CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

THE MONGOLS IN THE EYES OF THE RUS’

Donald Ostrowski

The Rus’ian sources provide testimony regarding the Ordu (in Russian, the term is Orda), not the Mongol Empire as a whole. For them, the Ordu was the Ulus of Jochi, to which the descriptive term “Qipchaq Khanate” has been used by later historians. No source contemporary to its existence refers to the Ulus of Jochi as “Golden Horde” (Zolotaia orda), which in the context of that time would be applicable only to a palace or encampment.1

Those Russian sources that carry testimony regarding the Ulus of Jochi and its successor states can be divided into three genres: (1) chronicles, (2) tales and saints’ vitae, and (3) documents (such as official and state papers). One can further categorize the sources according to provenance, whether they were written by churchmen or government officials. After the initial expression of bafflement for the first Mongol incursion in 1223, those sources written by churchmen went through three chronological stages of interpretation: 1237–1252 (pejorative Christian religious denigration); 1252–1448 (neutral description); 1448+ (return to pejorative Christian religious denigration). Those sources written by government officials remained neutral in wording throughout.

RUSSIAN VIEWS OF THE MONGOL INCURSIONS

The first mention of the Mongols appears sub anno 1223 in three early chronicles – the Laurentian, the Suzdal’, and the Novgorod I. The Laurentian and Suzdal’ chronicles are in the same Laurentian manuscript codex, which dates to 1377. The current consensus is that both chronicles derive from a non-extant compilation (svod) of 1305. Since there is a gap of 154 years between the time of the entry and the extant manuscript, and a gap of 72 years between the time of entry and the supposed source compilation, we need to search for independent confirmation that the 1223 entry was not altered significantly in the subsequent copying and editing. The Novgorod I Chronicle of the Older Redaction provides that confirmation because it represents an independent chronological line and because the entries...
about the coming of the Mongols coincide. These chronicle accounts describe the Mongols (Tatars) as defeating the Rus’ princes “because of our sins”:

That same year, [Novg. I and Suzdal’ chronicles add: for our sins, unknown] peoples [iazytsi] came, [Suzdal’ Chronicle adds: Godless Moabites called Tatars] whom no one knows well, who they are, nor from where they came, nor what their language is, nor of what tribe [plamene] they are, nor what their faith is. But they call them Tatars, and others say Taumen, and others Pechenegs, and others say that they are those of whom Methodius, Bishop of Patmos, testifies, that they came out from the Etrian Desert, which is between East and North.2

When the Mongols returned home, the chroniclers reported: “we do not know from where they came and to where they went again only God knows [Novg. I adds: whence he fetched them against us for our sins].”

Initially, the chroniclers used pejorative language about the Mongols, drawing on Christian religious terminology.4 In descriptions of the conquests of 1237–1240, the Mongols are characterized as “godless,” “lawless,” and “accursed,” but phrases like “there was no opposing the wrath of God” also appear.5 Perhaps the fullest expression of this viewpoint appears in the Novgorod I Chronicle’s account of the Mongol conquest of Rus’:

Let brothers, fathers, and children, whoever see God’s infliction on the entire Rus’ land not weep. God loosed the pagans on us because of our sins. God, in his wrath, brought foreigners against the land, and thus crushed by them they [the Rus’ people] will remember God. . . . God punishes lands that have sinned either with death or famine or an infliction of pagans or drought or heavy rain or other punishment, to see if we will repent and live as God bids us.6

These expressions indicate a genuine bafflement on the chroniclers’ part concerning who the Mongols were because they did not fit into the existing Rus’ worldview. The claim that the Mongols were sent to punish the Rus’ for their sins is a topos that served to place the Mongols’ existence within the context of a Christian universe.

When the Mongols returned to the western steppe, the chroniclers used the same rhetorical tropes they had used to denigrate the Polovtsians (Qipchaqs) earlier. But this particular interpretative paradigm ended in northeastern Rus’ within fifteen years of the Mongol conquest.

RUSSIAN VIEWS OF THE ULUS OF JOCHI

After 1252, in areas where the Rus’ Church was under the Patriarch of Constantinople, we find an absence in the sources of the pejorative terminology that characterized the initial reception.7 The elimination of pejorative terminology and the neutralizing of the descriptions of the Mongols in northeastern Rus’ sources were probably the result of the alliance between Byzantium and the Ulus of Jochi. It would not have been appropriate for Rus’ chroniclers to write critically about an ally of the Byzantine Empire. This alliance, except for brief exceptions, remained in place until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. In addition, the Church
benefited from the patronage of the khan through freedom of worship, being allowed
to own land, and exemption from taxation. Rus' churchmen, in return, prayed for
the well-being of the khan and his family. In addition, the Rus' Church in 1261
established an archiepiscopal see in Sarai, the prelate of which attended to the Rus'
princes and their entourages when they journeyed there to fulfill their duties to the
khan. The archbishop of Sarai also acted as diplomatic liaison with Constantinople.
Before Özbeg Khan’s conversion to Islam in the early fourteenth century, there may
also have been some hope that the archbishop would have a hand in converting the
kans and their court to Orthodox Christianity.

The chroniclers and other writers describe the relationship of the Rus’ princes and
prelates to the rulers of the Qipchaq Khanate in a matter-of-fact way, never going
into detail about why the Mongols were ruling Rus’. In the fourteenth century, for
example, the chronicles describe many trips of the Rus’ princes and grand princes
to the capital of the Jochid Ulus but rarely provide a reason for those trips. The
closest statement of explanation comes from the author of the Galician-Volhynian
Chronicle, where, sub anno 1287, he writes: “for at that time the princes of Rus’
were Tatar subjects, having been conquered by God’s wrath.”

In yearly entries and compilations made between 1252 and 1448, Rus’ ecclesi-
stastical writers and chroniclers describe Mongol-Tatar raids as though those raids
were motivated by God with the Mongol-Tatars’ acting as divine agents. The phrase
“favored by God and the tsar” (i.e., the Tatar khan) appears frequently in the
chronicles. Any disparaging verbiage directed at the Tatars found in a northern Rus’
chronicle entry between 1252 and 1448 can be easily traced to a later interpolation
in that entry during redaction or revision after 1448.

One of the more cryptic episodes described in Rus’ chronicles is the Mongol-
Tatar campaign to the Suzdal’ land against Alexander Nevskii’s brother Andrei in
1252. The problem is exacerbated by contradictory reporting in the sources. The
chronicles and the Life of Alexander Nevskii treat the Tatar campaign in a variety
of ways but are chary about supplying crucial details. The Novgorod I Chronicle
(Older Redaction) does not mention this episode at all. The Suzdal’ Chronicle
(titled Continuation of the Suzdal’ Chronicle according to the Academy Copy in
PSRL) states that Nevriui (it is not specified as to who he was or who sent him)
went against Andrei Iaroslavich and chased him beyond the sea. The Laurentian
Chronicle (titled Suzdal’ Chronicle according to the Laurentian Copy in PSRL) states
that Andrei “with his boyars thought to run rather than serve the khan and he fled to
an unknown land with his princess and his boyars.” Without mentioning the name
of Nevriui, the chronicle continues that the Tatars chased after Andrei and went to
Pereyaslav, where they fought a battle. Then “the Tatars scattered throughout the
land,” perhaps in search of Andrei. They killed the commander (voevoda) Zhidoslav,
and they took “the princess” and “children” away. They also “took numerous people
as well as horses and cattle and caused much misery when they left.” Later (post-
1448, pre–Nikon Chronicle) chronicles state that Nevriui went “against the Suzdal’
land” as well. To this story, the sixteenth-century Nikon Chronicle introduces,
besides other anti-Tatar elements, an anti-Tatar speech that it puts in the mouth
of Andrei Iaroslavich: “O Lord, why do we quarrel among ourselves and lead the
Tatars against one another! It would be better for me to flee to a foreign land than
to be friends with, and serve, the Tatars.” This speech does not appear in earlier
chronicles but does represent the further development of an idea that was expressed in the fourteenth-century *Laurentian Chronicle* and the fifteenth-century *Simeonov Chronicle sub anno* 1252: “Prince Andrei Iaroslavich thought with his boyars that it was better to flee than to serve the khan.” The *Nikon Chronicle* changes the focus from a specific political decision not to serve Batu to a general religious decision not to serve the Tatars. Although Batu was not Muslim, the Rus’ Church, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was promoting the idea that a “Russian” was someone who accepted Christianity under the aegis of the head of the Rus’ Church, and by that time being “Tatar” was equated with being Muslim.

The First Redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* (from the fifteenth century) implies that Alexander went to see Batu in 1249 and an unnamed khan in 1262/1263 just before his death but does not mention Alexander’s trip of 1252. The *Nikon Chronicle* interprets it differently by explaining that Alexander left Andrei in charge of Vladimir and the Suzdal’ land while he was gone, since he (Alexander) had been grand prince of Vladimir and all Rus’ all along, in the view of the chronicler. In neither instance do the authors of these texts stipulate any connection between Alexander’s trip and the khan’s move against Andrei. None of the extant chronicles has Alexander complain to the khan about Andrei during his 1252 trip to Sarai, as the nineteenth-century Russian historian Sergei M. Solov’ev had proposed.

It seems that Andrei thought better of his decision not to “serve the Tatars” or to recognize the right of the khan of the Jochid Ulus to review the *yarligh* to the grand prince of Vladimir, for, despite the report in a few chronicles of Andrei’s demise in exile, most of the others report that by 1256 he was back in Rus’ as the prince of Suzdal’, traveled with Alexander to Sarai in 1257 and died in 1264.

Another case highlights a typical problem one encounters in dealing with chronicle information about the Mongol/Tatars. The Galician-Volhynian Chronicle characterizes Noqai, who ruled the western part of the Ulus of Jochi under the ostensible overlordship of the khan from the 1260s until 1299, as “lawless,” “darnned,” and “accursed.” Yet those epithets do not seem justified within the context of the chronicler’s description of what Noqai was supposed to have done. Under the entry for 1277 (6785), the chronicle characterizes Noqai as “accursed and lawless,” but the accompanying text describes Noqai responding to complaints by the Rus’ princes Lev Danilovich, Mstislav Danilovich, and Volodimir Vasylko’vich about the Lithuanians. Noqai sends his envoys with documents. He instructs those Rus’ princes to accompany the army he is sending led by the commander (*voevoda*) Mamshei against the Lithuanians. Noqai sends his envoys with documents. He instructs those Rus’ princes to accompany the army he is sending led by the commander (*voevoda*) Mamshei against the Lithuanians. 22 Under the entry for 1282 (6790), the chronicler again characterizes Noqai as “accursed and lawless” but describes him as going with Khan Töle Buqa against the Hungarians and as ordering four Rus’ princes to accompany them against their common enemy. At this point, as well as later in the text, the Rus’ chronicler states that “the princes of Rus’ were Tatar subjects,” one of the few times this is acknowledged in the Rus’ sources. And the Galician-Volhynian chronicler uses the phrase “for at that time the Rus’ princes were under Tatar rule” (*v voli tatar’skoi*) to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Jochid khan. Later in the same chronicle but still under 1287, the chronicler declares, “God sent His sword against us which
serves His wrath for the proliferation of our sins” and explains that “at the time the princes of Rus’ were subject to (v voli, lit. in the power of) the Tatars having been conquered by God’s wrath.” The text does not make clear how any of these actions make Noqai lawless, damned, or accursed. He appears to be just the opposite, for the chronicler describes Noqai as sending armies to help Rus’ princes combat their enemies at their request and including Rus’ princes along with his army against a common enemy – the Hungarians.

In addition, the chronicler specifically indicates under the entry for 1283 (6791) [=1287] that on the way back from another campaign against the Poles, Töle Buqa and his army ravaged the land of Prince Lev but that the “accursed Nogai” did not take part in this devastation of a Rus’ prince’s land because he went a different route. Töle Buqa is also characterized by the chronicler as “accursed and lawless” although fewer times than Noqai is. The chronicler denigrates Noqai but provides no reason for doing so. One possibility is that Noqai was supposed to have converted to Islam, but the chronicler never mentions that occurrence. The Galician-Volhynian chronicler was not under the authority of the metropolitan of Rus’. The rulers of Galicia-Volhynia received authorization from the patriarch in Constantinople to establish their own separate autocephalic church. Therefore, they were not constrained by the same diplomatic pressures that precluded church writers from denigrating the Mongol/Tatars.

After 1448, the chronicles in the area of the Rus’ Church under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of All Rus’, Iona, revert to the pre-1252 pejorative terminology about the Tatars. Nonetheless, one can extract some information about those khanates. The compilation of the Nikon Chronicle represents an important stage in the revision of the Muscovite virtual past. We can see three types of interpolation of earlier chronicle entries by the editor of the Nikon Chronicle. The first type is the simple revision, which modifies an earlier entry that is neutral toward the Tatars to put an anti-Tatar spin on it. The second type of interpolation is the double-layered revision, where a post-1448 but pre-Nikon Chronicle revision puts an anti-Tatar spin on an earlier entry and is then further revised and enhanced in the Nikon Chronicle. The third type of interpolation is inclusion of anti-Tatar material where no previous entry exists in the earlier chronicles. The chroniclers were aware that Rus’ princes had often allied with the Tatars, although after 1448 the chroniclers openly deplore such alliances.

In their depiction of the Tatars, the chronicles after 1448 proceed along an increasingly radical trajectory. Whereas the Nikon Chronicle represents a culmination of textual modifications and interpolations in the chronicle representations of the Mongols, of Batu, and of Alexander Nevskii, Great Menology (Velikie Minei Cheti) and Book of Degrees (Stepennaia kniga) do not draw on the Nikon Chronicle accounts about the mid-thirteenth century. Instead, they draw on pre-Nikon Chronicle accounts. The Great Menology and Book of Degrees do, however, represent a further conceptual development of the “cruel Mongols” that is depicted in the Nikon Chronicle.

The chronicles also variously describe the so-called Stand on the Ugra of 1480. A prominent feature of the interpretive paradigm was to turn the events in the fall of 1480, in which Ivan III and Ahmed Khan and their armies faced off against each other over the Ugra River for a couple of weeks, into a major historical event. Ahmed
Khan had moved his army to the southwestern border of Muscovy in the hope of meeting up with a Polish-Lithuanian army under Kazimierz IV Jagiellonczyk, the king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania, and of proceeding together with it against the Muscovite army. But Kazimierz did not show up, possibly because Ivan had arranged for his own ally, Mengli Girei Khan, to attack the southern reaches of Kazimierz’s realm with his Crimean Tatar forces. Eventually, on November 11, according to the chronicle account, Ahmed and his army withdrew. The chronicles of the time depict the Rus’ and Tatar armies as disinclined to fight each other.

Vassian Rylo, the archbishop of Rostov and member of the war council, wrote a harsh letter to Ivan III upbraiding him for his indecisiveness. Although the standoff at the Ugra River was not unlike a number of other steppe military encounters, where neither side obtained military superiority, Vassian viewed the events differently. Not much of political, military, or diplomatic significance occurred at the Ugra in November 1480, other than that it was the last encounter between the Muscovite grand prince and the khan of the Qipchaq Khanate. Churchmen, nonetheless, developed their subsequent descriptions of this non-battle into an event of major importance, depicting it as the overthrow of Tatar domination. In the 1550s, an account of the “Stand on the Ugra,” written by a churchman, presented it as one of the most significant occurrences in the history of the world. Another event that was made prominent by this interpretive paradigm was the battle on the Don River in 1380, which will be discussed later. Instead of the Muscovite grand prince providing Rus’ forces in support of Toqtamish Khan in a civil war, the battle was depicted as Dmitrii Donskoï’s defeat of the Tatars.

**TALES AND SAINTS’ VITAE**

Both tales (*povesti*) and saints’ vitae (*zhitiia*) are narratives written by ecclesiastical writers, usually monks. Tales could be about secular personages, such as the Tale about Tsarevich Peter (*Povest’ o Petre, Tsareviche Ordynskom*) or events such as the Occurrence beyond the Don (*Zadonskhchina*) or the Tale about the Battle with Mamai (*Povest’ o Mamaevom poboishche*). But a tale could also be written about a prelate or monk that the tale writer wanted to be considered for sainthood. If the subject of the tale was declared a saint by the Rus’ Church, then the tale (*povest’*) became a *vita* (*zhitiie*). Tales and saints’ vitae could be incorporated into a chronicle or be copied as stand-alone works. Rus’ saints’ vitae are an offshoot of Byzantine saints’ vitae. Whereas scholars have used Byzantine saints’ vitae as sources of historical evidence, they have found Rus’ saints’ vitae to be more problematic. The Russian historian Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii (1841–1911), in his study of Rus’ saints’ vitae as a historical source, concluded that the rules and commonplaces were followed so rigidly that they could provide little of value for the scholarly investigator. He did allow, however, that the miracle stories attached subsequently to the end of a saints’ vitae might provide some evidence concerning the time of their writing.  

Tales and saints’ vitae present, with some exceptions, highly stylized testimony in regard to the Tatars. Those that were written between 1252 and 1448 in northeastern Rus’ exhibit the same neutral attitude the chronicles do (provided they were not interpolated later). An example is the Tale about Tsarevich Peter, the composition
of which can be dated to the mid-fourteenth century, which describes in a neutrally worded way the adjudication by the Jochid khan of a land dispute in Rostov.33

Other tales and saints’ vitae written before 1448 that were interpolated after that year often display contradictions in their narratives. A typical kind of contradiction one encounters is the name of the khan whom Alexander Nevskii went to see and who sent the Tatar expedition against Rus’ in 1252, that is, whether it was Batu or Sartaq. The account under 1247/1248 of the killing of Batu, “the impure khan,” by King Vladislav of Hungary34 helps to explain this contradiction. This story, the Tale about the Death of Batu (O ubienii Batieve), is a fabrication that first appears in chronicles of the second half of the fifteenth century.35 One also finds a version of it in the sixteenth-century Vasilii-Varlaam Redaction of the Life of Alexander Nevskii36 and in the sixteenth-century Iona Dumin version of the Book of Degrees (Stepennaia kniga).37 An allusion to it appears in the seventeenth-century History about the Kazan’ Khanate (Istoriiia o Kazanskom tsarstve).38 Halperin referred to it as part of the “fictionalizing” about Batu and the Tatars going on in Muscovite Church writing of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.39 He pointed out that, in contrast, “[t]hirteenth-century sources created an image of Batu which accurately reflected his power and influence over Russian affairs, and which resonated with the reality of Mongol superiority over Russia at the time.”40 One of the texts from this later period engaged in fictionalizing the account of Batu is the Tale about Merkurii of Smolensk (Povest’ o Merkurii Smolenskom), in which Batu is prevented from taking Smolensk, in great part due to the intervention by Merkurii, a Moravian Slav in the service of the king of Smolensk in 1239. According to the tale, Merkurii led “a Godly life, labored in fasting and charity.” He entered the Tatar camp at night and killed many of the enemy. He was killed in the ensuing battle and had his head cut off. At that point, the Tatars “dropped their weapons and, driven by some unknown force, fled from the city.”41 In the Tale about the Death of Batu, not only is Batu defeated in battle when he invades Hungary, he is killed as well. We have no evidence other than the Tale about Merkurii that Batu was defeated in Rus’ at any time, nor any evidence other than the Tale about the Death of Batu that he was killed when he led his army into Hungary. As Halperin characterizes them, both the Tale about Merkurii and the Tale about the Death of Batu are texts that “would nowadays be labelled a work of historical fiction.”42

Halperin, furthermore, pointed out that since Batu died in 1255, many years after his invasion of Hungary, the chroniclers had a problem of where to insert the Tale in their chronicles. A period of fourteen years separates Batu’s invasion of Hungary from the year of his death. It would have been bad form to describe his death one year, then in subsequent years describe him as still being alive. So, instead of inserting the Tale about the Death of Batu under 1241 when Batu was in Hungary, the chroniclers placed it under 1247/1248 because they may have had no entry (or few entries) specifically naming him between then and the succession to the throne by his son, Sartaq, in 1255.43 If they did come across a specific reference to Batu for an entry between 1247 and 1255, all they had to do was substitute the name “Sartak” for “Batu,” or, as in the case of the Nikon Chronicle’s account of the uprising of 1262, the formula “after the killing of Batu, so did his son Sartaq” was used (see earlier in this chapter).
The chronicles that incorporate the *Tale about the Death of Batu* then add “Sartak” to any reference to “khan” after 1247/1248. Thus, they assert that the khan who sent Neviu against Andrei was Sartaq, the son of Batu, although Batu was still khan in 1252. Both the First Redaction and the Vladimir Redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*, in contrast, state that Batu became angry with Andrei. Neither the First Redaction nor the Vladimir Redaction of the *Life* incorporates the *Tale about the Death of Batu*, and both of them continue to name Batu as the khan who sent Neviu. Some historians have made an attempt to reconcile the contradiction by explaining that Batu and Sartaq were co-khans. While examples of co-rulers appeared in Byzantium, we have no evidence of such a phenomenon in the Jochid Ulus.

The Vasilii-Varlaam Redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* for Makarii’s *Great Menology*, the Chudov version of the *Book of Degrees*, and the Iona Dumin Redaction of the *Book of Degrees* (all compiled in the sixteenth century) incorporate the story of Batu’s being killed by Vladislav. In each of these texts, the khan who sends Neviu against Andrei and the Suzdal land is Sartaq rather than Batu. For the compilers of chronicles and the *Book of Degrees*, the fictional story of the killing of Batu in Hungary in 1247/1248 by Vladislav had become established historical fact. But the redactors of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* continued to consider Batu as khan in 1252. The Iona Dumin Redaction of the *Life*, however, adapted the testimony of the Chudov version of the *Book of Degrees* that Sartaq was khan at the time.

The version of the *Tale about the Death of Batu* that was added to the Iona Dumin Redaction in the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* is characterized not so much by an increase in the number of formulaic slurs but in their intensity. In the title, instead of “About the Death of Batu Khan” or “The Death of the evil-doing Batu in Hungary” as in the chronicles, we find “About the Death of the God-Reviled Dog, Batu Khan.” The phrases “accursed Batu” and “Godless Batu” appear frequently: “The accursed Batu went to western Hungary. . . .” and “the Godless Batu. . . .” In the first redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*, in contrast we find no demeaning epithets attached to Batu, who is reported as saying, “Alexander, do you know that God has submitted many nations to me?”

The beginning of the anti-Tatar interpretative framework is 1448. At that time, the Rus’ bishops and the Muscovite grand prince, Vasilii II, declared the Rus’ Church to be administratively autonomous in relation to the patriarchate of Constantinople. The council of bishops nominated one of their own, Iona, the archbishop of Riazan’, to be metropolitan, and the grand prince appointed him to that position. As a result, the Rus’ Church was no longer constrained by the foreign policy interests of Byzantium. An anti-Islamic, anti-Tatar ideology developed and was featured in such works as *Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche* (Legend of the Battle against Mamai), *Slovo o pogibeli Russkoi zemli* (Discourse about the Ruin of the Rus’ Land), and *Povest’ o razorenii Riazani Batyem* (Tale about the Destruction of Riazan’ by Batu), all of which date to the second half of the fifteenth century. Anti-Tatar remarks were also interpolated into earlier Rus’ chronicle accounts. This interpretive paradigm was characterized by calling the Tatars “godless,” “sons of Hagar,” “Moabites,” and so on, but it went much further. While it was admitted that Batu conquered the Rus’ land, that is to say, “it was God who punished the Rus’ for its sins,” nonetheless, in
the words of the author of Zadonshchina (The Event beyond the Don), which he put in the mouths of the Italians at Kaffa, “it will no longer be, as in the early times.”

That is, Mamai would not conquer Rus’ as Batu did. Church writers developed a Manichaean-like (Rus’-Tatar) dichotomy. Jaroslaw Pelenski discerned seven pairs of binary oppositions in the writings of Metropolitan Makarii (1542–1563) regarding the differences between Muscovites and Tatars: believers versus nonbelievers; religious versus godless; Christian versus pagan; pious versus impious; pure versus unclean; peaceful versus warlike; and good versus bad.

The Tales of the Kulikovo Cycle were written after 1448 and provide fictionalized accounts of the supposed battle in 1380 on the upper reaches of the Don River between forces led by Grand Prince Dmitri Ivanovich (Donskoi) on one hand and forces led by the emir Mamai on the other. The Kulikovo tales ostensibly derive from chronicle accounts, but those accounts provide minimal testimony about the battle, only indicating that Dmitrii’s forces won. Among the tales are Narrative of the Battle with Mamai (Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche) in four redactions, Event beyond the Don (Zadonshchina) in two redactions, and Oration concerning the Life and Passing Away of Grand Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich (Slovo o zhitii i prestavlenii velikogo kniazia Dmitriia Ivanovicha).

Significant issues of dating the various accounts and narratives and of their relationship to each other abound. Scholars have tried to use the accounts in this cycle of tales to reconstruct the battle, but the results are questionable at best. The lack of archaeological evidence from the supposed battle site compounds the problem.

Another genre of tale is problematic as a historical source. Byliny (sing. bylina) are oral epic poems or songs. We do not know when they were composed. Most of them were written down in the nineteenth century (except for a few that were written down in the early seventeenth century). Some scholars think they are contemporary with the pre-Mongol and Mongol periods. Byliny do not have much about popular attitudes toward the Mongols except insofar as the hero is battling some stylized enemy, who sometimes is identified as “the Tatars”; thus, their allusion is interchangeable with the pre-Mongol Qipchaqs and the Mongols themselves.

DOCUMENTS

The manifestation of a neutral attitude toward the Tatars ended in church sources in 1448 but continued in state documents. The state view, as in part represented in the Posol’skii prikaz (Foreign Office) documents, contain neither anti-Islamic nor anti-Tatar rhetoric. Those who composed state documents wrote them in straightforward language as though the state representatives/agents were dealing with co-equals. The principle of realpolitik characterized Muscovite state dealings with the Tatars.

Documents tend to be the most reliable sources of information about the Mongol/Tatar khanates. For example, an agreement (which can be dated to June 28, 1404) between Grand Prince Vasili Dmitrievich (r. 1389–1425) and Metropolitan Kiprian (1376–1406) indicates the fiscal responsibilities of the metropolitan included having to pay tribute to the Tatars.

There are six yarlighs preserved in the Rus’ metropolitan archive (constituting the so-called Short Collection) considered to be translations into Russian of authentic patents issued from the Jochid Ulus: (1) from Tiuliak Khan (Tulunbek, Toqtaqiya) of
Mamai’s Horde to Metropolitan Mikhail (Mitia) (1379); (2) from Taydula Khatun to Metropolitan Ioann (Feognost?) (1347); (3) from Möngke-Temür Khan to the Rus’ clergy and monasteries (1267); (4) from Taydula Khatun to Metropolitan Feognost’ (1343, 1351); (5) from Berdibeg Khan to Metropolitan Aleksei (1357); (6) from Taydula Khatun to Metropolitan Aleksei (1354). A seventh yarligh, which purports to be from Özbeg Khan to Metropolitan Peter (found in the so-called Full Collection) has been determined to be a sixteenth-century forgery.

In 1969, the historian Edward L. Keenan (1935–2015) questioned the authenticity of a yarligh that is not part of the Short Collection – the Yarligh of Ahmed-Khan to Ivan III. He concluded, after a cross-language (Turkic–Russian) comparison, that “it is not a contemporary Old Russian translation of a diplomatic document from the chancellery of the Great Horde.” Instead, he called it “a historical ballad, in epistolary form” and, as with the Kazanskaia istoriia, saw it originating in “the circles of the Posol’skij prikaz [Ambassadorial Chancellery]” of the early seventeenth century. Since the Yarligh of Ahmed-Khan follows neither the formulae of official translation nor the formulae of diplomatic structure for its genre, Keenan argued that it cannot be considered a genuine yarligh. The genuine yarlighs to the metropolitans, in contrast, affirm the immunity of the Church from taxes and tributes and declare that the Church’s property should be protected from expropriation or damage as long as Rus’ churchmen pray for the well-being of the khan and his family.

The wills of the grand princes are also another documentary source that provides evidence concerning the tribute (dan’) to the Tatar khan. They contain evidence from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries that the grand princes were looking forward to a time when the Tatar khan was no longer their suzerain. In particular, they stipulate that the tribute is still to be collected by family members from the populace and kept for themselves. Grand Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich (Donskoi) wrote in his second will (1389) about the possibility of no longer having to pay tribute to the khan: “And should God change the Orda [so that] my children do not have to pay the out-go (vykhod) to the Orda, then the tribute (dan’) that each of my sons collects in his own appanage (udel) will be his.” By the time of the first will (1406/1407) of Grand Prince Vasili I (r. 1389–1425), that formulation became: “And if God brings about a change concerning the Tatars, then my princess shall take the tribute [dan’] for herself from these volosts and villages, and my son, Prince Ivan, shall also not interfere in this tribute.” The second will (probably 1417) and third will (probably 1423) of Vasili I have a similar formulation: And if God brings about a change concerning the Orda, then my princess shall take this tribute [dan’] for herself from their patrimonial principalities, and my son Ivan shall not interfere in this.”

Another document, however, indicates that a change had already occurred concerning the Ordu. In 1449, in a treaty with the Suzdal’ prince, Vasili II declares:

You are not to have dealings with the Orda. You, Prince Ivan, are to hand over to me and my sons, without any trickery, any old yarlighs [iarlyki] you might have
for Suzdal’, Nizhni Novgorod, or Gorodets, or for the [Nizhni] Novgorodian principality as a whole. You are not to accept any new yarlighs [iarlyki]. And any yarlighs [iarlyki] for [Nizhni] Novgorod or Suzdal’ that any khan might give you or send to you, you are to surrender them to me, the grand prince, and my sons according to our pact. You are not to keep them.68

Previously, all princes who ruled a town received their patent directly from the Tatar khan. By requiring the Suzdal’ prince to have no dealings with the Ordu and through demanding that he turn over any patents from the khan, Vasilii established himself as the authority over Suzdal’, replacing the khan in Sarai. At the same time, Vasilii declared his son Ivan co-ruler without bothering to obtain approval from the khan, making him the first ruler in Rus’ to not get approval from the khan since 1240. Vasilii was the last grand prince to be authorized to rule by a yarligh from the Tatar khan in Sarai. Although Vasilii’s son, Ivan III (r. 1462–1505), continued to pay tribute to the Ordu until 1503, he ruled completely independently.

RUSSIAN VIEWS OF THE SUCCESSOR KHANATES OF THE JOCHID ULUS

The five successor khanates to the Jochid Ulus were the khanates of Astrakhan’, Crimea, Kazan’, Kasimov, and Sibir’. Russian rulers continued to pay tribute to the Crimean khan, their ostensible suzerain, until 1700 (although the Russian sources call the payments “gifts”). In any case, the Treaty of Constantinople (July 3, 1700) absolved Russia of any further tribute/gift obligation to the Crimea khan.69

Within this period, we also begin to see the previous centuries of Tatar rule being referred to as a “yoke.” The phrase “yoke of slavery” (rabotno igo) had already appeared in the sixteenth-century Life of Merkurii of Smolensk as applied to the period of Chinggisid hegemony in Rus’. The phrase “Tatar Yoke” (jugo Tatarico) was first applied to the period of Chinggisid hegemony in Latin by non-Russians. The Polish historian and cartographer Maciej z Miechowa used it in his Chronica Polonorum of 1519 to apply to the period of Chinggisid hegemony.70 In 1575, the imperial ambassador Daniel Prinz also used the term.71 Direct evidence of its usage in Russian sources does not appear until the 1660s with an interpolation in one of the copies of the Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche. Subsequently, this term appears in the Synopsis of Innokentii Gizel’ in 1674.72 From there it entered the mainstream of Russian nationalist historiography in the late eighteenth century through the multivolume history of Russia by M. M. Shcherbatov.73 The term “Tatar yoke” sums up the Church’s position about the period of Chinggisid hegemony.

After the end of the Jochid Ulus, the two “discourses” that began in the Russian sources in 1448 continued on in regard to the successor khanates. The Church’s attitude was that the sons of Hagar were pagan and godless. It was basically an anti-Muslim ideology. So, the Tatars themselves were not inherently bad in the church view of things; they were bad insofar as they were Muslim. Once the Tatars converted to Christianity, their Islamic background was forgotten. Those born Tatar who converted to Orthodox Christianity were then accepted as Russians. The attitude of the state and secular authorities, as reflected in the documents, was that the Tatar khanates and Muscovy were part of the
same inter-state system, sometimes allied and sometimes opposed. Individual Tatars fought in the Muscovite cavalry and led regiments as Tatars. Those who converted to Christianity, advanced through the political system and a few, like Peter Ibramovich and Simeon Bekbulatovich, both of whom were Chinggisids, attained positions of high status in Muscovy.

NOTES

6 PSRL 2000, 3, 62.
8 PSRL 1908, 2: col. 897.
9 See, e.g., PSRL 1904, 13.1: 92 (sub anno 1339); PSRL 1922, 15.1: col. 56 (sub anno 1344); and PSRL 1913, 18: 92 (sub anno 1344).
10 For a more detailed discussion of Alexander, see Ostrowski 2009, 46–64.
12 PSRL 1997, 1: col. 524. The Patriarch of Constantinople Nikifor’s Short Chronicle has the same information but uses the spelling “Nevron.” Tikhomirov 1962, 239 (fol. 575).
14 PSRL 1997, 1: col. 473. The reference to “the princess” is probably to Anastasia, the daughter of Prince Daniil of Galicia and wife of Andrei. The “children” could refer to Iurii and Mikhail, the sons of Andrei and Anastasia, who would have been held in Sarai as hostages. Iurii later became Prince of Suzdal’ and died in 1279.
21 6785 marks the year from creation as marked by the Orthodox Church, which would be used in the chronicles.
22 PSRL 1908, 2: col. 876.
23 PSRL 1908, 2: col. 881.
24 PSRL 1908, 2: col. 888. Some of the sub anno dates in the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle are out of sync with other contemporary sources.
25 PSRL 1908, 2: cols. 888 (sub anno 1282), 897 (sub anno 1287).
26 PSRL 1908, 2: col. 894.
28 On the concept of the “virtual past,” see Ostrowski 1989, 201–220.
29 For this section, I draw on Ostrowski 1998, 149–155.
31 Golokhvastov and Leonid 1874, 71–72.
32 Kliuchevskii 1871.
34 PSRL 1885, 10: 135–136.
36 Mansikka 1913, 45 (2nd pagination).
37 Mansikka 1913, 89–90 (2nd pagination).
38 PSRL 1903, 19: col. 10; and Glazatyi et al. 1954, 46.
41 Budovnits 1958, 171–175.
43 Halperin 1983, 63.
44 See Begunov 1965, 174–175, 192.
45 Mansikka 1913, 24 (2nd pagination).
46 See, e.g., Vernadsky 1953, 148; and Zenkovsky 1986, 27, fn. 42.
47 Mansikka 1913, 45 (2nd pagination), 89–90 (2nd pagination). Stepenniaia kniga 2007, 1: 526–527. The Vasilii-Varlaam Redaction changes the name of the land where Batu meets his demise at the hands of Vladislav from Hungary to Bulgaria. Mansikka 1913, 45 (2nd pagination). This Redaction also appears in the Uvarov no. 1787 (517) (378) copy of the Velikie Minei Cheti.
48 PSRL 1921, 24: 96; PSRL 1949, 25: 139. See also Rozanov 1916, 110.
49 Mansikka 1913, 89–90 (2nd pagination).
50 Begunov 1965, 174.
51 Jakobson and Worth 1963, 64.
52 Pelenski 1974.
57 See, e.g., Nabiev 2010.
59 Maikov 1863, 139; Oinas 1978, 238.
60 Shchapov 1976, 176–179.
61 Keenan 1969, 47.
62 Keenan 1969, 44.
63 Keenan 1969, 47.
64 DDG, n. 12, 36.
65 DDG, n. 20, 56.
66 DDG, n. 21, 59; DDG n. 22, 61.
67 DDG, n. 61, 197.
68 DDG, n. 52, 156.
69 Davies 2007, 187.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


DDG, See List of Abbreviations.


Glazatyi, I., G.N. Moiseeva and V.P. Vradianova-Peretts, eds. (1954) *Kazanskaia Istoriiia*. Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR.


Mansikka, Vilho, ed. (1913) Zhitev Aleksandra Nevskogo (Razbor redaktsii i teksty). In Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti i iskusstva 180.


— The Mongols in the eyes of the Rus —

