CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE ULUS JOCHI (GOLDEN HORDE)

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The history of the Mongol Empire has most commonly been told using the evidence of the often richly detailed written sources, even though more than a century of archaeological study has produced a mass of evidence about the material culture across the empire. Publications of the archaeological material often are difficult to access and, for non-experts, difficult to assess. As the best work in recent decades on the Golden Horde illustrates, though, it is essential to use both the written sources and evidence from material culture if we wish to obtain a full picture of the culture and history of the region that, at its fullest extent, encompassed a territory bounded by the Carpathians in the West, the Black Sea, North Caucasus and Khwarazm in the South, and the Kazakh steppes and Western Siberia to the East (Map 33.1).

While the archaeological evidence often merely reinforces what we know from the written sources, more importantly, it offers unique material about regional culture, daily life, interethnic relations, and much else. Unlike so many of the written sources, the evidence from material culture is “unbiased,” but nonetheless needs to be critiqued and may invite divergent interpretations.

THE CHALLENGES IN OBTAINING AND ASSESSING THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

The surface remains of settlements from the era of the Golden Horde had attracted the attention of Russian administrators and scholars early in the eighteenth century, at a time when even rather substantial portions of significant buildings were still in evidence. The earliest excavations occurred when there was as yet no scientific methodology in archaeology. Such was the case, for example, with the pioneering work of Aleksandr V. Tereshchenko in 1848–1850 at Tsarevskoe on the Aktuba River (a tributary of the lower Volga). While Tereshchenko uncovered evidence of many structures and accumulated masses of artifacts (including thousands of Golden
Horde coins and some spectacular examples of metalwork [Figure 33.1]), he failed to record information for contextualizing the finds.

While his excavations in the early 1920s left much to be desired by modern standards, Frants V. Ballod did important survey work, documented a number of structures, and recovered many artifacts at Selitrennoe and Tsarevskoe on the Aktuba River, the sites which at least until recently were considered to be the locations of the capitals of the Golden Horde, the old and new Sarai. Among Ballod’s more interesting contributions was to document the water supply system at Tsarevskoe (Figure 33.2), which included a connected set of catchment basins and a network of conduits, evidence of the sophistication of the engineering which went into the planning and construction of these cities where there had previously been no settlements.

His excavations of house remains revealed the kang system of hot-air heating ducts under the benches and anticipated the much more extensive documentation of the domestic architecture undertaken in recent archaeology (Figure 33.3).

Systematic, scientifically based archaeological investigation of Golden Horde sites began only in the late 1950s. Of particular importance was the work of German F. Fedorov-Davydov, who developed some of the standard methodologies for classifying and interpreting artifacts and led many of the important, large-scale excavations. Fedorov-Davydov worked out detailed ceramic typologies for Golden
Figure 33.2 Cross-section of the catchment basins for the water supply of Tsarevskoe. After Ballod 1923b, Figure 5.

Figure 33.3 Plan showing the kan heating system in “Structure No. 2” at Selitrennoe. After Ballod 1923b, Figure 23.
Horde material and systematized a great deal of the numismatic evidence, both of which are essential for establishing chronology. He classified many other types of objects, including the stone statues erected in the steppes by the Qipchaqs in the period just prior to the Mongols (Figure 33.4).

The result has been to determine much more precisely than before what Mongol rule meant for the populations they conquered. Unlike many archaeologists, Fedorov-Davydov was able to move beyond his detailed technical studies to generalization about the larger historical issues of the Golden Horde. His work on the development of its cities, while revised in some particulars by more recent studies, is still standard.
Some of the most important current research is that of Leonid F. Nedashkovskii, whose innovative work extends the study of major city sites into their hinterland. By including in his purview settlements and burials in a radius of about 60 km around Ukek (next to Saratov on the Volga), Tsarevskoe, Selitrennoe (both on the Aktuba) and Sharenyi Bugor (in the Volga delta), he has been able to document the interactions of the urban centers with their surrounding regions and show statistically regional variation and change over time. His “radial” approach may not always take into account the effect of natural barriers to easy movement (e.g., in the case of Sharenyi Bugor), but the broadening of focus into wider regions is highly significant for our understanding of the relationship between sedentary centers and the surrounding, often nomadic, cultures.

Where excavations have been undertaken with proper attention to detail, the work is time consuming, and, especially where seasons and funding are short, may therefore have to focus on very small areas in much larger sites. Such “sampling” often tends to concentrate on the places where there is some surface evidence of there being buried structures, but this then may bias the results toward investigation of the remains left by elites. Especially for the major cities, what is excavated may be but a small percentage of the total area. The most famous of the urban sites, Selitrennoe (assumed to have been Sarai – the, or at least one of the capitals of the Golden Horde) occupies an area of some 15 km², of which only some 30,000 m² have been excavated. Even though the city of Bulghar on the middle Volga has seen extensive (and largely well published) excavation, by the beginning of the twenty-first century only about 22,000 m² of a total area of 3,800,000 m² had been excavated. In the study of Volga Bulgharia, incidentally, aerial photography was used for the first time in 1973–1974 to identify potential archaeological sites, a method employed some decades earlier in the arid regions of Central Asia where possible features of interest would stand out more clearly on the ground. The city of Bulghar itself has now seen what apparently is one of the first attempts to use ground-penetrating radar at Golden Horde sites to identify objects of potential interest. It is likely that the application of such modern technology will substantially expand the database of archaeological material.

**ETHNIC COMPOSITION**

Identifying the ethnicity of those who left behind the remains found by archaeology can be a very problematic undertaking. The structural features of residential architecture tell us little about who may have inhabited the buildings, even though some residential complexes include, along with masonry buildings, evidence of yurts. Artifacts may or may not be revealing. A residence inhabited by a Christian might have a bronze amulet with a cross; certain kinds of jewelry have been sufficiently researched to suggest with some confidence that they were popular with a certain ethnic group. Artifacts such as bronze mirrors are of some interest since they were widely appreciated across Eurasia (Figure 33.5).

Many seem to have been modeled on those produced in East Asia but nonetheless can reasonably be seen as local products. In conjunction with certain other kinds of artifacts, they may point to the owners as having come from nomadic traditions. Ceramic evidence, which is more abundant, may distinguish elites from commoners but not tell us who they were.
Burial rituals are extremely important. A great deal of emphasis in their study has focused on those that show evidence of Islamic tradition (the lack of burial inventory, bodies positioned so the face looks toward Mecca). This then distinguishes them from others that may have no Islamic features or perhaps suggest the mixing of Islamic with some non-Islamic traditions. It is more common that the non-Islamic burials contain artifacts, which can help to suggest cultural filiation. There are isolated burials scattered across the steppe, many of which have over-grave structures that...
connect them with Central or East Asian nomadic tradition. The largest numbers of burials excavated from the Golden Horde period are located in cemeteries near settlement sites. Such cemeteries may offer a cross-section of the inhabitants of an adjacent city, although it is possible that those who did not live in the city proper were buried there too. Inscriptions on tombstones naturally can reveal much: there is substantial epigraphic evidence from Muslim burials at Bulghar on the Volga; one of the striking exceptions is a tombstone inscribed in Armenian commemorating a woman buried there (Figure 33.6). This is but one bit of evidence about a significant Armenian presence in several Jochid cities.

Furthermore, a number of craniological studies have been undertaken, with careful measurements at least suggesting distinctions between Europoid and Mongoloid features. Such studies then have made possible the sculptural reconstruction of the individuals (the methods pioneered by M.M. Gerasimov in the 1930s and 1940s). This work has documented changes over time in the ethnic makeup of Jochid cities, where in the early decades, elite burials tended to have more Mongoloid features; later, after decades of ethnic mixing, the dominant features are Europoid. In Bulghar, the evidence from Muslim burials shows a very mixed population by the late fourteenth century, though the dominant characteristics for women are more Europoid than Mongoloid. Of course, this is old methodology; one has to imagine more

Figure 33.6 Two gravestones from fourteenth-century Bulghar, the Muslim one on the left commemorating a master goldsmith who died in 1317, the one on the right in Armenian commemorating a Christian “princess,” Sarah, who died in 1321.
Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.
could be done with osteological analysis. Certain skeletal features can tell us something about occupations (especially for those who rode a lot and who may have developed the muscles to draw a composite bow). So far, there seems to be no DNA analysis of human remains from Jochid sites.

Among the very interesting results from excavations are the studies of animal bones, whose large numbers can produce meaningful statistical comparisons and may reveal a great deal about the diet of the local population. At Tsarevskoe, remains of cattle are significant, whereas at Selitrennoe remains of sheep and goats by far dominate. These data reinforce other evidence about the significance of settled agriculture and animal husbandry at the former site (which became important later than did Selitrennoe), as opposed to the pattern we might expect for a nomadic population. The Selitrennoe remains are analogous to those found at Qaraqorum in Mongolia. This does not necessarily mean that the city population there was composed of sedentarized nomads but may merely reflect the significance of the site’s relationship to the nomadic ordu of the khan. In fact, urban populations of the Jochid cities seem to have been drawn from a wide array of nomadic and sedentary peoples, many of them forcibly relocated there.

Relatively recently, archaeologists at Jochid sites have been using flotation for palynological study establishing evidence of local flora from their seeds. The data reinforce what some of the contemporary descriptive accounts tell us about the products of local agriculture, where millet seems to have been the primary crop, but depending on the location, rye, wheat, and oats also were significant. We know from studies of other regions across Eurasia that grains were important in nomad diets. While it is difficult to say who exactly were the farmers, the settled populations in the Jochid Ulus clearly were engaged in significant agriculture, a fact that helps us understand why the khans promoted urban development.

**CITIES AND SETTLEMENTS**

In a now classic work on the historical geography of the Golden Horde, the archaeologist Vadim L. Egorov described some 110 settlement sites of various sizes and indicated another 30, mentioned in written sources but not yet located. The most judicious recent reviews of the evidence agree that there surely are significant settlement sites yet to be found. A minority (and sharply criticized) view claims this greatly exaggerates the level of urbanization in the Golden Horde. There is some agreement on a classification scheme by the area a settlement occupies. What constitutes a city is also defined by the degree to which it has substantial archaeological strata in which a wide range of artifacts has been unearthed: the remains of significant buildings, evidence pointing to its possible political importance (e.g., with the minting of coins), and its involvement in craft production and trade.

While there are several somewhat different periodizations of urban development in the Jochid Ulus, they all rest in the first instance on the numismatic evidence: the frequencies and types of excavated coins and/or the mint marks indicating where they were struck. Moreover, there is a consensus that the peak of urban development occurred during the first half of the fourteenth century, interrupted by the period of political disorder in the 1360s and 1370s across much of the territory of the Golden Horde. The accession of Toqatamish in 1381 restored stability, but then...
his conflict with Timur (Tamerlane), ended with the latter’s invasion and destruction of many of the cities in 1395. Other kinds of archaeological evidence (for example, the destruction or changes in usage of buildings) coincide with what the coins reveal.

If the impact of Timur’s invasion is clear enough, the earliest stages in this history are rather opaque. The often-sensational narrative accounts about the destruction inflicted by invading Mongol armies are not always confirmed by archaeological evidence. Of particular interest in this regard is the fate of cities in what is now southern Kazakhstan. Otrar was one of the first targets of Chinggis Khan’s invasion of Central Asia and, according to the written sources, was destroyed. Yet, both for it and neighboring Sauran, archaeology has failed to find evidence of mass destruction (perhaps mainly the citadels suffered?), and in any event there is plenty of evidence about the rapid revival of these cities in subsequent decades. While Bilar, the capital of Volga Bulgharia, never really recovered from the Mongol invasion, Bulghar did and thrived under Mongol rule down through the fourteenth century.

At Selitrennoe and Tsarevskoe, no layers of settlement can be confidently dated to the first decades of Mongol rule. The earliest minting of coins in the Jochid Ulus seems to have been at a site in Central Asia on the Syr Darya River and then at Otrar (as it recovered from the initial Mongol devastation). Coins also were issued at Bulghar, which was never the Mongol capital. In all of these cases, the coinage seems to have been used primarily in the local economy. Recent finds suggest that coins were minted at Sarai as early as the 1260s (Figure 33.7).

Probably the explanation for this silence regarding the earliest capital on the lower Volga is that the “capital” moved with the Khan in his annual migration up and down the river between summer and winter camps. Fedorov-Davydov has posited a parallel existence of nomadic and sedentary culture in the Horde, where the survival and development of cities reflected political decisions as well as economic considerations. In the early decades of Golden Horde history, the revenues from existing cities were sent to the Qa’an in Mongolia. Newly erected cities, where none had existed previously, could be under the direct control of the local rulers, not the imperial center. Thus, new cities were built using labor conscripted in part from the indigenous nomadic populations, such as the Qipchaqs, who were now being displaced from their traditional grazing grounds. The choice of the Aktuba for the capital, Sarai, was a logical one, given favorable vegetation and climate and access to key trade routes.

Other new cities of importance included: Ukek (Uvek) on the lower middle Volga, at a key crossing point on routes originating in the cities of the Crimea; Madzhar
(Majar), bordering the northern Caucasus in a region that became one of the important summer camps for the khans and with access to east–west trade routes; and Solkhat in the Crimea, which competed with established cities, such as Kaffa.

Controversy over the location of Sarai as the capital of the Jochid Ulus has increased in recent years since it is so difficult to match the evidence of written sources with that from archaeology. The narrative texts describe the Mongol capital but do not tell us exactly where it was. The Sarai of one narrative might not necessarily be the Sarai of another (the name, after all, is a generic one). Medieval Russian chronicles tell of princes going to the Horde to see the khan, but do not say precisely where he was to be found. Medieval Italian maps confuse the matter further in their naming of cities on the Volga. Important as it is, numismatic evidence can be subject to differing interpretations. Minting of coins need not necessarily have taken place in a capital city; a number of mints were located in cities that never were the capital. We have money on which the inscriptions refer to Sarai, or Sarai al-Jadid (New Sarai), and Sarai al-Mahrus (Sarai the divinely protected), as well as coins bearing no mint location but likely also produced in the capital. While it has long been assumed that the coins of “New Sarai” were produced in a later capital (the site of Tsarevskoe), there is now an argument that all these inscriptions may refer only to a single mint location, the Selitrennoe site. Yet the absence of any evidence of occupation and coins there prior to the 1360s has raised the question of whether another site, yet little studied, at Krasnyi Yar, also on the Aktuba, might not have been the first capital established by Batu. Once it arose, Selitrennoe in fact had an unbroken sequence of occupation down into the fifteenth century, unlike Tsarevskoe, which seems to have flourished mainly in the middle of the fourteenth century and then declined rather sharply beginning in the political disorders of the 1360s. Tsarevskoe never recovered from its destruction by Tamerlane, whereas Selitrennoe survived.

ARCHITECTURE

Even if planned and sponsored by the ruling Jochids, these new cities do not emulate the layout of the “classic” cities of many areas of Central Asia and the Middle East, which have a citadel, a residential and craft area (shahristan), and a suburban rabad. Otrar on the Syr Darya is an example. When founded, Sarai and the other new cities lacked fortifications, presumably because Mongol rule ensured security. It was only at a later stage in their history, as the political environment deteriorated, that some of them acquired walls. In contrast, many of the cities strategically located on the periphery of Jochid territories and founded prior to the coming of the Mongols, were fortified. Examples include Bulghar (Map 33.2); Verkhnii and Nizhnii Dzhulat, in Alan territory, guarding the Terek River trade route and access through the mountains into Georgia. In the new cities of the southern steppes, the house complexes generally do not emulate the complex and extensive residential quarters found in many medieval Islamic cities, but rather developed out of an array of elite residences, around which then coalesced the residences of the ordinary population, craft districts, and the like. Both the simpler houses and the larger multiroom ones tended to be made of fired brick and had similar interior arrangements, with benches warmed by hot-air ducts,
these features typical of architecture found in areas of Central and northeast Asia and considered (in the context of the Golden Horde cities) to be “of the Mongolian type.” As Ballod had long ago documented, amenities included water piped into the city from the outside, available in cisterns or wells, and, as has now been discovered, in a few really large mansions, channeled into a courtyard with a basin or fountain in the middle. The careful excavation of such a house in Selitrennoe, which was built toward the middle of the fourteenth century, revealed several stages of reconstruction, first with the division of larger connected rooms into smaller isolated ones,
then, in the 1260s–1270s, the gradual decay of the residence, with accumulations of rubbish, and, finally, the use of the remains of the abandoned house as a burial ground. With the exception of a rather modest structure at Bulghar (begun in the mid-thirteenth century, measuring 24 x 29 m, built of brick and stone, with an open central courtyard [Figure 33.8]), no convincing evidence has been found to document the existence of a royal palace in the Golden Horde.

Did one exist in Sarai as a place for ceremonial functions on the occasions when the khan was in residence in his camp near the city? One might at least hypothesize something akin to the situation in the Orkhon Valley in Mongolia, where there seems to have been a regular annual peregrination of the khan and his court, stopping at several different “palace” sites.36

The architecture of the major buildings clearly is analogous to structures in Islamic lands, though whether the architects had come from abroad, and if so by what routes, is a matter of conjecture. Seljuk architecture seems to have been the main inspiration, transmitted either via the Caucasus or through the Crimea.37 This can be seen in the basic plan of mosques, baths, mausolea, and caravanserais; their architectural features, such as elaborate portals; and decorative elements. The baths, which obtained water through underground pipes, featured a hypocaust system of channeling hot air under the entire floor of the hot rooms (Figure 33.9).38
Figure 33.9  Baths at Bulghar; 1) Drawing of what subsequently was termed the Belaia palata (White Chamber), as seen in the expedition of Peter S. Pallas in 1768 (Source: Pallas, P.S. [1788] Puteshestvie po raznym provintsiiam Rossiiskago gosudarstva. Atlas, Sanktpeterburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia nauk: Pl. VI); 2) mid-nineteenth-century lithograph of the then ruins of the White Chamber (Photo © Daniel C. Waugh); 3) the remains of another of the baths at Bulghar, the so-called Vostochnaia palata (Eastern Chamber) (Photo © Daniel C. Waugh); 4) a fluted stone basin that probably was in the central hall of either the “White Chamber” or another of the Bulghar baths; 5) ceramic water pipes excavated at Bulghar.

Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.
Most such structures can now be studied only from the remains of foundations and bits and pieces of tiles and carved stone or stucco decorative elements. The surface outlines suggesting a buried wall led archaeologists to excavate a mosque at the settlement site of Vodianskoe on the Volga somewhat north of its confluence with the Aktuba River. The town obviously was of some importance, with brick houses (some of them semi-dugouts) and metal workshops. Some of these previous structures were destroyed for the building of the mosque in the second half of the fourteenth century. Measuring 26 x 35 m, it had a substantial stone foundation, walls of baked brick, and a minaret whose roof was topped by turquoise tiles interlaced with stucco that had carved inscriptions. Carved stucco inscriptions framed the mihrab, in front of which was an area delineated by a wooden rail or screen. In the middle of that enclosure, a column obtained from some building of Late Antiquity had been erected, presumably as a Qur’an stand. Around and within the mosque there were a good many burials, mostly Muslim, though in one case with a sheep interred next to the deceased. Tamerlane’s invading army destroyed Vodianskoe in 1395.

The prayer hall of the main congregational mosque at Selitrennoe measured approximately 36 x 36 m with 9 naves, the roof supported by 60 columns. There was a massive portal on the north and an ablutions basin just inside the entrance. An unusual feature was a separate room on the north side, next to the portal, where some fragments of brilliant tile decoration have been found (Figure 33.10). Other finds of tile work, especially from Tsarevskoe, attest to the breadth and skill of artisans in the Jochid Ulus.

The types and techniques varied, including mosaic faience, anchored on a white fritware body that imitates porcelain, and majolica, where the body might be off-white or colored clay. Some tiles have a molded surface design. Accomplished calligraphers produced the Quranic inscriptions. To a considerable degree, the styles and techniques can be traced to Iran. Technical analysis of examples from Bulghar places them closer to ones found in Khwarazm and adjoining areas than is the case for tiles found at the lower Volga sites, suggesting the possibility that the craftsmen who worked at Bulghar may have come from Urgench. However, local tile production in the Golden Horde must have been the norm.

Unlike at Selitrennoe and Tsarevskoe, in other locations there is more to be said from surface remains of important buildings, which either were depicted by early visitors and/or have survived even to the present. For example, Solkhat in the Crimea preserves at least parts of mosques and a madrasa. There are a great many mausolea built in the Jochid period. Visitors to Madzhar in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries drew what in some cases seem to be quite accurate pictures of a number of them, whose features clearly are to be connected with analogous structures in Khwarazm and in Seljuk Anatolia (Figure 33.11).

At least two minarets from the Jochid period survived more or less intact down into modern times, one at Verkhnii Dzhulat (destroyed in 1981) and the other, the so-called small minaret in Bulghar (its current height is 16.5 m), located next to a surviving mausoleum containing a good many anonymous elite burials (Figure 33.12).
Bulghar in fact is the site of many important architectural remains: baths (preserved mainly in their foundations), the foundation of what is thought to have been a palace, and mausolea. Most of these structures have been thoroughly excavated, although there is some disagreement about their original appearance and the degree to which they may embody elements of earlier architectural traditions in Volga Bulgharia. As we now see them, the mausolea have been altered considerably down through the centuries (Figure 33.13).

Figure 33.10 Ceramic tiles from Golden Horde sites: 1, 3, 5, and 6) Bulghar; 2) Madzhar; 4) Tsarevskoe; 7) Selitrennoe (from the northern room of the Congregational mosque).

Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.
Figure 33.11 Lithographs illustrating Peter S. Pallas’s description of his visit to Madzhar in 1793. While he saw still substantial architectural remains, watercolors of the site made by the Russian Mikhail M. Nekrasov in 1742 suggest that there was a lot more to be seen half a century prior to Pallas’s visit. The architectural drawings and some of the other lithographs illustrating Pallas’s travels rather idealize some of what he must have seen.

The most interesting structure at Bulghar is a large mosque whose distinctive architecture includes four circular bastions at the corners (Figure 33.14). It seems likely that either Caucasian or Anatolian models influenced the reconstruction in the fourteenth century whose remains are what we see today.

That said, while the planning of such major buildings seems indebted to outside influences, there certainly is evidence of accommodation to local tastes and to the necessity of finding building materials locally. Thus, in Bulghar and the Crimea, construction was in stone, rather than in fired brick, as was the case in the steppe regions. Carved stone inscriptions and decorative elements have been found at a number of the sites of religious buildings.

Figure 33.12 The small minaret at Bulghar, variously dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It is located next to the khan’s mausoleum in an area where most of the architectural tiles have been found. The portal of the minaret is framed with interesting stone carving.

Source: Photo © Daniel C. Waugh.
The role of government in city development and the construction of many of these buildings can be reasonably hypothesized, as especially is the case with a string of caravanserais placed at regular intervals between Khwarazm and Saraichuk, just north of the Caspian Sea (Map 33.2). Located at water sources, these buildings made travel directly across the deserts of the Ustiurt Plateau possible. There is substantial unity in the plans and structural features. Probably their construction took place in the first half of the fourteenth century during the apogee of the Golden Horde under Özbeg Khan. At least one of the buildings, constructed of stone with some carved decoration, has parallels to Armenian architecture of the period, when Armenian architects also were commissioned to build in Islamic polities.
Figure 33.14  The congregational mosque at Bulghar. But for the base, the minaret is modern reconstruction. The building with the pyramidal roof in the center is the Eastern Mausoleum, not part of the mosque. The insert shows the onsite drawing offering a possible reconstruction of the original appearance of the mosque at the end of the fourteenth century. At top is a piece of the original carved stone portal and a rather eroded capital for one of the columns of the prayer hall.

Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.
TRADE AND MATERIAL CULTURE

As the evidence from architecture suggests, the international connections of the Jochid Ulus were very important, and there is much else in the archaeological record and the written sources to support the now well-established view regarding the importance of its international trade.46 Whether promotion of trade was the main raison d’être for the establishment of the new cities and the caravanserais may be disputed – certainly there were political and other considerations as well. Even if the rare finds of gold coins should not be taken to indicate they were regularly used in commerce, dinars struck in the Delhi sultanate and a florin (from Florence) dated 1329 are reminders of Ibn Battuta’s evidence that annually thousands of horses were exported to India and the Florentine Pegalotti’s oft-quoted description of the route through the Jochid Ulus as the best way to China (Figures 33.15 and 33.16).

Much of the material evidence relates to the consumption patterns and tastes of the elite. Leonard Nedashkovskii’s recent work incorporating the urban hinterlands reminds us, though, that domestic exchange, some of it undoubtedly in prosaic necessities, was an important part of the commerce of the Horde. As evidence from sites such as Vodianskoe suggests, substantial numbers of copper coins, whose minting peaked in the fourteenth century, is evidence of the importance of domestic commerce, even though one can assume far from all transactions required money.47
Figure 33.15 Gold dinars of the Delhi sultans excavated in the Golden Horde. Left to right: Muhammad Shah II Iskander al-Sani (1295–1315); Kutb al-Din Mubarak Shah (718 AH; 1318 CE); three coins of Muhammad III Shah (1325–1351), the first dated 741 AH (1340/1341).
Source: Photo © Daniel C. Waugh.

Since ceramics (most commonly in shards) survive to be excavated, there is a great deal of evidence about their manufacture and distribution.48 Apart from architectural tiles, discussed earlier, almost every common type of ware was made in the Horde, many of the designs inspired presumably by imported items. One exception would seem to be that the refined Iranian lusterware associated with Kashan was not replicated (Figure 33.17).
Figure 33.17  Golden Horde Ceramics: 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8 Selitrennoe; 3, 4, 7, 9, and 10 Bulghar. No. 10 is imported Iranian lusterware; the other vessels presumably were all produced in the Golden Horde. Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh, images not in uniform scale.
Any town, and even some small settlements, might have its own workshop, where red or other colored clays (as opposed to the more refined white frit, composed of ground quartz and white clay) formed the body of both glazed and unglazed vessels. In the early decades of the Horde, the ceramics craftsmen probably were conscripted from the Crimea or Caucasus, bringing their techniques and designs with them, but over time the designs were adapted to local tastes. The kilns in the larger cities undoubtedly produced certain of the more elegant and expensive wares that were traded beyond their immediate region. Perhaps the most recognizable Jochid ceramics are the dishes that might have a geometric or animal design in the center, surrounded by a distinct pattern of “droplets” and dots with splashes of turquoise and blue (Figure 33.17 #1, 7, 8, 9).

At least some of these have been found outside of the central territories of the Jochid Ulus, for example, in the Russian principalities. For the period up to the middle of the fourteenth century, imports of “Eastern” ceramics into Rus’ were rare, probably transmitted by Mongol administrators or individuals sent on a mission to the Horde. For brief decades starting in the middle of the fourteenth century, though, the products of the Volga kilns dominated the flow of “eastern” wares into Rus’, in quantities suggesting they were objects of trade.

The manufacture and trade in glass objects in certain ways is analogous to the picture for ceramics. So far, few glass workshops have been found (one at Selitrennoe, one at Bulghar), the evidence suggesting that they produced products such as multicolored bracelets, pendants, and rings that circulated widely, even amongst the nomads in the territory of the Horde (Figure 33.18).

Moreover, some of the glass production was exported, judging from finds in the Rus’ principalities. While there are finds of expensive and technically sophisticated glassware, such as vessels with enameling and gold decoration, it seems likely that they were imports, probably from Iran, Central Asia, or Egypt. The chemical composition of the glass produced in the Jochid Ulus is similar to that of Central Asian workshops, leading to the hypothesis that those who made the glass in the Volga region may have come from there. Moreover, it is possible that some of the raw materials were imported.

The artistic tastes of the Jochid elite were reflected in personal accoutrements. Skilled metalworking is evident in many of the towns where excavations have uncovered many stone molds used to cast jewelry (Figure 33.19).

There are stunning gold, silver, and bejeweled objects, often lacking an archaeological context, as is the case of one of the most spectacular finds, a hoard found during construction work in Simferopol, Crimea, in the 1960s (Figure 33.20). It contains gold and silver belt plaques, decorations for a woman’s headress, accoutrements made from as far away as Italy and Egypt and both imitation and actual gold coins (including ones minted in India) to which loops have been added so they could be worn as jewelry. A Mongol gerege (badge of authority) issued by Kildibek Khan in 1361 suggests the collection might have belonged in the family of a Mongol administrator, but it is impossible to know exactly when and by whom the collection was put together. The hoard’s filigree applique with the knot representing good fortune has many analogies in other parts of the Mongol Empire. The challenges in determining the provenance of such objects of conspicuous consumption are well illustrated by one of the gold belt cups
associated with the Mongol elite whose handle is in the shape of a dragon’s protoma (Figure 33.21).

Several analogous cups have been found in Jochid territories. This one was found somewhere in (western?) Siberia in the early eighteenth century. The dragon motif, of course, has a long history across Asia, emblematic of imperial power. The given example is stylized to the extent that it likely was created by a craftsman who was not familiar with the more precise models such as one might see on the ceramics of the Yuan or Ming period in China. The designs engraved around the rim and the lotus in the medallion of the bowl have affinities to imagery known among the Tangut and Khitans, but at some remove and likely filtered via Central Asia or the Middle East. The Turkic inscription (written in Arabic script) around the inside of the bowl indicates a date of 617 AH/1220–1221 CE). However, it is inscribed in a mirror image, suggesting that it must have been added by someone who did not know the language or script and simply calqued it from another object. Stylistic
Figure 33.19 Stone molds for making jewelry and other decorative metal objects, found at Bulghar.  
Source: Photo © Daniel C. Waugh.

Figure 33.20 Items from the Simferopol Hoard found in the 1960s.  
Source: Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.
analysis in fact suggests the cup is probably of later date. The comparisons of the motifs with their presumed ultimate sources in East Asia suggests that, as with many other examples from the arts of the Mongol period, the craftsmen and artists of Central or Western Asia did not always understand (or simply did not care to reproduce precisely) the imagery in the sources for their inspiration, even if they had the opportunity to see the Chinese or other East Asian works of art.54

Unfortunately, the relatively poor preservation of perishable organic materials in Jochid graves limits our ability to document some aspects of its material culture. Textiles are an example, where fragmentary finds have been made at Selitrennoe...
and several sites along the Volga. A late fourteenth-century elite female burial in Bulghar contained a reasonably well-preserved head covering cum shawl, remarkable for the fact the garment was sewn using several different kinds of silk (Figure 33.22). It gleamed from the use of gold thread and golden appliques. Some of the silk may have come from Egypt, some from other parts of the Mediterranean world or Central Asia and some from China. The deceased was not buried according to Muslim ritual, this in a city where Islam was well established, where there were members of the Mongol ruling elite, and also a substantial population of the indigenous Mordvinians. In short, here in a microcosm is a window into the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the Golden Horde.

It has been too easy in some ways to invoke this history and material culture in the name of ethno-nationalism. As Konstantin A. Rudenko has explained, the richness of the evidence from Bulghar and its region has encouraged ideas about Bulghar exceptionalism. A good deal of the current literature on the Golden Horde treats it as a distinct “civilization,” at the risk of exaggerating the distinctive features of its culture. The material record, though, certainly reinforces what we have known from the written sources about the (granted, forcible) incorporation of different ethnic groups into the new Mongol-ruled polity. One can see how many features of the culture of the small ruling elite were maintained alongside a range of cultures
of indigenous nomadic and sedentary peoples and how conscription and interaction with the world beyond introduced cultural change. As one might expect, borrowings were adapted; there was substantial evolution over time and syncretism. While by no means universal, sedentarization occurred. Whether this all adds up to the creation of a new “civilization” is a subject for further discussion.

NOTES

1 The current essay focuses on material from the territories directly administered by the Jochid Ulus in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and does not attempt to deal with archaeological evidence regarding the Horde’s impact on the Rus’ principalities. For the Rus’ territories, see Waugh 2017, 16–19. The history of earlier excavations normally is reviewed in the opening sections of any more recent work discussing the same site; see, for example, Khlebnikova 1987; Fedorov-Davydov 1994, Ch. 2; Nedashkovskii 2010, Ch. 1; Rudenko 2014, devoted entirely to the archaeology and historiography of Volga Bulgharia. For up-to-date essays summarizing and generalizing from the evidence of material culture, see ITDV 2009 and ZOVMI. The most valuable of these essays have also been listed separately in the bibliography. Excellent color illustrations of the arts of the Golden Horde may be found in Sokrovishcha Zolotoi Ordy 2000, Zolotaia Orda: Istoriiia i kul’tura 2005, Dschingis Khan 2005, 222–240, and Zolotaia Orda i Prichernomor’e 2019.

2 Ballod 1923a, 1923b.

3 Savel’ev 2012.


5 Much of Fedorov-Davydov 1966 is devoted to systematization and classification for steppe burials; Fedorov-Davydov 2001a is devoted largely to ceramics found in city sites; his 1987 article pulls together what was known at that time about coinage at Bulghar. Leonid F. Nedashkovskii’s publication (2000) of the results of excavation at the city site of Ukek, on the outskirts of Saratov, emulates Fedorov-Davydov’s approach in devoting Ch. 1 to the numismatic material and in Ch. 2 systematically classifying the various other artifacts.

6 Nedashkovskii 2000; Nedashkovskii 2010; Nedashkovskii2013.

7 Pigarev 2016; Pigarev 2018.

8 Zilivinskaia and Vasil’ev 2016, 654.

9 Rudenko 2014, 168.

10 Igonin and Khalikov 1976.


12 Poluboaiarina 2009.

13 Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 78–84; Nedashkovskii and Rakushin 1998; Rudenko 2015.

14 Kostiukov 2009.

15 Volkov 2009.

16 Iablonskii 2009.

17 Gazimzianov 2015.

18 Iavorskaia 2007.

19 Zeleneev 2013; Bulatov 1976, 98; Maslovskii 2013a; Maslovskii 2013b; Rudenko 2013.


23 Nedashkovskii 2010, 15.

24 Zilivinskaia and Vasil’ev 2016, 651.
25 See above, n. 5.
29 Petrov et al. 2018; Pachkalov 2007; Singatullina 1998.
32 Baipakov 2013, 105–120.
35 Petrov 2016, 620–621.
39 Egorov and Fedorov-Davydov 1976.
42 Noskova 2001, 305.
45 Zilivinskaia 2017.
48 Kramarovskii 2005, 137–147. Particular categories of ceramics have received special attention (e.g., Naumenko et al. 2017); imports are among the most frequently cited evidence regarding international trade (e.g., Koval’ 2013). While his focus is on ceramics found in the Rus’ principalities, not in the territories of the Golden Horde, the most ambitious technically sophisticated effort to classify “oriental” ceramics in the larger region is that by Koval’ 2010. Many of them came from or via the Golden Horde and its successor states (see esp. pp. 192–198 and Plates 20–24, 26, 31–37, 57–61, 74). For a recent analysis hypothesizing a Golden Horde connection to explain how a Chinese celadon made it to Novgorod far in the north, see Rodionova and Frenkel’ 2018.
49 Bulatov 1976.
52 Sokrovishe 2000, 288–289.
53 Kramarovskii 2000, 161–166.
54 Kadoi 2009.
55 see, e.g., Orfinskaya et al. 2004; Orfinskaya and Lantratova 2011.
56 Fedotova et al. 2015.
57 Rudenko 2017.
58 e.g., ITDV 2009, 551–558; Kramarovskii 2005.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


ITDV, See List of Abbreviations.


Nedashkovskii, L.F. (2016a) ‘Zemledelie, skotovodstvo, promysly i remeslo.’ In ZOVMI. 551–78; color illustrations [4–7], [9–11], [13], [23].


ZOVMI, See List of Abbreviations.