

The
Mongol Impact
on Medieval
Russian History



RUSSIA AND THE
GOLDEN HORDE

CHARLES J. HALPERIN

In loving memory of my father,
Louis Halperin

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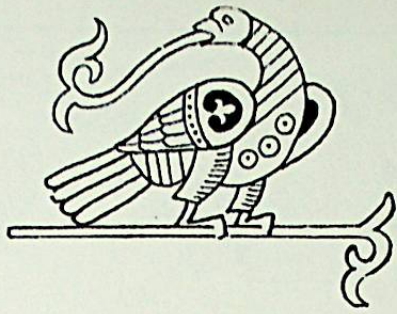
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PREFACE

Among historians of Russia, neglect of the period of Mongol domination has been the rule rather than the exception. As Michael Cherniavsky aptly observed, "There seems to have prevailed a vague desire to get rid of, to bypass, the whole question as quickly as possible."¹ Most specialists in medieval Russian history have described the Mongol influence as negligible or entirely deleterious and then moved on rapidly to other topics of investigation.² Russia's historical experience since the "Tatar Yoke" has itself contributed to this traditional prejudice among Russian writers. During the imperial period, when Russia was constantly at war with such Asiatics as the Ottoman Turks, the Central Asian Muslims, and the Japanese, the Russian populace tended to regard Muslims, nomads, and Asians with contempt and suspicion. Westernization, initiated by Peter the Great, introduced European feelings of superiority into eighteenth-century Russian historiography and racist and colonialist ideologies into nineteenth-century Russian historical writings. Imperial Russian policy toward minorities at the turn of the twentieth century engendered rabid chauvinism. The scholarly discipline of Inner Asian studies bloomed only at the end of the nineteenth century in Russia, too late to influence the treatment of Russo-Tatar relations in the classic multivolume histories of Russia.³ Even the early Russian oriental studies reflect all the prejudices of their times against nomads and Muslims.⁴

Soviet scholarship since the Russian Revolution has made great strides in the study of medieval Russia and the Mongol Empire. At the same time, it has perpetuated some of the prejudices of Imperial Russian historiography and interpolated some newer dogmas.⁵ Among Russian emigré scholars, the Eurasian movement of the 1920s tried to reinterpret Russia's relationship with the steppe but foundered in metaphysical partisanship. Eurasianism did inspire George Vernadsky, the recognized

American specialist on Russo-Tatar relations, but his contributions to the subject contain their own idiosyncratic flaws.⁶ Western scholarship, with its own set of biases, has too often echoed, at various levels of sophistication, the famous but apocryphal epigram, "Scratch a Russian and find a Tatar."⁷ Thus nationalistic prejudices, cultural condescension, and scholarly ignorance have contributed to the continued neglect of the impact of the Golden Horde on Russian history.

In recent years the situation has begun to change. A number of Western and Soviet historians, archaeologists, and philologists have shed much needed light on the period of Mongol rule. Thus far, however, no one has attempted to integrate their findings or to present a new overall interpretation of the role of the Mongols in Russian history. In this monograph I will approach this task using the paradigm of the medieval ethnoreligious frontier as a comparative framework.

NOTES

1. Michael Cherniavsky, "Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Medieval Political Theory," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), p. 459.
2. For surveys of Russian historiography on this topic consult B. D. Grekov and A. Iu. Iakubovskii, *Zolotaia orda i ee padenie* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1950), pp. 247–261; V. V. Kargalov, *Vneshnepoliticheskie faktory razvitiia feodal'noi Rusi. Feodal'naia Rus' i kochevniki* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 219–255; N. S. Borisov, "Otechestvennaia istoriografiia o vliianii tataro-mongol'skogo nashestviia na russkuiu kul'turu," *Problemy istorii SSSR V* (Moscow, 1976), pp. 129–146; and Michel Roublev, "The Scourge of God," unpublished manuscript, Chapter I, "Introduction."
3. V. V. Bartol'd, "Obzor deiatel'nosti fakul'teta vostochnykh iazykov" and "Istoriia izucheniia Vostoka v Evrope i Rossii," reprinted in V. V. Bartol'd, *Raboty po istorii vostokovedeniia* (= *Sochineniia*, tom IX; Moscow, 1977), pp. 21–196 and 197–482 respectively.
4. I. N. Berezin, "Ocherk vnutrennogo ustroistva ulus Dzhuchieva," *Trudy Vostochnago otdeleniia Russkago arkheologicheskago obshchestva* 8 (1864), pp. 387–394; V. V. Grigor'ev, "Ob otnosheniakh mezhdru kochevymi narodami i osedlymi gosudarstvami," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnago Prosveshcheniia*, ch. 178, 1875, otdel nauk (III), pp. 1–27.
5. Charles J. Halperin, "Soviet Historiography on Russia and the Mongols," *Russian Review* 41:3 (July 1982), pp. 306–322.
6. Charles J. Halperin, "George Vernadsky, Eurasianism, the Mongols and Russia," *Slavic Review* 41:3 (Fall 1982), pp. 477–493; Charles J. Halperin, "Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism," *Forschungen zur osteuropaischen Geschichte* 36 (1984), forthcoming.

7. *Macmillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Famous Sayings*, ed. Burton Stevenson (New York, 1948), p. 2019; Bergan Evans, *Dictionary of Quotations* (New York, 1968), p. 602. I could not find the epigram in Bartlett. It seems clear that the original version of the epigram was French—"Grattez le russe et vous trouverez le tartare!"—and that it arose in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is most plausibly attributed to Napoleon. See Victor Hugo, *Le Rhin* (Paris, 1900), v. 3, p. 186.

RUSSIA AND THE GOLDEN HORDE

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By Charles J. Halperin

"Scratch a Russian and find a Tatar!" In the traditional view, reflected in this epigram, Russia's supposed historical backwardness and isolation from the West are blamed largely on Russia's domination by the Mongol Golden Horde from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. In a pathbreaking reinterpretation of the impact of the Mongol yoke on medieval Russian history, framed within the comparative context of the medieval ethnoreligious frontier, Charles J. Halperin shows the Russo-Tatar relationship to have been complex, multifaceted, and by no means always hostile. Alongside the religious prejudice and ideological enmity toward the Mongols expressed in the contemporary written sources on which the traditional view is based, Halperin points to countervailing evidence—philological, archaeological, and textual—of close and pragmatic relationships involving intermarriage, mutually profitable trade and commerce, borrowing of political institutions, assimilation of Mongols into Russian society, and alliances between Russian princes and Mongol khans that left a more positive legacy. This pioneering effort at reconstructing a realistic image of Russo-Tatar relations and assessing their impact on Russian history is essential reading for anyone interested in Russian, medieval, and Inner Asian history.

CHARLES J. HALPERIN is the author of numerous articles in the field of medieval Russian history.

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