

Berke, Khan of the Qipchaq Khanate from 1257 to 1267. He was a grandson of Chinghis Khan, third son of Jochi, and younger brother of Batu. William of Rubruck tells us that Berke converted to Islam but does not provide a date. This evidence conflicts with that of the Persian historian Juzjani, who says Berke was raised from infancy as a Muslim. It also conflicts with the evidence of Abu 'l-Ghazi, who says that Berke adopted Islam after he became khan. In this regard, William has been generally taken as the most reliable source of the three, for he also remarks that Berke's *yurt* was originally in the southern part of the Khanate where Muslims from Turkey and Persia passed. Subsequently, after Berke converted to Islam, 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 date generally assigned for Berke's accession to the khanship (1257) is based on two considerations: (1) Berke succeeded Ulaghchi, the son of Batu; and (2) the last mention of Ulaghchi is in the Rus' Chronicles under 1257. Berke, thus, became the fourth khan of the Qipchaq Khanate after Batu, Sartak, and Ulaghchi. Early in his reign, according to Juzjani, Berke traveled to Bukhara and honored the learned men there. He also ordered the punishment of Christians in Samarkand and the destruction of their churches for mistreating Muslims in the town. Although he was the first khan of the Qipchaq Khanate to be a Muslim, he continued the Mongols' pluralistic religious policy of tolerance toward all religions and did not make Islam the privileged religion of the Khanate.

Berke supported Arigh Boke in his struggle (1260–1264) with Qubilai Qan. When Prince Alaghu revolted against Arigh Boke, he took over Khwarezm and drove Berke's officials away. W. Barthold argues that the destruction of a 5000-man division of Berke's, described by Wassaf, was not the work of Qubilai's forces nor those of Hülegü (as C. d'Ohsson suggests) but of Alaghu. Berke later supported Qaidu against Alaghu and by extension against Qubilai.

Berke seems to have had few direct dealings with the Rus' lands except to promote religious tolerance, to send tax collectors there, and to commandeer Rus' troops to send to his ally, the Mamluks in Egypt. It was during Berke's reign and presumably with his approval that the Rus' Church established an episcopal see in Sarai in 1261. When an uprising of townspeople against Berke's tax collectors in Rus' had to be put down with Khanate troops, Alexander Nevskii went to Berke, either on his own initiative or because he was summoned, and pleaded for leniency for the perpetrators. It was on his way back from his meeting with Berke that Alexander Nevskii died in Gorodets in 1263.

From 1262 on, Berke fought the Ilkhanate of Hülegü until the latter's death in 1265, and then continued fighting Hülegü's successor, Abaqa, until Berke's own death in January 1267. During the period 1264–1265, as part of this Qipchaq Khanate-Ilkhanate war, Berke formed an alliance with the Mamluk sultan in Egypt while Hülegü formed an alliance with the Byzantine Empire. This brief period represented one of the few occasions during the two-and-a-half centuries of the Qipchaq Khanate's existence that it was not on friendly terms with the Byzantine Empire.

Further reading: *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (London, 1990); Bertold Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde. Die Mongolen in Russland 1223–1502* (Wiesbaden, 1965); George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven, CT, 1953); John Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia 1200–1304* (London, 1983).

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