



Genghis Khan's Greatest General: Subotai the Valiant

Richard A. Gabriel

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This book tells the story of Subotai the Valiant, a warrior for Genghis Khan and one of the greatest generals in military history. Subotai commanded armies whose size, scale, and scope of operations surpassed those led by any other commander in the ancient world. Under Subotai's direction, Mongol armies moved faster, over greater distances, and with a greater scope of maneuver than any army had ever done before.

When Subotai died at age seventy-three, he had conquered thirty-two nations and won sixty-five pitched battles, according to Muslim historians. Had the great Khan not died, Subotai likely would have destroyed Europe itself.

Genghis Khan's Greatest General: Subotai the Valiant Details

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From Reader Review Genghis Khan's Greatest General: Subotai the Valiant for online ebook

Frank Thun says

Short, 140 pages, but a good read

Douglas Sherk says

This book is an excellent survey of the Mongol Empire's combat strategies and tactics. It tells stories of the empire's conquests at every stage of its existence. On many occasions, the Mongols were outnumbered more than 3-1 and still managed to crush various empires in their wake. Diagrams fill these pages, illustrating everything from 10-year campaign movements to the way Mongol horse archers maneuvered during skirmishes. It's an enjoyable and illuminating read.

Having said that, it's unclear to me why the focus is on Subotai. I started reading it to learn more about the great general, but I found only scant information on him. To be fair, there were very few primary sources to evaluate. Those that did exist, e.g. The Secret History of the Mongols, are biased, poetic, or both. The author did an excellent job of working with what he had, but I wonder if writing a book about Subotai was a lost cause from the beginning.

The author convinced me that there was some merit to the Mongol Empire's expansion, but that the cases made in Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World are mostly distortions. In the West, we hold many misconceptions about the Mongols: that they were murderous cannibals who raped and pillaged every place they conquered. The facts suggest something in between this and the positive interpretation of Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World. The Mongols went to war because they were warriors, not because they wanted to proliferate their values or build a civilization.

I weakly recommend this book to anyone interested in military history. Mobile doctrine enthusiasts would particularly enjoy the tales of Blitzkrieg's forebearers. Unfortunately, you won't learn much about Subotai by reading this book.

Gerry Germond says

Not much of a biography; we learn Our Boy was the son of a blacksmith, the brother of one of the Khan's inner circle members, and that he eventually retired to the Danube (sources on Wikipedia contradict that). That's about it. It's a decent history of the Mongol conquests many of which were accomplished under the command of Subotai. Just what was his role or how did he accomplish them is unexplained, other than, like Alexander, he had a damned fine army to work with. Did he think of the strategies used or were they Mongol s.o.p.? What were Jebe's contributions? Did he have a fine command team like (Saint) Robert E. Lee? We'll have to settle for letting the results (area conquered, and his won-lost record) speak for themselves. There is an interesting chapter at the end on the Mongols' possible influence on Soviet doctrine, which they seemed to have tossed out the window in time to welcome the panzers on June 22, 1941. Also, there's a chapter in which U.S. Army War College students express what can be learned from the Mongol art of war; interesting

stuff, much of which can be learned from other generals and is likely in one field manual or another. Unfortunately, most of the details on Subotai's life and thoughts are unknown, and a history of the Mongol conquests are just basically a summation of his achievements.

Rahib Heydarov says

Not much about how The Genius Boy. Mostly chronological conquers...

Christopher says

Hard to objectively review, as by its own admission it works with pretty scarce material about the man himself and therefore is more of an operational history. I think given the sources available it does a good job as well as explaining the strategic significance, both then and now, of looking at Mongol military operations.

Terence says

Not a bad read. The problem with the biographies of people living 800 years ago (or a similarly remote period) is that there's usually not a lot of primary sources to evaluate. If you're lucky you have a couple of histories; if you're really lucky you have a few letters & inscriptions or similar material; if you're really, really lucky you have something actually written by the subject.

Beyond that it's all speculation and inference.

With the material we've got, the author did a good job. I guess my real "beef" is a philosophical one: I have a guilty admiration for the military commander who's more than just a soldier (like Scipio Africanus or Napoleon) but, in the end, these men's primary job was destroying other people's lives, oftentimes with no defensible justification, hence the "guilt."

Mongol historical revisionism may laud some of the effects of their conquests (like reopening the overland trade routes through Asia) but I think, in the end, the original assessment that they were the "scourge of God" is closer to their real impact than otherwise.

Josh says

A necessary read if you're interested in how Genghis Khan did much of what he did.

I wanted to know more about Subotai specifically. The book doesn't cover a ton about him as I think there's little actually known about the guy.

Dan Carlin's Hardcore History episodes on the Mongolians used a ton from this book.

Danny says

It was good. Moreso about the mongols, than about Subotai himself. There are many typos that lead me to believe this book was not properly edited.

Loránd says

Definitely worth reading if you're interested in military tactics. It completely shatters the notion that European knights clad in heavy armor were the deadliest military force to be reckoned with at the time.

It also explores the character of Subotai (as well as a historical work can), and I found it fascinating.

Anwer says

Subotai was perhaps one of the most enigmatic figures around Ghengis Khan, his principal general and strategist, who knocked on the doors of Vienna and conquered more land and people than anyone on history. The book is well written, engaging and a reminder on the impact his Mongol general had on modern military thinking. I still feel not enough research has been done on Subotai and little is known of the man himself.

Richard has opened a wonderful debate with his book and hope other writers will follow his footsteps. A recommended read.

Stephanie says

This is a rather short monograph which would have benefitted from being shorter still.

The author moves back and forth in time and often repeats himself in almost boilerplate fashion. Also, little real feeling of Subotai is conveyed, this is best seen as a general survey of Mongol warfare and engagements.

That said, it does its job in explicating the engagements and the evolution of military thinking within the Mongol command. It also provides some insight into the growth of technical martial competence as a result of contact with defeated peoples.

Jintong Shi says

The greatest general ever in human history, conquered the territory from Korea to Hungary, laid siege to Vienna, conquered Balkans, helped conquer China at the age of 70, from Siberia to Afghanistan, vanquished 32 nations...This book is written from a professional military historian, very interesting.

Campbell says

A deeply fascinating and well-written account of the life and times of an almost entirely unknown (outside the niche of military historians and enthusiasts) genius of warfare. Even if you think you have no particular interest in the Mongols, I'd still urge you to read it, as it's truly enlightening.

Ronald Jones says

This is the only book I've come across that focuses on one of the greatest generals in history. The author has taken what little information is available is on this military genius and pieced together a very interesting biography.

Nicholas says

There simply isn't enough information on Subotai in the primary sources available to the author to warrant a book. This book is an OK history on a few select Mongol campaigns, most of which Subotai took part in, with the occasional unsourced biographical bit or innovation attributed to Subotai.
