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Research paper

Yuri V. Seleznev,  
Dr. Sci., Head of the Dep. of Russian History  
Voronezh State University, Voronezh, Russia  
*ordai359@mail.ru*

### A MUSCOVITE PRINCE IN KHAN UZBEK'S CAMPAIGN: RECONSTRUCTING YURI DANILOVICH'S SOJOURN IN THE HORDE

*Abstract.* The presence of Russian princes and their retinues at Khan Uzbek's headquarters during the winter of 1318–1319 remains unresolved. However, an examination of contemporaneous events indicates that, at that time, the Horde's forces were engaged in a campaign in Transcaucasia. Indirect evidence suggests that the retinues from the appanage principalities of the Grand Principality of Vladimir had assembled at the Horde ruler's headquarters, including the warriors of the executed Prince Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver, commanded by his twelve-year-old son, Konstantin. This concentration of military units can be attributed to strategic military necessities. Consequently, it is plausible that the forces of the Grand Principality of Vladimir, under the leadership of the grand prince, Yuri Danilovich of Moscow, participated in Uzbek's Transcaucasian campaign, engaged in combat operations, and incurred losses. Horde troops, potentially incorporating Russian retinues, clashed at the crossings of the Kura River and sustained casualties during the retreat through Derbent. It is highly probable that Prince Yuri's ally and patron, the noyon/emir Kavgadyi, perished in these engagements. Moreover, Arabic sources from the East document the presence of Russian units at Khan Uzbek's headquarters in 1318–1319. The alignment of the timeline for the Vladimir forces' stay at the khan's headquarters with these source accounts enables us to equate Yuri Danilovich's troops with the "host of Circassians, Russians, and Jasz." A thorough synthesis of the available direct and indirect evidence allows for a tentative reconstruction of the chronology of Russian troops' involvement in Khan Uzbek's Transcaucasian campaign.

*Keywords:* Derbent; Yuri Danilovich; Uzbek; Hulagu; Kura; Golden Horde; Ilkhanate; Kavgadyi

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## ИСТОРИЯ

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Исследовательская статья

Селезнев Юрий Васильевич

доктор исторических наук, заведующий кафедрой истории России

Воронежский государственный университет, Воронеж, Россия

*ordai359@mail.ru*

### МОСКОВСКИЙ КНЯЗЬ В ПОХОДЕ ХАНА УЗБЕКА: ШТРИХИ К ХРОНОЛОГИИ ПРЕБЫВАНИЯ В ОРДЕ КНЯЗЯ ЮРИЯ ДАНИЛОВИЧА МОСКОВСКОГО И ВЛАДИМИРСКОГО

**Аннотация:** Факт пребывания в ставке хана Узбека русских князей и их дружины зимой 1318–1319 гг. не подвергался осмыслинию. Между тем анализ событий данного времени показывает, что в это время ордынские войска совершили поход в Закавказье. Выявленные косвенные свидетельства позволяют утверждать, что в ставке ордынского правителя были сконцентрированы дружины удельных княжеств великого Владимирского княжества, в том числе ратники казненного князя Михаила Ярославича Тверского во главе с его двенадцатилетним сыном Константином. Такая задержка войсковых подразделений может быть объяснена военной необходимостью. В этом случае мы можем предполагать, что войска Владимирского княжества во главе с верховным правителем князем Юрием Даниловичем Московским могли принимать участие в походе Узбека в Закавказье, участвовать в боевых операциях и нести потери. Ордынские войска, среди которых могли оказаться русские дружины, вели боевые действия на переправах реки Куры и понесли потери при отводе войск через Дербент. С большой долей вероятности можно предполагать, что именно в ходе этих действий погиб союзник и покровитель князя Юрия нойон/эмир Кавгадый. Кроме того, восточные (арабские) авторы сохранили свидетельства о наличии у хана Узбека в 1318–1319 гг. подразделений из русских войск. Совпадение хронологии пребывания владимирских дружин в ставке хана и известий источников позволяет отождествить войска Юрия Даниловича и «рати Черкесов, Русских и Ясов». Комплексный анализ имеющихся прямых и косвенных свидетельств позволяет предположительно реконструировать хронологию участия русских войск в походе хана Узбека в Закавказье.

**Ключевые слова:** Дербент; Юрий Московский; Узбек; Хулагу; Кура; Орда; Ильханат; Кавгадый

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In the course of the struggle for the Vladimir throne, Princes Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver and Yuri Danilovich of Moscow consented to present themselves at the khan's court. In the autumn of 1318, Prince Mikhail was executed. Prince Yuri and his comrade-in-arms, Prince Kavgadiy, served as the chief prosecutors at the trial.

Nevertheless, immediately following the execution, Prince Yuri Danilovich and his retinue (*druzhina*) did not return to Rus' but remained in the Horde until the summer of 1319. Meanwhile, the Tver retinue returned to the principality's capital, and Prince Mikhail's remains were interred in the Savior Cathedral in Tver only on September 6, 1319, upon the Muscovite delegation's return from Khan Uzbek.

Researchers have not sufficiently addressed the issue of Prince Yuri's stay in the Horde. N.M. Karamzin [1, pp. 116–119], S.M. Soloviev [2, p. 254] (whom modern scholars often follow in this foundational work [3, p. 40]), A.V. Ekzempolyarskyi [4, p. 66], E. Klug [5, p. 114], and A.A. Gorskyi [6, pp. 50–53; 7, p. 42] all note Prince Yuri's presence at the khan's headquarters during the execution and the subsequent return of the Muscovite retinue. N.S. Borisov characterizes the prince's qualities, observing that "the fundamental character trait of this man was ambition" [8, p. 202]. A.N. Nasonov [9, p. 87] and V.L. Egorov [10, pp. 216–217] discuss Khan Uzbek's intention to advance with military forces into Transcaucasia. Nevertheless, scholars have not linked Prince Yuri's presence at the Horde ruler's headquarters with Uzbek's subsequent operations on the Caucasian front.

There are, however, grounds to suggest that Prince Yuri Danilovich was expected to participate in the Horde's campaign.

This is primarily evidenced by the chronology of his sojourn at the khan's headquarters. On the eve of the Transcaucasian invasion, during the execution of Prince Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver on November 22, 1318, Prince Yuri was present at Khan Uzbek's headquarters and actively participated in carrying out the sentence. Prince Yuri returned to Moscow before September, most likely in early to mid-August 1319 [11, p. 90]. Russian princes typically spent about one and a half to two months traveling to and from the Horde khan's headquarters [12, pp. 104–105; 13, p. 34]. Accordingly, Prince Yuri must have departed from Uzbek's headquarters no earlier than early to mid-June 1319, having remained at the khan's court from November 1318 to May 1319. It was precisely during this period that military operations unfolded in Transcaucasia.

The confrontation between the Jochid and Hulaguid dynasties has traditionally been associated with disputes over Persian Iraq, Arran, and Azerbaijan – territories that, by right of conquest, should have belonged to the House of Batu but were instead assigned to Hulagu and his descendants. M.T. Gadzhimuradov includes Southern Dagestan among the contested regions [14, p. 68]. Specialized studies by I.Kh. Kamalov and I.M. Mirgaleev emphasize that the rivalry between the Ulus of Jochi and the Ulus of Hulagu arose from the struggle for the economically and strategically vital territory of Transcaucasia [15, p. 350; 16, pp. 3, 37; 17]. I.M. Mirgaleev also provides a survey of scholarship on military conflicts between the Mongol uluses [15, p. 346].

The prelude to the conflict during the reign of Khan Uzbek was the death of Ilkhan Öljaitu at the end of 1316. Subsequently, in 716 AH (March 26, 1316–March 15, 1317; probably January 1317), Uzbek received an overture from the Iranian aristocracy – particularly from Emir Čoban (Chupan, Dzhupan) – to seize the throne of the Hulaguids. However, on the counsel of Emir Kötlük-Temür, he declined the offer [18, pp. 325–326; 19, pp. 521–522]. The twelve-year-old Abū Sa‘id, son of Öljaitu, thus ascended as the head of Mongol Iran.

Arab chroniclers (Ibn Duqmāq and al-‘Aynī) attribute the outbreak of hostilities to the policies of Emir Čoban, who "arbitrarily ruled over the Khudābandah clan (i.e., Öljaitu's lineage – author's note)" [18, pp. 328–329]. At the same time, Čoban "ordered the execution of Yarundzhī and Qurmishī, along with many others" [18, pp. 328–329]. Two of Qurmishī's sons fled to Uzbek and informed him of Čoban's actions [19, pp. 521–522]. Uzbek, ruler of the Horde, "was incensed by the arbitrary conduct of this Chinggisid and dispatched an army" [18, pp. 328–329]. The Arab chroniclers present this account of the campaign's origins based on statements from Uzbek's envoys, who arrived in Cairo in 1320. Thus, what we have here is the Jochid court's perspective on the causes of the military actions in Transcaucasia.

Persian sources do not specify the causes of the military escalation but acknowledge that "the royal throne was ruled by Karaju Chupan" [20, p. 86]. According to the *Ta’rīkh-i Shaykh Uwais*, Čoban exploited Abū Sa‘id's minority to seize complete control of the state and resolved to exact vengeance on Khan Uzbek [21, p. 105].

Consequently, between March and October–November 1318, Emir Čoban ordered the execution of numerous members of the Ilkhanate's ruling elite – "a total of forty emirs" [19, p. 518], including scions of the Genghisid clan. Those who evaded the purge sought refuge in the Horde, where they garnered Uzbek's

patronage: “King Uzbek drew them near, befriended them, and entrusted one with command of a tumen” [19, pp. 521–522]. Admittedly, Persian chroniclers date the execution of Emir Qurmishī to the period following the war of 1318/1319.

Čoban’s actions were perceived as a usurpation of authority by the “golden lineage” of Chinggisids and furnished the pretext for the Horde’s invasion of Transcaucasia, spearheaded by the khan in person.

It is reasonable to suggest that the military operations ascribed to 718 AH (March 5, 1318–February 21, 1319) transpired between December 1318 and February 1319. In addition to explicit references attesting that these events occurred “in winter” [22, p. 85] (“midwinter” [20, p. 88]), the campaign’s timing can be inferred from the execution of Prince Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver at Khan Uzbek’s headquarters. The hagiography (*zhitiye*) chronicling the prince’s final days records that the death sentence was carried out on November 22, 1318. At that time, Khan Uzbek’s headquarters was located in the North Caucasus near Derbent: “beyond the Terek River, on the Seventsi River, beneath the city of Dedyakov, as one traverses the high mountains of the Jassky-Cherkasy, near the Iron Gates” [11, p. 86; 23, p. 111]. Given the profound astrological significance of celestial alignments in Genghisid decision-making, it is plausible that the Transcaucasian offensive commenced following the full moon of December 8, 1318.

According to the *Tārīkh-i Wāṣṣāf*, the route from Derbent was defended by the forces of Emir Tarmatāz (Barmiyāz) “with his personal thousand (*khazāreh-i khāṣṣeh*).” Furthermore, “the Lezgin tribes... maintained strong ties with that [Golden Horde] side” and failed to warn the emir of the enemy’s approach. As a result, “Tarmatāz’s (Barmiyāz’s) troops hastily retreated” [20, pp. 86–89]. The whole of Shirvan was subsequently occupied by Jochid forces. Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū reports that the Horde’s vanguard was commanded by Emir Küyat [22, p. 85].

The *Tārīkh-i Wāṣṣāf* further recounts that Uzbek arrayed his troops in strict adherence to military doctrine: along the banks of the Kura River, “the right and left flanks, the vanguard (*mankyla*), and the rearguard (*kechka*) were stationed” [20, pp. 86–89].

On the opposite bank, Abū Sa‘īd’s forces, which had wintered in Karabakh (Gavbari), stood arrayed [22, p. 85]. Yet the Jochids held a marked numerical superiority. Meanwhile, Emir Čoban’s troops, originally bound for Khorasan, were hastily redirected to Transcaucasia [20, pp. 86–89]. In an effort to halt Uzbek’s progress, Abū Sa‘īd directed that tents be pitched along the riverbank at double their standard dimensions, thereby inflating the perceived size of his army. It is reasonable to surmise that the Horde’s forces attempted to cross the Kura but could not secure a foothold on the opposing shore: the army “had no opportunity to cross the Kura River” [18, pp. 328–329].

Furthermore, captives from Abū Sa‘īd’s ranks revealed that Emir Čoban had mustered a substantial force, which was enveloping the Jochids from the rear. Alarmed by the prospect of encirclement and rout, Uzbek commanded a retreat northward beyond Derbent [20, pp. 86–89; 21, pp. 103–104; 22, p. 85; 24, p. 144].

The onrushing Hulaguid army promptly entered the battle, with Emir Čoban “having crossed the river, pursued [with his troops – author’s note] the fugitives, slaying many and taking others prisoner, whom he delivered to the padishah” [22, p. 86].

No peace agreement was concluded, and Uzbek’s envoys in Cairo reported that, during the winter of 1319–1320 (prior to the death of the Chagatai Yasa’ur – “In mid-Jumādā al-Awwal 720 AH [mid-June 1320], Prince Yasa’ur was killed” [22, p. 110]) – Horde forces had once again sought to vanquish the Hulaguids [18, pp. 328–329]. The delegation was charged with renewing the alliance against the Hulaguids but received no firm assurance from the Horde.

Consequently, Khan Uzbek’s Transcaucasian campaign extended from December through January, and likely February, encompassing the entirety of the winter of 1318–1319. By March or April, the khan was presumably already in the North Caucasus. He may have returned to Sarai by May or June. It was there, along the Volga or in the North Caucasus, around June 1319 that Uzbek disbanded his forces, enabling Prince Yuri to return to Moscow.

Beyond the chronological framework, additional indirect evidence supports the participation of Russian forces in Uzbek’s campaign.

For instance, the *Life of Mikhail of Tver* records that “Prince Yuri departed with Kavgadyi and proceeded ahead to the Horde, taking with him all the princes of Suzdal and boyars from the cities and Novgorod” [11, p. 76]. In other words, the Muscovite prince was accompanied by his allied princes and their retinues, the personnel of which were commanded by boyars. Prince Yuri, naturally, was attended by his own retinue.

Moreover, the retinue of the executed Prince Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver was detained in the steppe: “The following summer, Prince Yuri, having arrived in Rus’, brought with him Prince Konstantin and his father’s retinue” [11, p. 90]. Thus, the armed forces of the Grand Principality of Vladimir came under the control and command of Prince Yuri, as the head of the “Russian ulus.” Furthermore, the retention of the executed rival prince’s retinue was motivated by some compelling necessity – one that could arise in the context of impending military operations for which these contingents were earmarked.

Another indirect corroboration of the involvement of Russian forces in the campaign against Hulaguid territories is referenced in the *Life of Mikhail of Tver*, which alludes to the fate of Emir Kavgadyi: “it befell the accursed and lawless Kavgadyi: not having lived even half a year, he ended his wretched life in a foul manner, accepting eternal torment.” In essence, Kavgadyi outlived the execution of Prince Mikhail (November 22, 1318) by less than six months, succumbing under circumstances left unelucidated by the hagiographer no later than the latter half of May 1319. This period aligns precisely with Khan Uzbek’s Transcaucasian expedition. Amid the confrontation along the Kura River, the Shaykh Uwais describes how “a battle ensued, and [the combatants] showered one another with arrows” [21, pp. 103–104]. Horde forces likewise secured the bridges over which enemy detachments endeavored to advance: “the troops of the emirs and valiant warriors, breaking through the ranks, resolved to cross the bridge of Prince Mengü-Timür and obstruct the enemy’s route to Derbent” [20, p. 89]. Furthermore, during the retreat, Horde troops suffered losses as Emir Čoban “slew many of them, captured others, and brought them to the padishah” [22, p. 86].

It is plausible that Emir Kavgadyi sustained his mortal wound in precisely these clashes.

It is noteworthy that in the *Life of Mikhail of Tver*, Prince Yuri is invariably portrayed in close association with Kavgadyi. It is highly probable that, during the Transcaucasian campaign, Russian forces operated in conjunction with Kavgadyi’s detachment or were integrated into the unit under his command. These narratives thus indirectly indicate the involvement of Vladimir-Suzdal troops in hostilities against the Hulaguids.

Another piece of indirect evidence supporting Prince Yuri’s participation in the Horde’s Transcaucasian campaign is the assertion by the Arab author al-‘Umarī that “The sultan of this state has hosts of Circassians, Russians, and Jasz” [25, p. 230]. Al-‘Umarī, a contemporary (d. 1349), refers explicitly to Uzbek: “The one who is there is now its sultan, Uzbek Khan...” [25, p. 232] and “Uzbek, who now rules the Kipchak state” [25, p. 241]. His informant on the composition of the Horde’s forces was ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Nūmān al-Khwārizmī: “Sheikh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, son of Nūmān, was asked about his [Kipchak] troops and said...” [25, p. 241]. Notably, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Nūmān al-Khwārizmī resided in Cairo – where al-‘Umarī could have consulted him – for a year and a half on an ambassadorial mission, spanning 718 AH (March 5, 1318–February 21, 1319) to 720 AH (February 12, 1320–January 30, 1321) [26, pp. 57–59; 27, p. 32]. This interval corresponds precisely to the course of the Jochid–Hulaguid war. Thus, al-‘Umarī acquired firsthand intelligence on Khan Uzbek’s military contingents. Among these, the substantial Russian detachment that ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Nūmān al-Khwārizmī considered salient enough to report could only have been the Vladimir-Suzdal army, under the command of the principality’s grand prince, Yuri Danilovich of Moscow.

It should be noted that Prince Yuri Danilovich was married to Khan Uzbek’s sister and thus held the status of the khan’s son-in-law. The involvement of the khan’s kin, including his sons-in-law, in military campaigns constituted a paramount obligation. The presence of Uzbek’s cousins (sons of his aunt) – Kötlük-Timür and Saray-Kötlük – as well as Isa-gurgan, is attested during the 1318–1319 expedition [20, pp. 86–89]. Isa-gurgan was the husband of Itkudzhudzhuk, Uzbek’s daughter, and simultaneously the father of Urudzhi, Uzbek’s wife [27, pp. 92, 93; 28, pp. 295, 296]. Although by this juncture Prince Yuri had become a widower – his wife, Uzbek’s sister Končaka (baptized Agafiya), having perished in captivity in Tver [29, pp. 7–37] – the Muscovite house was nonetheless enmeshed in the intricate web of matrimonial alliances binding the Horde’s aristocracy. Consequently, its participation in the military campaign represented an ineluctable duty.

Thus, the complex of indirect evidence from diverse sources permits the reasonable inference that Prince Yuri Danilovich of Moscow, in his capacity as grand prince of Vladimir, was not merely in attendance at Khan Uzbek’s headquarters following the execution of Prince Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver but, with considerable likelihood, participated in Uzbek’s military campaign against the Hulaguid domains. Prince Yuri commanded a contingent comprising Vladimir-Suzdal retinues, including the Tver forces under Prince Konstantin. It is reasonable to conclude that Russian troops engaged in the combat at the Kura River crossings, most probably

as elements of the unit led by Emir Kavgadyi, who likely perished in these very clashes. By the end of May 1319, Uzbek's army – and evidently the Russian contingents – had retreated to the territory of the Ulus of Jochi. By August, the retinues of the Russian princes had returned to their principalities.

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