

# MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF CENTRAL EURASIA



No. 1 (1) 2020



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*Has been published since 2020*

**No. 1 (1) 2020**

Nur-Sultan

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**Medieval History of Central Eurasia**

Owner: International Science Complex Astana  
Periodicity: quarterly  
Circulation: 500 copies

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## NOTES ON THE CAPTURE OF WILLIAM BUCHIER BY THE MONGOLS in HUNGARY

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**Abstract.** In 1254, during his stay at Karakorum, Franciscan traveler William of Rubruck met Parisian born mastersmith William Buchier. Rubruck recorded that Buchier was captured in Hungary, during the Mongol invasion, by a half-brother of the Great khan *Möngke* (1251–1259), in a city called ‘Belegrave’. So far, the identification of the Mongol commander who had captured William Buchier largely remained out of the interest of the researchers. The city where he had been taken captive was frequently, and erroneously, identified as Belgrade, capital of modern Serbia. This article is dedicated to the subject “who was the half-brother of Möngke that captured William Buchier, and where and when it happened”. On the basis of the Rubruck’s report and other western and oriental sources related to the Mongol military campaign in central Europe, it is concluded that Buchier was captured by prince Böček in Alba Iulia (*Gyulafehérvár, Bălgrad*), modern Romania, in the early spring of 1241.

**Keywords:** William Buchier, William of Rubruck, Böček, Mongol invasion of Hungary, 1241, Belgrade, Alba Iulia, *Székesfehérvár*, Mongol captives

**Introduction.** In his itinerary to the court of Great Khan Möngke (1251–1259), Franciscan traveler William of Rubruck described how he encountered in Karakorum a small colony of Mongol captives from Hungary. The most prominent among them was a Parisian born mastersmith William Buchier (‘Willelmus nomine, oriundus Parisius; cognomen eius est Buchier’). According to Rubruck, Buchier was captured during the Mongol invasion, “by one of the khan’s brothers on the father’s side, in a city called Belegrave, in Hungary, where there was a Norman bishop from Belevile, near Rouen, along with a nephew of the bishop, whom I saw there in Karakorum” [15, p. 234; 41, p. 223–224; 44, p. 287]. Afterwards, Buchier distinguished himself in the court of Möngke and he made a marvelous tree-shape fountain of alcoholic beverages for the khan.

Destiny of William Buchier and the fate of other Mongol captives from central Europe, which Rubruck recorded, are important for historians due to numerous reasons. It offers vivid insight into the presence of newcomers from Western Europe in the urban centers of medieval Hungarian kingdom and reveals the Mongol treatment of their captives during and after the Western campaign. Therefore, it is not surprising that Buchier, and his fountain in Karakorum, became an object of several studies [16, p. 143–146; 27; 33, p. 123–128; 39].

Equally intriguing information, about master William’s place of residence in Hungary was not left aside. The name ‘Belegrave’ was correctly emended as ‘Belgrade’, and since the pioneer work on Mongol History by baron Abraham Constantine Mouradzea d’Ohsson [9, p. 305], commentators and translators of the Rubruck’s report identified it with the namesake city at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, the modern capital of Serbia [15, p. 468; 40, p. 223; 41, p. 224; 44, p. 287]. Recently, the information about the capture of master William was also acknowledged in Serbian historiography as an important information related to the history of Belgrade in the thirteenth century [30].

However, the identification of Rubruck’s ‘Belegrave’ with Belgrade in Serbia is faced with many difficulties. Some scholars, among them prominent French orientalist Paul Pelliot, expressed doubts in such identification [28, p. 199]. Moreover, Romanian historian Aurelian Sacerdoteanu suggested that Buchier was actually captured in Alba Iulia, Transylvania [34, p.

277–279], and such identification is also sometimes present in the works of Hungarian or Romanian historians [38, p. 318–319; 39, p. 79].

On the following pages, our intention is to return to this issue once more. Besides the master William's residence in Hungary, the attention will be focused to the identification of his captor. The latter issue, inseparably tied with the former, is less complicated. Nonetheless, with an exception of a short remark made by English orientalist John Andrew Boyle [1, p. 269; 4, p. 147], it was left on the margins of researches. Therefore, we will first discuss who was the unnamed "khan's brother on the father's side" who captured William Buchier in Hungary.

**Discussion.** William of Rubruck did not record the name of the Mongol commander who captured Buchier, but the information he provided is sufficient to identify him. Rubruck stated that "Möngke has eight brothers, three by the same mother and five on the father's side only" [15, p. 233; 41, p. 223–224; 44, p. 287]. This statement is in accordance with Chingisid genealogies recorded in oriental sources. It is known that Tolui, the youngest son of Chingis Khan, and his chief wife Sorkaktani Beki had besides, Möngke, three more sons who gained a fame in the Mongol history: Kubilai, Hülegü and Arik Böke. Persian historian Ata-Malik Juvayni (1226–1283) mentions that Tolui had four more descendants: Möge, Böček, Sögetü and Sübedei [1, p. 571], while his compatriot and contemporary Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318) adds another two: Jorike, and Kutuktu, stating that the former died young without descendants [31, p. 104–107]. All of them, except Jorike, are also enumerated as Tolui's sons in Yuán Shǐ, official history of the Mongol dynasty in China [18, p. 88–89]. Therefore, it is certain that five half-brothers of Möngke that Rubruck had in mind were Möge, Böček, Sögetü, Sübedei and Kutuktu.

According to Rashīd al-Dīn, just one of them took part in the Mongol campaign in the West (1236–1242). It was Böček [31, p. 37]. His participation in the campaign is confirmed by John of Plano-Carpini and his companion monk C. de Bridia [20, p. 18; 44, p. 69], but also by a number of Slavic and oriental sources. As sources do not mention any other brother or half-brother of Möngke in these events, it is certain that the Mongol prince, who captured William Buchier, was indeed Böček.

Böček's activities in the Western campaign also deserve a mention here. According to Juvayni, Böček assisted his brother Möngke in the subjugation of Cumans on the middle Volga in 1237. Allegedly, he was the one who personally slew Cuman leader Bachman, per Möngke's orders [1, p. 553–554]. Two years later, together with princes Shiban and Büri, Böček led a Mongol army to the Crimean Peninsula [31, p. 39]. In 1240, according to Hypatian Chronicle and Rashīd al-Dīn, he took part in the siege and conquest of Kiev [29, p. 785; 31, p. 45]. His achievements in the campaigns against Rus' are also mentioned in the Secret History of the Mongols [42, p. 208].

In late winter / early spring of 1241, when the Mongol invasion of Hungary commenced, Böček was placed at the command of the left wing of the army. According to Rashīd al-Dīn, he passed through the land of Qaraulaq/Wallachia and clashed with local populations of Ulaq/Vlachs [7; 31, p. 45; 35, p. 431]. From there, he penetrated the Carpathian Mountains and entered Transylvania. Besides Rashīd al-Dīn, the passage of his detachment is confirmed by a letter of the Hungarian king Bela IV (1235–1270), sent to pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) in 1247. In the letter, Bela IV stated that one Mongol army penetrated into Hungary at the place where he later settled Knights Hospitaller. Their settlement took place in the Land of Severin, in the "vicinity of Cumans and Bulgarians" on the opposite bank of Danube, according to the king's words [43, p. 208–211, 231]. Therefore, it can be concluded that Böček made his way to Transylvania through one of southwest Carpathian passes (either Vulcan or Mehadia), before he joined his forces with the main Mongol army in eastern parts of the Hungarian kingdom.

The short overview of Böček's movements in early 1241 casts doubts to the identification of Belegrove/Belgrade with the modern Serbian capital. Namely, Böček's

activities were limited to Wallachian plains and South Transylvania, far from Belgrade. Besides, neither written sources, nor archaeological findings, indicate that the Mongols crossed the Danube during 1241, and there is nothing to suggest that their operations in 1242 were carried further south than northern parts of the region of Syrmia (modern Srem) [19, p. 91–100]. Belgrade was out of the reach of Böček's detachment and all other Mongol armies in Hungary.

Second indication that Master William could not have been captured in Belgrade lies in the local political conditions, to which we also have to turn our attention. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, regions of Belgrade and Branichevo, on the right bank of the Danube, were the cause of discord between the two regional powers – Hungarian kingdom and Bulgarian empire. However, since the beginning of the reign of Ivan Asen II (1218–1241) they were under the Bulgarian control. In 1230, the Bulgarian ruler issued his privilege to the traders from Dubrovnik, allowing them to freely conduct their operations in all his lands, including Belgrade and Branichevo [6, p. 30; 21, p. 58–59]. The Hungarian crown did not abandon its claims on the two border regions and two years later, it tried to reconquer the contested territories. The Hungarian attempts are reflected in a letter, written by Pope Gregory IX to bishop of Csanád in Hungary on March 21, 1232, when the pope requested that two Bulgarian Orthodox bishops of Alba (Belgrade) and Brandusium (Branichevo), who previously rejected the union with the Roman catholic church, should return to its arms [43, p. 103–104].

The Papal letter is frequently interpreted as an evidence of the establishment of Hungarian rule in Belgrade and Branichevo, but such interpretation is doubtful. The two orthodox bishops would be hardly able to resist the request for union if their seats were indeed occupied by Hungary. Even if Hungarian attempts to conquer territories south of the Danube were fruitful at that time, the changes were only of a temporary character [8, p. 134; 17, p. 146–148]. Namely, no other source indicates that Belgrade was a Hungarian city on the eve of the Mongol invasion. Quite the contrary, report of the eyewitness of these important events, Roger of Várad (today Oradea, Romania), suggests that the lands on the right bank of Danube remained in Bulgarian hands at the time of the Mongol invasion.

According to Roger's words, the Cumans, who were previously settled in Hungary, rose to arms in the early spring of 1241, after their leader Cuthen was murdered in Pest. They wrought havoc in the south parts of the country, descended to the region of Marchia, or western Syrmia and from there, according to his words, entered "Bulgaria" [19, p. 88–91; 32, p. 176–177; 45, p. 65]. Thus, from Roger's perspective, the rivers of Sava and Danube remained a border between Hungary and Bulgaria in 1241. The similar conclusion may be drawn from the contents of the above-mentioned letter of Bela IV from 1247, according to which, the right bank of Danube, opposite to Hungarian land of Severin belonged to Bulgaria. Evidently before the death of Ivan Asen II, and at the time of the Mongol invasion, Belgrade was not a Hungarian, but a Bulgarian city.

Finally, there is another convincing argument in favor of rejection of Belgrade as the residence of Master William. According to Rubruck, the city where he was captured was the episcopal seat of Roman Catholic church. In Belgrade, there was no Roman catholic bishop neither in 1232, when Gregory IX sent his instructions to the bishop of Csanád, nor immediately after the Mongol invasion. It was only in 1290, long time after the region fell out from Bulgarian rule that the Papal curia took decisive steps to establish a Roman catholic seat in Belgrade [11, p. 355; 25, p. 7–8; 43, p. 366].

Previous remarks related to Böček's activities, political situation and ecclesiastical conditions on the right bank of the Danube at the time of the Mongol invasion show that identification of Rubruck's 'Belegrave' with Belgrade in Serbia should be rejected. In order to find out where Master William was captured, we need to explore the other possibilities. Fortunately, there are only two other possible candidates for Rubruck's 'Belegrave' in the

medieval Kingdom of Hungary that can be taken into account: Alba Iulia in Transylvania, as proposed by Sacerdoteanu, and Székesfehérvár, southwest of Budapest. Namely, both cities are attested in the medieval sources under the Slavic name 'Belgrade', and both were attacked by the Mongols during their campaign in central Europe.

Székesfehérvár (literally "white castle with the seat"), founded by Hungarian grand prince Geza in late tenth century, was one of the most important urban centers of medieval Hungary. Alba Iulia, whose Hungarian name Gyulafehérvár (lit. "Gyula's white castle") was related to another Hungarian leader from the mid-tenth century, was chief political and ecclesiastical seat in the eastern parts of the Kingdom. Alba Iulia was probably attested under the Slavic form of its name for the first time in 1071, when "Frank, bishop of Belgrade" ('*Francone Bellagradensi pontifice*') is recorded [5, p. 587]. In the beginning of the twelfth century, sources mention certain 'Vincurius comes Bellegratae' in Hungary [14, p. 103], whose possession, according to prevalent opinion, should also be equated with Alba Iulia. Nonetheless, it is possible that the domain of Vincurius was Székesfehérvár.

For the travelers and chroniclers of the early Crusades, the name 'Belgrade' was frequently pertaining to Székesfehérvár. The city is recorded as 'Belegrave' by chronicler Albert of Aachen, with respect to the passage of the Crusaders through Hungary in 1096 [2, p. 46–47]. Moreover, Odo of Deuil, who followed the French King Louis VII in the Second Crusade half a century later, stated that the city at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers is named "Bulgarian Belgrade", in order to distinguish it from the namesake city in Hungary ('*castrum attollit quod Bellagrava dicitur Bogarensis respectu cuiusdam quae in Hungaria est eiusdem nominis civitatis*') [24, p. 170–171; 26, p. 62]. In 1154, Arabic geographer from Sicily al-Idrisi also mentioned Székesfehérvár under its Slavic name B.l.g.rat.h [10, p. 58; 24, p. 171]. In his treatise, Alba Iulia is recorded as Wal.b.h [10, p. 62], which is probably nothing else than a corrupted form of its German name – *Weissenburg*. Székesfehérvár is once more recorded as 'castrum Belegrade' in an ecclesiastical document from 1192 [12, p. 282]. These examples illustrate that the Slavic name has been used for both cities before the Mongol invasion, but more frequently for Székesfehérvár. Alba Iulia is again recorded as 'Belgrad' in the sixteenth century [23, p. 36; 36, p. 29], and judging from the frequency of the name occurrence, Székesfehérvár may seem as more likely candidate of Master William's residence.

However, such conclusion would be premature. Although both cities were attacked by the Mongols, they did not share the same destiny. During the Mongol invasion, Alba Iulia was destroyed and raised to the ground. As an eyewitness, Roger of Várád left a vivid description of its state after the Mongol withdrawal: "there we found noting save the bones and skulls of the dead, the destroyed and broken walls of basilicas and palaces, soiled by the blood of an enormous numbers of Christians. The earth did not show the blood of the innocent, for it had absorbed it inebriated, but the stones were still cloaked with crimson blood..." [32, p. 224–225].

Székesfehérvár faced the Mongol attack in early 1242. Another contemporary chronicler, Thomas of Spalato (Split), recorded that the leader of the attack was Kadan, son of Great Khan Ögedei (1229–1241). According to his description, after the fall of Esztergom, Kadan marched straight to Székesfehérvár and "immediately on arrival, burnt down all the dwellings outside the walls. He then laid siege to the city, and for several days did his best to attack and storm it. But the site was surrounded by marshes and quite well protected, and there was a very effective garrison of Latins, who had built engines of war to defend it. So, the unholy leader was forced to retire in frustration" [3, p. 288–291].

Unlike Alba Iulia, Székesfehérvár resisted the Mongol onslaught. Besides, the latter city was not attacked by Böcek, but by Kadan. In addition, similarly to Belgrade, Székesfehérvár was also not an episcopal seat of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite its political significance, during the Middle Ages, it was subjected to the bishopric of Veszprem [37, p. 209]. All three

arguments are quite convincing in favour of rejection of Székesfehérvár as a place where master William was captured by prince Böček, together with a nephew of the local bishop.

On the other hand, Alba Iulia perfectly fits into all previously discussed details. The city was evidently known as “Belgrade” in the Middle Ages, it was the episcopal seat of Transylvania, it was conquered by the Mongols and finally, its location suggests that it lied along the way of Böček’s detachment after it crossed the Carpathians from Wallachia. The evidence at our disposal is sufficient to conclude, without any doubt, that ‘Belegrove’, the city where William Buchier fell in the Mongol hands, was Alba Iulia.

It needs to be added that, at the time of the Mongol invasion, the bishop of Alba Iulia and diocese of Transylvania was certain Raynald. He was posted at the office before 1222 [13, p. 374; 22, p. 346–347]. He was among those perished in the battle of Muhi, on April 11, 1241, when the Mongol forces utterly crushed the army of Bela IV [32, p. 186–187]. Obviously, Raynald was none other than “Norman bishop from Belevile, near Rouen”, recorded in the itinerary of William of Rubruck.

**Conclusion.** Despite the extent of destruction Alba Iulia suffered, not all of its residents perished in the Mongol onslaught. Besides Master William, the nephew of bishop Raynald was also captured by Böček. Probably, other captives from Hungary that formed the small western colony in Karakorum at the time of Rubruck’s travels, were also taken in Alba Iulia, or in other neighboring Transylvanian towns.

More than a decade later, Rubruck met William Buchier in Karakorum, and heard from him about his capture and the subsequent fate. Thus, it is known that Böček, “gave Master William to Möngke’s mother (Sorkaktani), since she strongly insisted on having him; and after her death Master William devolved upon Ariq Böke together with everything else that belonged to his mother’s residence. And by him he was brought to the notice of Möngke, who after the completion of the work bestowed on the master smith one hundred iascot (ingots of silver), namely a thousand marks” [15, p. 234; 41, p. 224; 44, p. 287–288].

In such a way, William Buchier, experienced French mastersmith, captured in the spring of 1241 in Transylvanian city of Alba Iulia by Böček, brother of the future great khan Möngke, made a fortune in the capital of the Mongol empire.

## ПРИМЕЧАНИЯ О ПЛЕНЕНИИ ГИЙОМА БУШЕ МОНГОЛАМИ В ВЕНГРИИ

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**Аннотация:** В 1254 г., во время своего пребывания в Каракоруме, францисканский путешественник Гийом Рубрук встретил Гийома Буше, французского мастера который родился в Париже. Согласно Рубруку, Буше был захвачен в Венгрии во время монгольского нашествия сводным братом великого хана Мунке (1251–1259) в городе «Белеграве». До сих пор, идентификация монгольского полководца, который захватил мастера Гийома, в значительной степени оставалась вне внимания исследователей. С другой стороны, город, в котором он был захвачен, часто ошибочно идентифицируется как Белград, современная столица Сербии. Данная статья посвящена следующим вопросам: кто был сводным братом Мунке, который захватил мастера Гийома, и где и когда это произошло. На основании сведений Рубрука и других западных и восточных источников, связанных с монгольской военной кампанией в центральной Европе, в статье

сделан вывод, что Буше был захвачен принцем Бучеком в городе Альба-Юлия (Дьюлафехервар, Белград), современная Румыния, ранней весной 1241 г.

**Ключевые слова:** Гийом Буше, Гийом Рубрук, Бучек, Монгольское вторжение в Венгрию, 1241 г, Белград, Алба-Юлия, Секешфехервар, монгольские пленники

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