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The Black Death in the Golden Horde: Between Myth and Reality

In the second half of the fourteenth century the main lineage of khans from Batu, son of Jochi, was extinguished and a huge socio-political crisis destabilized the Horde. Political disagreement ended in a blood feud that lasted more than a decade. The major consequence of the bulqaq – as the contemporaries called these years of anarchy in the upper echelons – was not merely the extinction of the main lineage of khans, but a profound change in the geopolitical landscape. Descendants of Jochi from secondary matrimonial lines were accepted as candidates for the throne.

Historians still disagree over what happened. On the one hand, political assassination of pretenders and the struggles among the begs over the possible election of a female-khan – Khatun Taytoğlı – have been offered as explanations for the crisis; on the other hand, the Black Death might have been the main trigger of the crisis. By taking into account all internal and external factors, this paper provides a new and more comprehensive explanation of the bulqaq-crisis of the 1350-70s.