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24. The Golden Horde and Russia

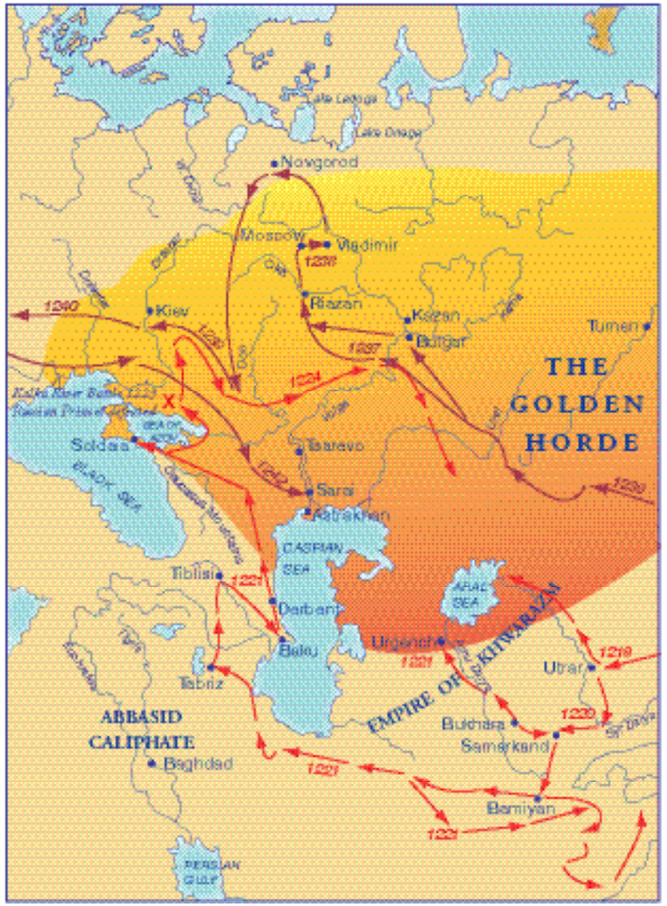
Daniel C. Waugh

Genghis Khan had assigned the western portion of the Mongol empire to his oldest son, Jochi, (fig. 1), but when Jochi predeceased his father (fig. 2), his share fell to his son Batu. The extent of his domains was yet to be defined, as major portions of the territory given to Jochi (Ulus Jochi) in Russia and Ukraine had not yet been conquered by the Mongols. Batu's armies eventually reached the Adriatic and the valleys of Austria before they retreated in 1241. He began to rule his state—better known as the "Golden Horde," a name given it much later by non-Mongols—from Sarai, a city he founded not far from the mouth of the Volga River. The power and prosperity of the Golden Horde peaked during the second quarter of the fourteenth century, but were shattered by Tamerlane's invasion in 1395. Successor states in its territory—the Crimea and Khiva—were ruled by Ghengissid dynasties far longer than were any other parts of the empire, the first remaining independent until the late eighteenth century, and the second lasting until the twentieth century.

The example of the Golden Horde highlights important aspects of society, the economy, and imperial politics in a large region of the empire. Since the relationship between the Mongols and urban centers is often misunderstood, it is of particular interest to learn about the cities of the Golden Horde. The relations between the Mongol rulers of Ulus Jochi and their Russian subjects evolved from policies of direct political control to those of indirect rule. There is considerable controversy over the impact of Mongol rule in Russia and Ukraine, since the national myths of the conquered paint a picture of unrelieved oppression, the effects of which were still being felt into modern times. Such one-sided assessments of the Golden Horde need to be reconsidered.

When Mongol armies first appeared in eastern Europe in 1223, the steppe nomads who lived there, the Polovtsy (Cumans), turned to the east Slavic princes for aid (fig. 3). The Mongols' shattering victory over this combined force on the River Kalka near the Sea of Azov foreshadowed their conquest in the 1230s.

Genghis's son Ögödei sought to follow up on his father's conquests, and, in particular, to extend his empire westward. After defeating the Jin dynasty and seizing North China, Ögödei launched an invasion west, with his nephew Batu and other grandsons of Genghis joining in the campaign. Although the cousins were often at odds, the campaign proved remarkably successful, in part because they did not face a united Russian



state. Thus, they could focus on one group or territory at a time. In short order in the late 1230s, they defeated the Bulgars, who occupied the middle Volga region, and the Polovtsy, who controlled the steppes north of the Sea of Azov and the Caucasus. Batu then moved on the Russian principalities, destroying Riazan in late 1237, and in the following year conquering the important center of Vladimir-Suzdal and the as-yet insignificant Moscow. The Mongols then swept through Kiev, the once great economic and cultural center of the Russian lands. By 1241 their forces had reached Budapest in the south and Liegnitz in Poland in the north. Mongol detachments were already scouting the routes further west when Batu learned of Ögödei's death and abruptly withdrew to the east, hoping to influence the choice of the next Great Khan. Rather than resume the campaign to Western Europe, he chose to consolidate his rule over the Ulus Jochi from the lower Volga.

Once the Mongols had pacified Russia and Ukraine, they took over the traditional nomad routes used by the Polovtsy up and down the main rivers (fig. 4). Batu would spend summers near Bulgar on the middle Volga and winters at his new capital, Sarai. The Franciscan John of Plano Carpini, who traveled as a papal emissary, visited Batu in 1245 en route to Mongolia and recorded how other members of the Mongol elite set up nomad camps along the Dnieper, Don, and Ural (Yaik) Rivers[1]

The chaos and destruction of invasion had disrupted flourishing commercial and craft emporia that were central to the Mongol empire's sustainability. In the consolidation and reconstruction of the following era, the Mongols, unlike earlier nomadic polities, incorporated into their domain long-established cities on the edge of the steppe world. Thus, Bulgar, at the border between the forest and steppe; Kaffa, a port in the Crimea; and Urgench, in the lower reaches of the Amu-Darya River in Khwarazm south of the Aral Sea, were important cities of the Golden Horde. The khans also founded new cities where previously there had been none. Prime examples are Batu's Sarai (the Selitrennoe Fort site) and the city founded under Khan Özbeg in the 1330s some 200 km further north on the Volga at the Tsarevo Fort site, a strategic location where that river comes closest to the river Don (fig. 5). The fate of these cities is a barometer of the political and economic strength of the Horde. Their decline coincided with the onset of civil war in the second half of the fourteenth century, and their destruction in 1395 marked the end of the Golden Horde's real political power.

Our knowledge of Golden Horde cities derives in part from records such as the eyewitness account by the Moroccan traveler extraordinaire, Ibn Battuta (see Dunn, this volume). When he arrived in the Golden Horde in the early 1330s, he reported that Kaffa, a city controlled by the Genoese under Mongol suzerainty, was "a wonderful

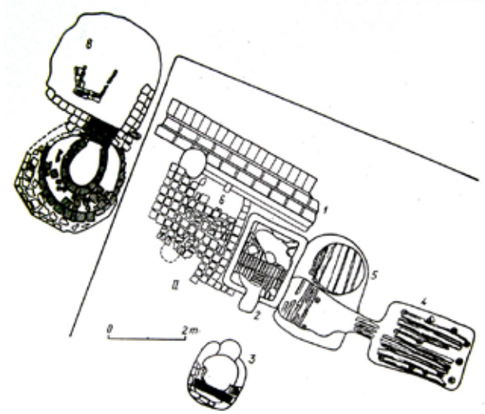
harbor with about two hundred vessels in it, both ships of war and trading vessels, small and large, for it is one of the world's celebrated ports."[2] Indeed, an Italian presence––earlier, it was the Venetians—in the ports of the Crimea well antedated the arrival of the Mongols (fig. 6, 7), and the Genoese had been granted trading privileges by the rulers of the Golden Horde through an important international treaty concluded in 1267. Later in his travels Ibn Battuta would describe Khwarazm/Urgench as "the largest, greatest, most beautiful and most important city" of the Mongols.[3] Of course, he was describing the Golden Horde at its peak during the reign of Özbeg Khan; approximately a century had passed since Mongol invasions had devastated the lands of the Khwarazm-shah and destroyed Bulgar on the Volga (fig. 8):

> The Khan's court and Sarai impressed the Moroccan visitor as one of the finest of cities, of boundless size . . . choked with the throng of its inhabitants, and possessing good bazaars and broad streets. We rode out one day . . . intending to make a circuit of the city and find out its extent. Our lodging place was at one end of it and we set out from it in the early morning, and it was after midday when we reached the other end. We then prayed the noon prayer and ate some food, and we did not get back to our lodging until the hour of the sunset prayer. One day we went on foot across the breadth of the town, going and returning, in half a day, this too through a continuous line of houses, among which there were no ruins and no gardens. The city has thirteen mosques for the holding of Friday prayers, one of them being for the Shafi'ites; as for the other mosques, they are exceedingly numerous. . . . [I]ts inhabitants . . . include the Mughals, who are the dwellers in this country and its sultans, and some of whom are Muslims, then the As, who are Muslims, the Qifjaq, the Jarkas, the Rus, and the Rum [Greeks]—[all of] these are Christians. Each group lives in a separate quarter with its own bazaars. Merchants and strangers from the two Iraqs, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere, live in a quarter which is surrounded by a wall for the protection of the properties of the merchants.[4]

Sarai's population at the time when Ibn Battuta visited is uncertain. One Arab source estimates 75,000[5]; archaeology confirms that the city was a flourishing multiethnic center of commerce and craft production (fig. 9 or 10). The outward appearance of urban development and prosperity did not reflect an ideal social and political order. Building and populating the new cities involved forced labor and conscription. Much of the initial labor was performed by the previous steppe inhabitants, the Polovtsy, who had been enslaved when they were driven off their grazing lands.

In many areas of the empire the khans conscripted artisans at will, a practice that has been well documented. A Russian goldsmith had made the khan's seal at his court in Mongolia; the famous fountain in the courtyard of the palace in Khara Khorum was the work of a captured Parisian master; weavers from the Middle East were resettled in northern China. In Sarai, ceramic crafts reflected the techniques and designs of such centers as Bulgar and Khwarazm and, at least initially, were probably the work of craftsmen conscripted from those cities. While such conscription must have inflicted serious damage on the older craft centers, many of them revived and flourished. The initial minting of coins by the rulers of the Golden Horde seems to have been in Bulgar, only a generation after the invasion. Minting at Sarai, the capital, began later. By the time Özbeg became khan (r. 1313–41), the Muslim architecture of Volga Bulgaria already surpassed what it had been in the century of the Mongol invasion (fig. 20).

The specialization of the numerous workshops in Golden Horde cities is impressive and probably reflects a substantial market for metalwork, jewelry, and glass. Ceramics production met demands for building materials such as bricks, decorative tiles, and drain pipes, as well as a broad range of dishes. While imported ceramics formed only a small percentage of what was in common use, local designs responded in creative ways to examples such as Chinese porcelain with its cobalt blue patterns. In some parts of the Mongol dominions (for example, northwest Iran) an effort was made to replicate the Chinese blue-and-



white ware. The Golden Horde workshops tended to incorporate some of the motifs, but often with different color combinations.

The steppe cities of the Horde included elite "estates," often on the outskirts of town, with multiroom mansions built of substantial masonry and their own craft shops and servants' quarters (fig. 28). Some of these compounds have the remains of *ger* platforms, a reminder that the Mongol elite did not completely adopt sedentary life. Although Ibn Battuta was impressed by the urban culture in Sarai, he was taken aback by the open observance of nomadic social customs that violated Islamic norms. The elite residences seem to have flourished into the second half of the fourteenth century, at which time growing political instability led their owners to build defensive walls in the same way that previously unfortified cities were then being walled. The bubonic plague undoubtedly played a major role in the cities' decline. As early as the 1370s, many of the mansions fell into disrepair and their compounds were being converted into cemeteries, well before the wars of the next decades destroyed the cities of the lower Volga and Crimea. The study of the elite residential complexes sheds light on other aspects of social and economic change. Modest structures that probably were living or working space for servants and craftsmen evolved over time from semi-dugout huts with no heating system into more sophisticated houses with stoves. Whether this means slave families were now gaining their freedom and moving up in social and economic terms is difficult to prove.

Ibn Battuta had noted only in passing that the residents of Sarai included Russians. He had no interest in the fact that there was a Russian Orthodox bishop there whose main function was probably to facilitate relations between the khans, on the one hand, and the Russian principalities and the Byzantine empire, on the other. Of greater interest to the Moroccan was the fact that one of the khan's wives was the daughter of the Byzantine emperor. Indeed, Byzantium, by virtue of its strategic control over communications with the Mediterranean, must have been more important to the Horde economically and politically than were the Russian principalities. But even Byzantium was incidental to the main political concern of Sarai: its hostility with Ilkhanid Iran, where the prize, never achieved, was domination of western Asia.

The Russian example illustrates well Mongol relations with subject peoples. However, establishing the exact nature of those relations and their long-term consequences is difficult: the medieval sources often are silent about important topics, and when they do speak, they have a pronounced anti-Mongol bias. Trying to discern the truth is further hindered by the anti-Mongol bias of too many modern assessments.[6] Long after the Mongol invasion of the Russian principalities in the years 1237–40, a monk described how "there is nothing to be seen in [Riazan] excepting smoke, ashes, and barren earth . . . instead of joy, there are only uninterrupted lamentations."[7]

Other cities that resisted met the same fate, although the impact was uneven. The important city of Novgorod in the north escaped destruction, ostensibly because the spring thaw melted the ice on the rivers, which the Mongol horsemen had been using to travel through this unpromising land of swampy, roadless forests. In a territory where the population still lived largely in isolated villages, the destruction of what was only a handful of towns could not be expected to have a permanent impact on social and economic development. Neither could this inhospitable region of modest resources have contributed much to the prosperity of the Horde.

Initially, the Mongols ruled their territories in Russia directly from the center of the empire that was being built at Khara Khorum, with only a limited local presence of Mongol administrators, census takers, and military contingents. Russian princes had to travel to Mongolia to receive their patents of office (*jarlyks*) from the Great Khan. John of Plano Carpini reported on the poisoning there in 1246 of Prince Iaroslav of Vladimir, the senior principality of northeastern Russia. His son, Alexander Nevsky (1220–1263), a Russian hero for his defeat of the Swedish knights on the River Neva in 1240, managed to survive his own visit to Mongolia and went on to become a dutiful servant of the khans in helping to put down Russian resistance to their rule. His descendants ruled Moscow.

By the fourteenth century, the locus of political and fiscal control over Russia had shifted to Sarai, although some tax revenues continued to be sent to the Great Khan. Russian princes still were expected to appear when summoned to the khan's court, either in Sarai or at his summer camp in the Caucasus foothills. The khans bestowed the patents for rule and approved the princes' wills, but largely did not interfere in the established patterns of princely succession. Intermarriage often strengthened the ties between Russian princes and their overlords. The relationship was one that could be manipulated successfully on both sides for political advantage especially as the Horde itself weakened. The emergence of Moscow as the preeminent Russian principality may be explained by its princes' success in cultivating their relations with Sarai.

There is little evidence to show, as some scholars would have us believe, that the khans were continually plotting ways to keep the Russian princes weak. Nor is it the case that the Russians seized every opportunity to rebel in order to throw off the "Mongol yoke."[8] In the national mythology, the high point of this struggle was the battle of Kulikovo in 1380, where Moscow prince Dmitrii Ivanovich "Donskoi" ("of the Don River") is portrayed in hagiographic terms. Yet the battle was not simply a victory of good, Christian Russians over "pagan" Mongols, but a complex affair involving conflicting allegiances on both sides in a period when the Golden Horde had already been substantially weakened by internal strife.[9]

Beginning around 1330, the Moscow princes became tax collectors for the khans and took advantage of administrative mechanisms that would later help them consolidate increasingly independent political power. Evidence that they adopted Mongol bureaucratic procedures does not necessarily mean, as some have claimed, that they also borrowed larger political structures or political theory.[10] By the time the Russian

princes emerged as autocrats in the seventeenth century, the Golden Horde had long ceased to be a viable political model.

Many myths about the Mongol impact in Russia have been invoked to explain uncomfortable facts about the country's subsequent history. Although the impact of the Mongol invasion and ongoing payment of tribute unquestionably was severe, the Mongols have been blamed for Russian "economic backwardness" right down to the twentieth century. The one quantifiable, if imperfect, measure of economic prosperity in Russia—the building of masonry churches in a country where most construction was of wood—bottoms out in the 1230s but shows a dramatic recovery within two or three generations of the invasion (fig. 29).[11] Russian trade through Novgorod to the Baltic and through the Crimea to Byzantium continued and, at least in the south, was in the interests of the khans to promote. The Russian church was among the beneficiaries of this trade; the Italian merchant network, based in the Crimea, reached all the way to Moscow. There is ample evidence of Russian economic recovery even before the demise of the Golden Horde in the late fourteenth century. Russian economic woes of later centuries have little to do with the Mongols.

Nor is there justification to support the myth that the Mongols "cut Russia off from the West," thus condemning the Russians to miss out on the Renaissance and the scientific revolution. This idea is encapsulated in an oft-quoted observation by Russia's national poet Alexander Pushkin that, unlike the cultured Muslim rulers in Spain, who were intellectually ahead of the medieval Christian West, "the Mongols gave Russia neither Aristotle nor algebra."[12] Yet, Islam, by the fourteenth century, had become the official religion of the Horde, mosques were being built, and Islamic learning promoted: Ibn Battuta records at length his interactions with learned Muslim clerics. There was no policy of cutting off non-Muslims either from their religious or, if they had any, their intellectual traditions. Indeed, Greek and southern Slavic clerics and artists continued to contribute to Russian culture, and there was active involvement with the Hansa in Novgorod and Italian merchants in the south. The khans even granted the Russian Church immunities from taxation and judicial interference by the secular authorities. Whatever were the intellectual accomplishments of the learned Muslims of Sarai, for perfectly good religious reasons that learning was off limits to the Russian Orthodox. The real barrier to the emerging culture of the Renaissance was that Russian Orthodoxy likewise blocked any intellectual borrowing from the Catholic West.

The fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Muslim Turks in 1453 reinforced the Russians' belief in the purity of their faith. Now, more than ever, Moscow felt compelled to defend its traditional religion and culture. The Muscovite state had barely survived a civil war in the first half of the fifteenth century, thanks to some timely help from remnants of the Golden Horde. Grand Prince Ivan III (r. 1462–1505) consolidated his power, absorbed most of the remaining independent Russian principalities, established a degree of political control over the Genghissid successor state of Kazan, and waged a successful war against Lithuania. Given his successes,

Ivan had every reason to think that his endeavors enjoyed divine sanction and that he was the real heir to the khans in Sarai.

Whether Ivan or his Muscovite heirs consciously articulated claims to that succession is uncertain.[13] The term, "White Tsar," with which rulers in the steppe, the Ottomans, and even princes as far away as Italy at times addressed the Russian ruler, might be taken in the Mongol color- and directional-coded terminology to mean the "Khan of the West." The Muscovite princes had an interest in regalia associated with the khans of the Golden Horde. Of the many royal crowns in the treasury of the Kremlin, the most important is the so-called "Cap of Monomakh," which some have argued is a prime example of the filigree gold work that was popular among the Mongol elite (**Figure** 31). Whether it was once part of the khan's regalia before being acquired by Ivan's Muscovite ancestors in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries is still debated.[14] Although the crown probably dates from the thirteenth century, Russian legends associate it with the eleventh-century Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos rather than admit to any Mongol connection.

When Grand Prince Ivan IV (r. 1533–84) became the first Russian ruler to be crowned tsar in 1547, the title, which derives from "Caesar," asserted the prestige associated with imperial Rome, not the tradition by which Russians had termed the khan "tsar." Having incorporated the successor states of the Golden Horde—Kazan (1552), Astrakhan (1556), and Siberia (ca. 1581)—Ivan IV then added the titles Tsar of Kazan, and so on, as explicit recognition that he had replaced the Genghissid khans. Where it served their purposes, the Muscovite rulers respected the imperial charisma of the Genghissid line, even if they did not shape their policies after those of khans whose rule in Russia had long ago ended. The characteristic institutions Muscovy bequeathed to the Russian empire—notably, autocracy and serfdom—developed later and gradually as responses to internal needs of the evolving state, not as a result of Mongol rule.

1. Dawson 1955, 55.
2. Ibn Battuta 1958–2000, vol. 2, 471.
3. Ibn Battuta 1958–2000, vol. 3, 541.
4. Ibn Battuta 1958–2000, vol. 2, 515–16.
5. Fedorov-Davydov 1984, 22.
6. Grekov in Grekov and Iakubovskii 1950; Vernadsky 1953; Halperin 1985.
7. Zenkovsky 1974, 205.
8. Nasonov 1940; Cherepnin in Tikhvinskii 1970, 191–200.
9. Petrov 2005.
10. Ostrowski 1990; Rakhimzianov 2005.
11. Miller 1989.
12. Grekov and Iakobovskii 1950, 177.
13. Halperin 2003.
14. Zhilina 2001.