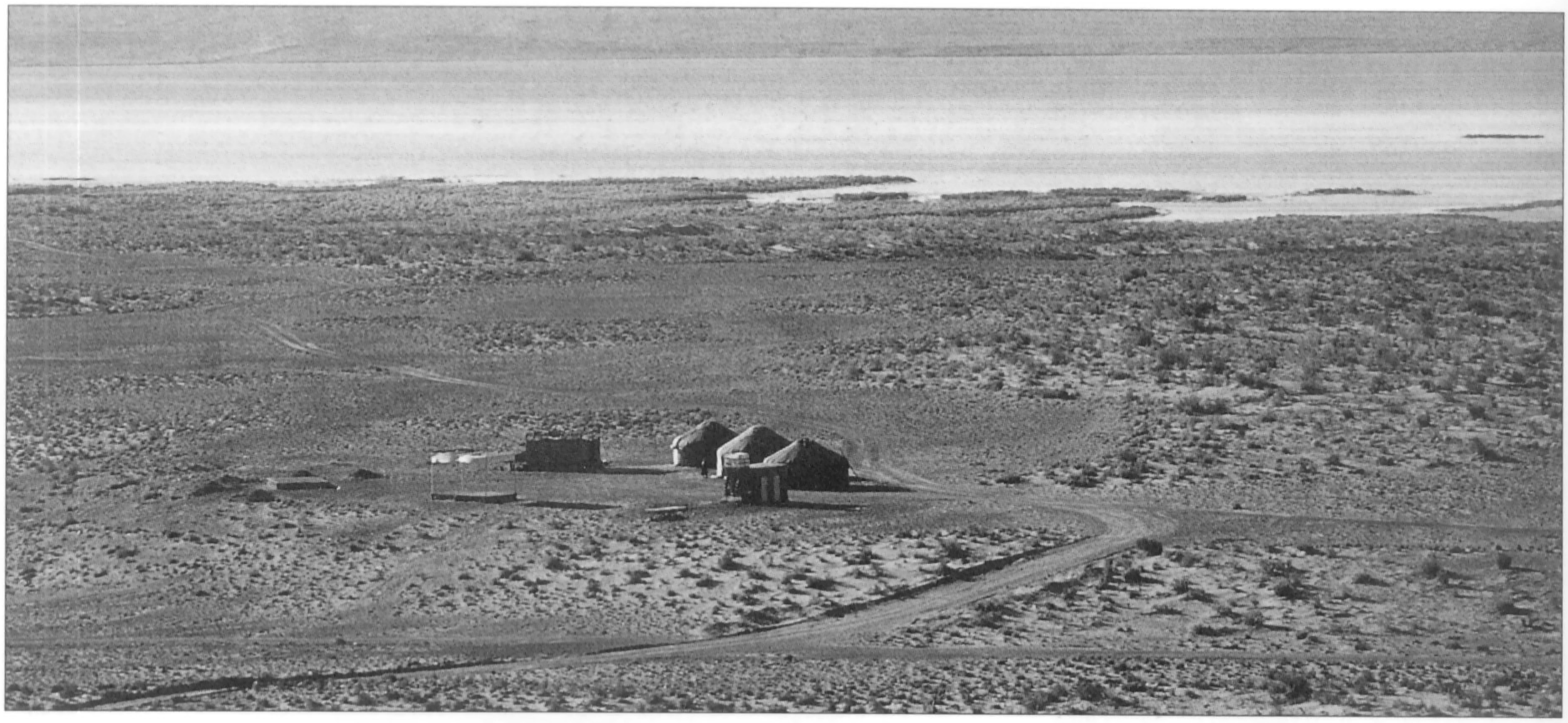
The Polovtsians were a wealthy people and their army, or at least its élite elements, was notably well equipped. Archaeological evidence also shows that the Polovtsians used a variety of different forms of helmet in the 12th and 13th centuries. Of those shown here, one is believed to consist of a European or Byzantine iron skull with a gilded rim decoration added by Polovtsian craftsmen (A). Another was found in a khan's grave and had an entirely gilded surface (B), while a third from Hungary is perhaps rather later and might include Chinese influence via the invading Mongols (C).

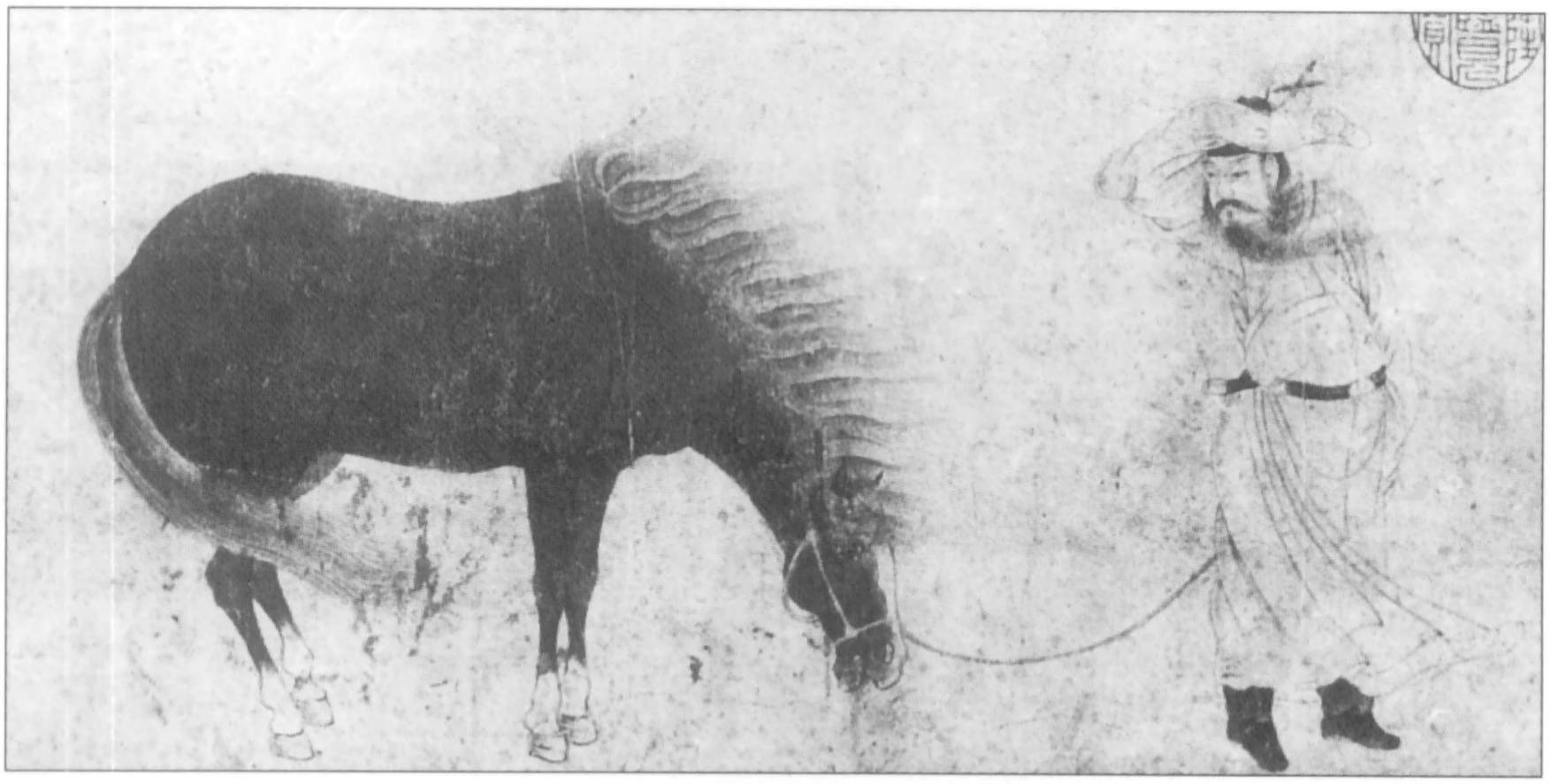
BELOW **The slopes on the eastern side of the little Kalka River, where the Mongols might have established their first defensive position, were certainly steep – but not too precipitous for Mongol cavalry to charge down against their somewhat disorganised enemies. (Michael Zhirokhov photograph)**



The wealth of the Mongols was shown above all in the splendid decoration of the saddles and horse harness used by their leading men. The objects shown here are the embossed silver sheets that originally served as facings for such saddles. They date from the 12th to early 14th century, showing that the Mongols were certainly not the primitive barbarians once thought. A – Silver facing of a saddle's cantle; B – Silver facing for a saddle's pommel or bow; C – Silver facing of a saddle's cantle. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

Looking down from the bluffs on the eastern side of the river, the area of flat land on this side of the Kalka is seen to be very restricted. Here the Russians and Polovtsians might have tried to organise themselves after crossing the river. At the same time they would have presented a tempting target for the Mongol horsemen. (Michael Zhirokhov photograph)





Kievans maintained their dogged resistance. Then with the Mongol assaults growing ever fiercer, the Russians began to run out of drinking water. Escape was out of the question and it was obvious that sooner or later they would have to surrender, so Sübodei decided to negotiate. He selected Polskinia, a senior *voivode* or perhaps the leader of the Slav-speaking Brodniki, as his intermediary, offering to release the Russian princes and their followers in return for a suitable ransom.

The Mongol commanders also promised no blood would be spilled and to prove the Mongols' good faith, their representative Polskinia kissed the Holy Cross in public. Prince Mstislav Romanovich had no choice but to agree to these terms, but as soon as the Kievans left the shelter of their wagon fortifications, the Mongols slaughtered some of them and took the rest prisoner. Mstislav Romanovich and the other princes with him were seized, but the Mongols did not kill them immediately. Instead the noble captives were first tied up and then thrown beneath what was described as a wooden 'bridge'. There they slowly died of suffocation under the weight not only of the timber planks but also of the Mongols who were feasting in celebration on the timbers. This extraordinary execution was in revenge for the killing of the Mongol ambassadors at the start of the campaign.

ABOVE **After their remarkable victory over the Russians and Polovtsians, and their almost as surprising lack of success against the Volga Bulgars, the Mongol army under Jebei, Sübodei and now Jochi made the long journey back to Transoxania, to report to Genghiz Khan. This took them through very bleak territory, some of it traversed in the depth of winter. Today the steppes around what is left of the shrinking Aral Sea are perhaps even more forbidding than they were in the 13th century. (D. Nicolle photograph)**

ABOVE, LEFT **A Mongol horse and groom as portrayed by Kubilai Khan's favourite Chinese painter, Zhao Mengfu, in the mid-13th century. The artist has even caught the biting wind which whistles across the Central Asian steppes. After their victory at the Kalka River, the Mongols left eastern Europe and the Islamic world alone for some years, instead concentrating on the conquest of China. With this largely completed, they turned west once again, this time including in their ranks Chinese troops who brought with them the most advanced forms of weaponry, including gunpowder. (National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China)**

AFTERMATH & RECKONING

This fine carved stone icon of St. George was made in 1234, during the period of relative calm between the first Mongol invasion of Russia, which culminated in the battle of the Kalka River, and the second, far more determined Mongol invasion, which resulted in Russian falling beneath what came to be known as the 'Tatar Yoke'. The stone icon is now in the Cathedral of St. George in Yur'yev-Pol'skiy, to the west of Suzdal.

THE MONGOLS RETURN TO THE EAST

The Mongols pursued their shattered enemies as far as the river Dnieper. The only record of them crossing that great river was when they sacked the town of Novgorod Svyatospolch on the west bank. Sübodei and Jebei Noyon now received orders from Genghiz Khan to join Jochi in an attack on the Volga Bulgars, after which they were to rejoin the main army, bringing the apparently insubordinate Jochi with them. So the Mongols turned back along the River Donets and crossed the Don to meet Jochi's army on the west bank of the even broader Volga River some time during the summer of 1223. Jochi had himself received orders to link up with Sübodei and Jebei. The joint army would then ride north along the west bank of the Volga to attack the Volga Bulgars. But when Sübodei and Jebei and their troops crossed the great Volga river near the town of Suvar, they were themselves attacked by the Volga Bulgars. The latter were zealous Turkish-speaking Muslims who attempted to take advantage of the devastation of their largely pagan Polovtsian neighbours to the south. As a result the Mongols, who had already suffered considerable casualties during their battle against the Russians on the little Kalka River, were obliged to retreat away from Volga Bulgar territory down the left bank of the Volga. It was a reverse and a humiliation which Genghiz Khan and his commanders neither forgot nor forgave.

The Mongols eventually passed near the site of the Golden Horde's future capital of Sarai, not far from where the huge River Volga empties into the Caspian Sea. They then turned east, towards Transoxania, where Genghiz Khan and the larger part of the Mongol army were starting their own slow march back to Mongolia. They had, in fact, spent the summer of 1223 resting in the lush foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains. Meanwhile on their march eastward Jochi, Sübodei and Jebei also defeated the Qangli Turks and killed their khan, probably in the autumn of 1223. The following winter seems to have been spent crossing the bleak Great Steppe that lay north of the Aral Sea.

The victorious western Mongol army had almost reached its goal when Jebei Noyon suddenly died of a fever near the River Imil. Not many days later Sübodei and Jochi finally found Genghiz Khan camped beside the upper reaches of the Irtysh River, north of the Tien Shan Mountains. There, at a great *Quriltai* or gathering of chiefs, Sübodei reported to Genghiz Khan on the results of his epic western campaign. Jochi was also forgiven for his suspected insubordination.

The Great Khan himself and his son Jochi both died only four years later in 1227. Genghiz Khan was succeeded by his younger son Ögedei, who, with his brother Batu, would continue their father's career of conquest, launching a second, yet more devastating invasion of Russia in 1238.

THE MONGOL WITHDRAWAL

1. Prince Mstislav Mstislavich of Galicia and Prince Daniil of Volhynia flee with their surviving troops to the original Russian camp at Khortytsya island then retreat down the Dnieper in boats, destroying those boats they did not need in order to hinder pursuit.
2. The last stand of the Kievans under Prince Mstislav Romanovich in the hills just west of the battlefield lasts three days before they surrender.
3. Prince Mstislav Svyatoslavich of Chernigov flees north with his surviving troops but is killed by the Mongols along with his son.
4. Prince Vladimir Ryurikovich of Smolensk and his surviving troops flee north-west, reaching the Dnieper and escaping.
5. Polovtsians reinstate Köten as their Khan, and flee back to the steppes west of the Dnieper.
6. Part of the Mongol army crosses the Dnieper and sacks the city of Novgorod Svyatospolch before Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon receive orders from Genghiz Khan to join Jochi in an attack on the Volga Bulgars, then to rejoin Genghiz Khan and bring the 'insubordinate' Jochi with them.
7. Mongols ride along the Donets river, cross the Don and meet Jochi's army, then travel up the west bank of the Volga towards the Volga Bulgars (summer 1223).
8. Jochi and his troops are ordered by Genghiz Khan to join Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon west of the Volga, then to attack the Volga Bulgars.
9. Combined Mongol army invades Volga Bulgaria but is attacked by the Bulgars while crossing the Volga river near Suvar; the outcome of the battle is disputed but the Volga Bulgars claim victory and the Mongols withdraw down the east bank of the Volga.
10. The main Mongol army under Genghiz Khan spends the summer of 1223 resting and feeding its horses in high pastures in the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains.
11. Western Mongol army under Jochi, Sübodei Bahadur and Jebei Noyon attack and defeat the Qangli Turks (eastern Kipchaqs or 'Wild' Polovtsians), killing their Khan (autumn 1223); then continues eastward across the Great Steppe (winter 1223–24).
12. Main Mongol army under Genghiz Khan starts its return march to Mongolia.
13. Jebei Noyon dies of a fever near the Imil river.
14. Sübodei Bahadur and Jochi meet Genghiz Khan beside the upper reaches of the Irtysh river; Sübodei Bahadur reports on the western campaign; Jochi submits to this father and his supposed 'insubordination' is forgotten.

RUSSIA – THE UNHEEDED WARNING

In this first clash between Mongols and Russians, Genghiz Khan's warriors had encountered an opponent who was strong militarily but who lacked the Mongols' mobility. The Russians had also shown themselves to be extraordinarily disorganised. During the next few years the revived Polovtsian Khanate and the Volga Bulgars succeeded in stopping further relatively small-scale incursions by Mongol forces loyal to Genghiz Khan's son Jochi and grandson Batu – founders of the future Golden Horde.

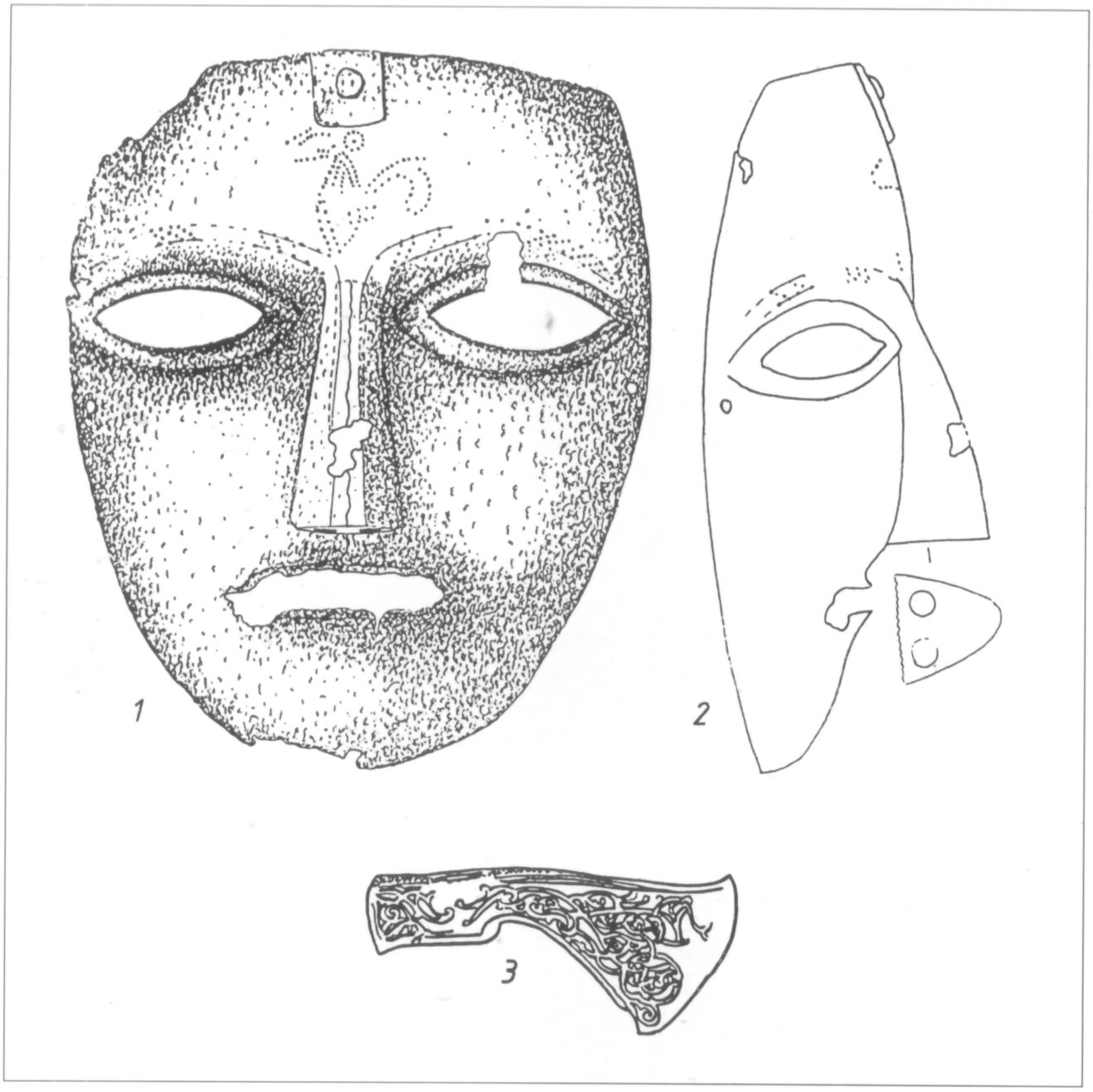
Perhaps these minor successes by the Polovtsians and Volga Bulgars lulled the Russians into a false sense of security. The Russian princely armies may have suffered a big defeat on the banks of the Kalka River

but now, it seemed, the fearsome Mongols had simply disappeared back into the unknown regions of furthest Asia. In truth, Kalka River had been but the first thunderclap of the coming storm, and the Mongols would return to inflict a yet more terrible blow. The Kalka River had been bad enough. Some of the country's best armies had been almost completely destroyed. Several princes and many boyars had also been killed – such heavy losses amongst the military-political elite being something almost unheard of during that period of Russian warfare.

The first Mongol invasion of Russia was also significant in another respect. Having previously despised the Mongols as Gog and Magog, the opinion of the Russian princes was transformed by this humiliating defeat. Russia's leaders were now convinced that the new Mongol invaders were invincible and partly as a result proved incapable of maintaining an effective alliance against them. When the next Mongol assault came 14 years later the Russian princes seemed completely helpless.

ABOVE **The fact that the Mongols suddenly arrived, won a major victory over the armies of several Russian principalities in 1223 and then as suddenly disappeared to the east again puzzled many Russian and other European chroniclers. They would of course return, but in the meantime the Russian princes returned to their traditional bickering, with control of the great city of Kiev often being the cause of these quarrels. Despite its decline, Kiev remained the cultural and spiritual centre of Russia, with the hill of the Kyyevo-Pecherska Lavra or Kievan Cave Monastery complex at its heart. Today the Kyyevo-Pecherska Lavra is a State Historical and Cultural Preserve containing a remarkable array of fine buildings dating from the 11th to 19th centuries.**

ABOVE, LEFT **Combats between Christian cavalrymen, normally fighting with spears or lances, and Turkish or Mongol horse-archers were a favourite motif in art from medieval Russia, the Byzantine Empire, Georgia and Armenia. This superb gilded bronze basin was made in the late 12th or early 13th century and seems to have been buried along with other treasures to save it from falling into the hands of the the Mongols. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)**



Volga Bulgar military equipment, late 12th–early 13th century: 1–2 – Decorated face-mask from a helmet, seen from the front and side; 3 – War-axe with inlaid decoration, possibly imported from the Islamic Middle East.

In 1235 Batu, khan or ruler of the westernmost Mongol provinces, was sent massive reinforcements by the new Great Khan Ögedei. These enabled him finally to crush the Volga Bulgars, closely followed by the Polovtsians. Batu's large Mongol army then attacked the Russian principalities, overrunning them one by one until, in December 1240, the great city of Kiev was itself reduced to ashes.

The road to central Europe now lay open – Hungary and Poland were the Mongols' next victims. Whether the Mongols intended to conquer Europe remains very doubtful, but they carried fire and sword deep into the Catholic Christian west, leaving a lasting impression of fierce, relentless and seemingly invincible warriors which persists to this day.

This subsequent assault began in 1237 when Mongol forces invaded the principality of Ryazan. Only three years later the north-western and southern parts of Russia lay in ruins. Enemy forces had made their way through prosperous Russian territories, overcoming their fortified towns as well as their normally relatively efficient armies. Furthermore, the evidence seemed to indicate that the Russians were technologically and even, under some circumstances, tactically superior to the Mongol invaders. Hence the Russians' defeat came as an even greater psychological shock.

There is no reason to believe that the invaders were at this time at a higher state of social, political, cultural or military development than their victims. Although the level of Mongol military science was in several ways excellent, it did have clear limitations and was based upon

quite restricted methods of warfare. For example the Mongols still relied to a considerable extent upon traditional central Asian horse-archery tactics, despite their fielding of substantial numbers of heavily armoured cavalrymen. In one respect, however, the Mongol tribal warrior was unsurpassed, and that was in his ability to undertake strenuous marches over vast distances. Furthermore stubborn fighting against equally determined foes lay at the very heart of his way of life. By the time of the second Mongol invasion and the subsequent conquest of Russia, Mongols armies could also draw upon the immensely sophisticated heritage of Chinese and central Asian siege warfare. This, as much as the Mongols' own fighting prowess and undoubted powers of endurance, was probably what tipped the balance so emphatically in their favour – and doomed Russia to several centuries of what became known as 'The Mongol Yoke'.

Russian armies also found themselves greatly outnumbered on the battlefield, though not in overall strategic terms. Furthermore the lack of political and military unity of action amongst the Russian princes proved fatal. These rulers had been born and brought up in a world, and in a military aristocracy, which was accustomed to fight small-scale feudal wars – often for what appeared to be trivial reasons. The Mongol hordes, however, introduced the Russian military elite, and the Russian people as a whole, to what was for them a completely new kind of warfare. This was based upon the total extermination of an enemy nation and the obliteration of its culture.

So it is no wonder that the Mongol inroads caused such horror in the minds of contemporaries. At first, however, the people of 13th-century Russia and Europe as a whole failed to grasp the scale of the catastrophe which had engulfed them. The ordinary Russian simply could not understand how his entire native country, large and powerful as it undoubtedly was, had collapsed. Meanwhile the Mongol occupiers established their regime based upon effective enslavement and the enforced payment of tribute, even in regions that had been virtually depopulated.

Sübodei Bahadur, as portrayed in a later Chinese woodcut.

The Mongols, like the Turkish nomads of Central Asia, used a number of different sorts of tents during their migrations, depending on the weather and the season. This is a type commonly known as a *yurt* in Western Europe, though it should more accurately be called a *ger* since the word *yurt* actually refers to a stretch of nearby grazing land. These tents consist of a wooden frame covered with sheets of felt and having a wooden door frame. They could be dismantled or, if they were of a particularly splendid and decorated form, could be transported intact on large carts. (Historische Museum, Bern)

Having conquered the entire Eurasian steppes and Russia to the north as well as half the Middle Eastern Islamic world, China and various other parts of the Far East, the Mongols established what was indeed a World Empire. Their court and its ceremonial became very elaborate, yet the Mongols retained their own way of life as well as their own distinctive costumes for both men and women, as shown in this Persian-Mongol miniature painting of the early 14th century. (Topkapi Library, Istanbul)

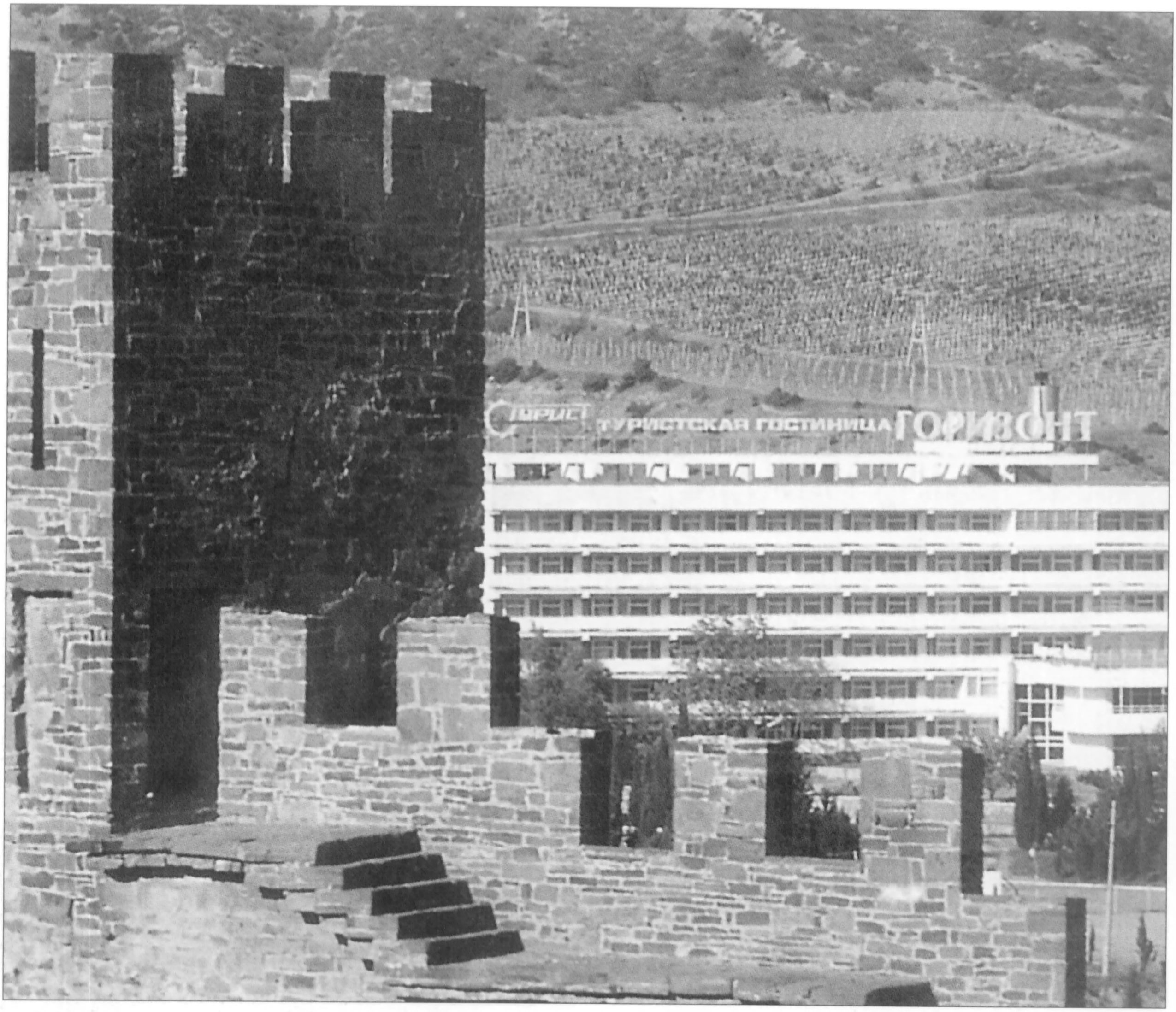
Khan Batu's first campaigns in this second Mongol onslaught seem to have been undertaken for reasons of immediate vengeance and a desire to pillage. The result was the widespread devastation of Russia's productive capabilities. For a while it could almost be said that the destructiveness of the Mongols deprived them of the fruits of their own victories. The scale of the catastrophe has been confirmed by archaeological research and it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that the Mongol invasion held up the development of Russia for 150 to 200 years. Moreover this happened precisely during those centuries when many countries in Western Europe began their own rapid economic, cultural, scientific and social development. For the Russian people, however, the two centuries or more which followed the Mongol conquest are still regarded almost as a 'Dark Age'.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Although the Mongol army advanced from north-western Iran, through Azerbeijan and Georgia before crossing the Caucasus Mountains into southern Russia, the Kalka campaign itself largely took place in the eastern Ukraine. Some parts of the Ukraine have been on the tourist itinerary for many years, even when the country formed part of the old Soviet Union, and are now increasingly being visited by today's more adventurous tourists.

Kiev, for example, remains a beautiful city with many medieval churches and monasteries in addition to its world famous Cathedral of Santa Sofia. As the capital of the Ukraine Kiev also has hotels in most price brackets. Getting off the beaten track and following the routes taken by the Russian and Mongol armies in 1223 is, however, rather more difficult. Most foreign tourists seem to use taxis or hired cars with drivers for longer excursions outside the main cities. Payment is still almost invariably in US dollars. There are, of course, bus services and trains but these mostly remain rather primitive by western European or North American standards. Another particularly interesting way to see

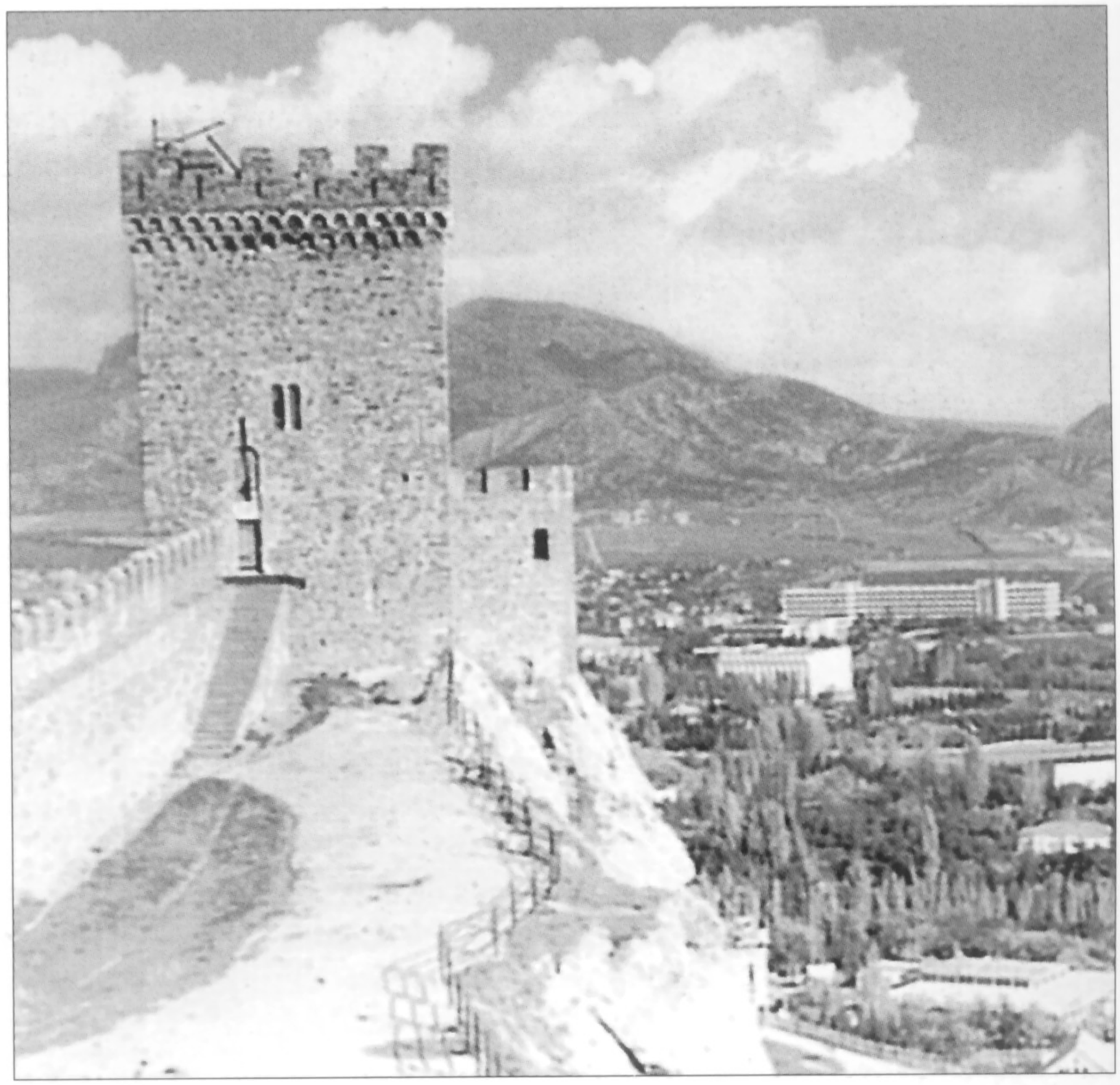
This side view of the restored medieval Golden Gate of Kiev shows not only the red-brick gate itself, but also a section through what would have been the massive earthen ramparts on each side of the gate. These originally ran right around the medieval city. The earth, here faced with concrete, was stabilised with massive internal timber 'walls'. Along the top were even more massive timber defences with overhung the outer part of the earth rampart.



the route taken by the Russian army as it moved from Kiev to what is now the Zaporizhzyia area is by cruise ship down the broad River Dnieper. Most bookings are all the way from Kiev to Odessa on the Black Sea. It must also be borne in mind that the Dnieper is now significantly broader than it was in the 13th century, since much of its lower course consists of man-made lakes behind hydroelectric dams.

Khortytsya island in the Dnieper, where the Russians and Polovtsians assembled before setting off eastward in pursuit of the Mongols, is now a 'cultural preserve' and well worth a visit. The neighbouring city of Zaporizhzhya has a number of large hotels, mostly dating from the Soviet era. The road from Zaporizhzhya to Mariupol, which must follow roughly the route taken by the advancing Russians and retreating Mongols in 1223, is a relatively minor one. It follows the small River Kinka into a range of hills with the small 'mountain' of Mohila Bel'Mak to the south. One of the most pristine of the Ukrainian National Steppe Preserves lies between the villages of Rozivka Zaporizka and Nazarivka where the road from Zaporizhzhya begins to dip down towards the Kalchik and Kalka rivers. This Steppe Preserve is also known as the Kamyani Mohyly or 'Stone Graves' because of the large number of

LEFT AND RIGHT **Today the former medieval Genoese trading outpost of Sudak on the coast of the Crimea is one of the most popular tourist resorts in the Ukraine. Its fortifications have been carefully restored and they tower above a number of modern hotels.**



BELOW **The little river Kalka flows from low hills though several small gorges before crossing the low coastal plain north of the Sea of Azov. Though rarely visited by foreign tourists, this is pleasant countryside which includes one of the best preserved 'steppe' nature reserves in the Ukraine.**

tombs of ancient and medieval steppe peoples found here. The Russian and Polovtsian army would then have headed for a crossing point on the River Kalka north of Mariupol. Mariupol itself was only founded in 1778, though it was on the site of a winter settlement used by the Zaporozhzhian Cossacks for the previous two centuries. Although it is today an important seaport and has a regional museum amongst other cultural sites, Mariupol's modest hotels do not rate a mention in most guide books.

The precise location of the battle of the Kalka River is unknown, though it is generally believed to have been between 25 and 50 kilometres north of Mariupol on the Kalka River. An entirely conjectural reconstruction of the final stage of the Russian-Polovtsian march and of the Mongol defensive position, based upon what seems likely but lacking any specific hard evidence, could suggest the following: Mongol armies traditionally marched along the watersheds between rivers rather than along river valleys, so the Mongols and their pursuers might have left the line of the modern road from Zaporizhzhya at the large village of Rozivka, continuing along the hills north of the Kalchik River. The Mongols then seem to have selected the Kalka as a line of defence, anywhere between its junction with the Kalchik at the village of Kremenivka and its source outside the village of Dmitrivika. The sides of the valley are naturally steeper at its northern end, near the source of the Kalka, so the area around the large modern village of Dons'ke seems a probable candidate for the actual location of the final battle.

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