

= Mongol siege of Kaifeng =

In the Mongol siege of Kaifeng from 1232 to 1233 , the Mongol Empire captured Kaifeng , the capital of the Jurchen Jin dynasty . The Mongols and Jurchens had been at war for nearly two decades , beginning in 1211 after the Jurchens refused the Mongol offer to submit as a vassal . Ögedei Khan sent two armies to besiege Kaifeng , one led by himself , and the other by his brother Tolui . Command of the forces , once they converged into a single army , was given to Subutai who led the siege . The Mongols arrived at the walls of Kaifeng on April 8 , 1232 .

The siege deprived the city of resources , and its residents were beset with famine and disease . Jurchen soldiers defended the city with fire lances and bombs of gunpowder , killing many Mongols and severely injuring others . The Jurchens tried to arrange a peace treaty , but the assassination of a Mongol diplomat foiled their efforts . Emperor Aizong , the Jurchen emperor , fled the city for the town of Caizhou . The city was placed under the command of General Cui Li , who executed the emperor 's loyalists and promptly surrendered to the Mongols . The Mongols captured Kaifeng on February 26 , 1233 , and looted the city . The dynasty fell two years later after the suicide of Aizong and the capture of Caizhou in 1234 .

= = Background = =

Genghis Khan was declared Khaghan in 1206 . The Mongols had united under his leadership , and defeated the rival tribes of the steppes . In the same period , China was divided into three separate states . In the north , the Jurchen Jin dynasty controlled Manchuria and all of China north of the Huai River . The Tangut Western Xia ruled parts of the western China , while the Song Dynasty reigned over the south . The Mongols subjugated Western Xia in 1210 . In that same year , the Mongols renounced their vassalage to the Jin . Hostilities between the Jin and Mongols had been building up . The Mongols coveted the prosperity of Jurchen territory . They may have also harbored a grudge against the Jin for assassinating Ambaghai , one of Genghis ' predecessors , and for the Jin emperor Wanyan Yongji 's rude behavior to Genghis when Wanyan Yongji was still a Jurchen prince .

The Mongols learned that a famine had struck the Jin , and invaded in 1211 . Two armies were dispatched by the Mongols into Jurchen territory , with one under the command of Genghis . The Jin built up its armies and reinforced its cities in preparation for the Mongol incursion . The Mongol strategy was based on capturing small settlements and ignoring the fortifications of major cities . They looted the land and retreated in 1212 . The Mongols returned the next year and besieged Zhongdu , the capital of the Jin , in 1213 . The Mongols were not able to penetrate the walls of the city in the Battle of Zhongdu , but intimidated the Jin emperor into paying tribute . They withdrew in 1214 . Later in the year , fearing another siege , the Jin moved their capital from Zhongdu to Kaifeng . The Mongols besieged Zhongdu once more in 1215 once they learned that the Jin court had fled from the city . The city fell on May 31 , and by 1216 , large swaths of Jin territory were under Mongol control .

Meanwhile , the Jin had been afflicted by multiple revolts . In Manchuria , the Khitans , under the leadership of Yelü Liuge , declared their independence from the Jin and allied with the Mongols . Yelü was enthroned a puppet ruler subordinate to the Mongols in 1213 , and given the title emperor of the Liao Dynasty . The Jurchen expedition sent against him commanded by Puxian Wannu was not successful . Wannu , realizing the Jin dynasty was on the verge of collapse , rebelled and declared himself king of Dazhen in 1215 . Further south , rebellions had broken out in Shandong beginning with Yang Anguo 's revolt in 1214 . The rebels were known as Red Coats , from the color of the uniforms they wore starting in 1215 . After the fall of Zhongdu in 1215 , the Mongols downsized their war effort against the Jin , and shifted their resources in preparation for the invasion of Central Asia . The Jurchens tried to make up for their territorial losses to the Mongols by invading the Song in 1217 . The invasion was fruitless , so the Jin wanted to negotiate for peace , but the Song rebuffed the offers . By 1218 , Jurchen diplomats were prohibited from traveling to the Song . The Mongol war against the Jurchens had subsided , but not stopped , and went on through the

early 1220s under the command of the general Muqali . Muqali died from sickness in 1223 , and the Mongol campaigns against the Jin wound down . The Jin settled for peace with the Song , but the Song continued to assist the Red Coats insurgency against the Jin . Genghis Khan fell ill and died in 1227 . Ögedei was his successor , and he renewed the war against the Jin in 1230 .

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Two Mongol armies were dispatched in 1230 to capture the Jin capital of Kaifeng , then named Bian . The plans were to have one army approach the city from the north , while the second attacked from the south . Ögedei Khan headed the army based in Shanxi and his brother Tolui commanded the army stationed in Shaanxi . An illness incapacitated Ögedei and Tolui , and they relinquished their roles in the campaign . Ögedei later regained his health , but Tolui died the next year . Subutai led the combined Mongol forces once the two armies converged in late 1231 and early 1232 . The Mongols reached the Yellow River on January 28 , 1232 , and began amassing around Kaifeng on February 6 . They besieged the city on April 8 .

The Jurchens tried to end the siege by negotiating a peace treaty . There was some progress towards an agreement in the summer of 1232 , but the assassination of the Mongol diplomat Tang Qing and his entourage by the Jurchens made further talks impossible . The Jin grew desperate . They had enlisted most of the available men in the empire to either defend Kaifeng or fight against the Mongols on the front lines . While the negotiations were ongoing , a plague was devastating the population of the city . Starvation was rampant . The supplies stored in Kaifeng were running out , even with what had been forcibly seized from people . The city 's political disintegration created unfounded fears that there was an internal threat . Several residents of the city were executed on the suspicion that they were traitors .

The defense of the city did not collapse immediately . The Jin held out for months before the city fell . The Jurchen emperor was afforded the opportunity to escape in late 1232 , and departed with a retinue of court officials . He left the governance of the city to the General Cui Li and moved to the city of Guide in Henan on February 26 , 1233 , then Caizhou on August 3 . The retreat of the emperor was ruinous to the morale of the soldiers defending the city . In the wake of the emperor 's departure , Cui ordered the execution of those loyal to the emperor who had remained in the city . He realized that prolonging the siege was suicidal , and offered to surrender to the Mongols . Cui opened the gates of Kaifeng and the Mongols were let into the city . He was later killed outside of battle in a personal dispute , for insulting the wife of someone under his command .

The Mongols looted the city when it fell , but atypical to most sieges in the time period , they permitted trade . The richest residents of the city sold their luxury belongings to Mongol soldiers for critically needed food supplies . Male members of the royal family residing in the city were captured and executed .

= = Military technology = =

Historian Herbert Franke observed in his assessment of the battle that the siege is significant for historians of military technology . Many of the details of the siege are known to historians , based on a comprehensive account of the battle compiled by a Jin official living in the besieged city . The Jurchens fired explosives , propelled by trebuchets , at the opposing army . A contemporaneous record of the battle recounts the process by which the bombs were launched . First , a soldier ignited the fuse . The rope of the trebuchet was pulled , launching the bomb into the air . The bomb produced a large explosion the moment it landed , inflicting damage that could penetrate armor . The explosion sometimes sparked a fire on the grass of the battlefield , which could burn a soldier to death , even if he survived the initial blast . The bombs were more primitive than modern explosives , and occasionally they would fail to detonate or detonated too early . Mongol soldiers counteracted the bombs by digging trenches leading up to the city , which they covered with shielding made of cowhide , to protect from the explosives fired overhead . The Jurchen official reports , in a translation provided by historian Stephen Turnbull :

Therefore the Mongol soldiers made cowhide shields to cover their approach trenches and men beneath the walls , and dug as it were niches , each large enough to contain a man , hoping that in this way the troops above would not be able to do anything about it . But someone suggested the technique of lowering the thunder crash bombs on iron chains . When these reached the trenches where the Mongols were making their dugouts , the bombs were set off , with the result that the cowhide and the attacking soldiers were all blown to bits , and not even a trace being left behind .

The infantry of the Jin were armed with fire lances . The fire lance was a spear , with a tube of gunpowder attached to it . The mixture contained , besides the gunpowder ingredients of sulfur , charcoal , and saltpeter , ground porcelain and iron filings . The flame that shot from the lance reached a distance of three meters . The heated tinder that ignited the weapon was stored in a small iron box toted by the Jurchen soldiers in battle . Once the gunpowder was consumed , the fire lance could be wielded like a normal spear , or replenished by a new tube filled with gunpowder .

The bombs and fire lances of the Jin were the only two weapons of the Jurchens that the Mongols were wary of facing . The Jurchen deployment of gunpowder was extensive , but it is not certain if the Mongols had acquired gunpowder from the Jurchens before this point . Herbert Franke maintains that gunpowder was in the arsenal of both combatants , but Turnbull believes that only the Jurchens made use of it . The Mongols loaded their catapults with large stones or bombs of gunpowder , which were fired at the Jin fortifications . The barrage inflicted casualties in the city and had a psychological impact on the soldiers operating the Jurchen trebuchets .

= = Historical significance = =

The siege of Kaifeng crippled the Jin dynasty , but did not destroy it . The penultimate emperor of the dynasty , Emperor Aizong , had evaded capture , but was left destitute after the siege . He sent his diplomats to entreat the neighboring Song Dynasty for help . They warned that the Mongols would invade the Song once the Jin fell , and requested supplies from the Song . The Song refused the offer . The Song , who had fought multiple wars against the Jin , resented the Jurchens for their conquest of northern China decades earlier . Instead of aiding the Jin , the Song allied with the Mongols . They cooperated militarily and captured the last of the cities still controlled by the Jin . In December 1233 , the Mongols besieged Caizhou , where Aizong had fled to from Kaifeng . The emperor was unable to escape the town under siege , and resorted to suicide . On February 9 , 1234 , the Mongols broke through the defenses of Caizhou . Emperor Mo , Emperor Aizong 's intended successor , resided in the same town and was killed in battle soon after . His reign lasted less than two days , from February 9 to his death in February 10 . The Jin dynasty ended with the fall of Caizhou .