

Batu (ca. 1206–1255)

A Mongol prince, the second son of Chinghis Khan's eldest son Jochi. Batu commanded the army that conquered the northeastern Rus' principalities (1237–1238) and subsequently that conquered the southern Rus' principalities and invaded eastern Europe (1240–1241). Batu was the first khan to rule in the Khanate of Qipchaq (Ulus of Jochi; *desht-i-Qipchaq*), which he is credited with having founded. His father, Jochi, to whom the lands had been granted “as far as Mongol hooves trod” in the western part of the Mongol Empire (i.e., west of the Irtysh River), died before ruling there. Batu is also credited with building the city of Sarai (Old Sarai, Sarai-Batu) on the Akhtuba channel of the lower Volga River.

Batu was present at the *quriltai* that chose Ögödei as qaghan in 1229 and most likely also at the *quriltai* of 1234, which planned the campaign against the Qipchaqs, as well as the *quriltai* of 1237, which planned the campaign against the Rus' principalities and eastern Europe. Disagreements over Batu's leadership developed during the campaigns in Rus' and eastern Europe (1237–1241). Güyüg, a son of Ögödei, and Büri, a grandson of Chaghadai, challenged Batu's authority, possibly on the basis of the questionable legitimacy of Batu's father. When Qaghan Ögödei died in 1241, Batu opposed and apparently managed to delay the elevation of Güyüg to become qaghan until 1246. Claiming ill health, Batu refused to attend any *quriltais*. His presence at the *quriltai* was needed to give legitimacy to Ögödei's successor because, after Chaghadai's death in 1242, Batu was considered *aqa*—i.e., senior-ranking member of the Chinghissids. When Güyüg was declared qaghan by a *quriltai* despite Batu's absence (although Batu was ostensibly represented by his five brothers), he mounted a campaign against Batu but died on the way to Batu's *ulus* in 1248.

This time Batu succeeded in getting a *quriltai* of 1251 to select his own candidate, Möngke, who was the son of Tolui (Chinghis Khan's youngest son). Batu had apparently reached agreement with Sorghaqtani, the widow of Tolui, thus forming an alliance of Jochids and Toluids

against the Ögödeids. Möngke and Batu then launched a joint attack on the Ögödeids and their supporters, the Chaghadaids. As a result of Batu's role in elevating Möngke to being qaghan and in helping him to consolidate his hold on that position, Batu had a relatively free hand in ruling his own khanate.

A sky worshiper, Batu followed a policy of religious toleration, but seems not to have been pleased by the conversion of his brother Berke to Islam, for, according to William of Rubruck, Batu changed Berke's *yurt* to the eastern part of the Khanate beyond the Volga River to reduce his contacts with Muslims, which he thought harmful. The Mongol and Turkic sources refer to Batu as *sain*, which means "good" or "wise", and in the Rus' sources before ca. 1448, Batu is depicted as "a powerful tsar" to whom the Rus' princes had to pay obeisance. After 1448, the Russian sources increasingly depict Batu as a cruel plunderer and enslaver of the Rus' land.

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