



Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History

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Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History Charles J. Halperin ..". an imaginative and dispassionate re-examination of the significance of the Mongol Conquest and its aftermath for Russia's historical development." --Slavic Review

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..". ingenious and highly articulate..." --Russian Review

Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History Details

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Daniel says

In his text "Russia and the Golden Horde," Charles Halperin effectively investigates the developments within Russian society under Mongol rule. Halperin argues that prior scholarship regarding this period has been distorted by academic bias and misleading source material, mechanisms that have created a false sense of brutality and stagnation towards the era. As he states "An unfortunate combination of circumstances involving the nature of the historical record and centuries-old prejudices has led many historians to dismiss this period as one in which Russian society was in a state of suspended animation or of cultural and economic decay." Instead, Halperin asserts that Mongol rule over the Russians involved a much more complex relationship that was simultaneously both mutually beneficial and destructive for the respective societies.

One of the most important aspects to understanding the Russian response to Mongol domination is the geographic and cultural situation of Russia in relation to foreign entities. The Russian people established themselves in a relatively permeable location that was influenced by both Western and Eastern societies. In many respects they were a component of the European commonwealth of nations through their acceptance of Byzantine Christianity, and yet they also maintained regular affiliations with the Islamic caliphate and various steppe tribes. The consequence of this interaction was a cosmopolitan attitude of cooperation and tolerance that was predicated upon economic and political imperatives. As Halperin contends, "It was often expedient for each side, when warring with one group of infidels, to make alliances with another...In the interest of profit, visitors and hosts alike learned to make concessions to each other's faiths, diets, and customs. The obvious benefits of cooperation demanded social and cultural accommodation." Through this early collaboration, Russian society was exposed to foreign sensibilities and thus not overwhelmed by the social differences that accompanied the arrival of the Mongols.

The previous system of interaction also influenced the manner in which the Russians perceived their subjugation by the Mongols, allowing them to consider the embarrassment rather less humiliating than would otherwise be expected. Because of the frequency in which the Russian military confronted the forces of outside tribes and nations, occasionally even experiencing defeat, "Russian writers recorded the events of the Mongol period within the conceptual framework evolved during the Kievan period...Through an adept and remarkably consistent use of language, in which they eschewed the terminology of conquest and even of liberation, the bookmen avoided coming to grips with the ideological conundrum of their own defeat." This view was also encouraged by the nature of the Mongol structure of occupation itself. Unlike other conquests where victors installed themselves directly as aristocratic leadership over a captured province, the Mongols did not directly garrison the whole of Russian territory. On the contrary, because of the proximity of nearby nomadic steppe armies, the Mongols found it more efficient to govern from outside Russia itself. Halperin condenses this circumstance by contending "The result for Russia was prolonged subjugation to Mongols whose cavalry remained as deadly as ever...Russia nonetheless was left, to a degree, to its own devices."

The ultimate ramifications of the Mongol domination are somewhat difficult to ascertain given the complex relations which defined the connection between Russia and the Golden Horde. Assuredly, the conflict initially involved enormous losses for the Russians, both in regards to property and human life. Yet this destruction eventually progressed into a restructuring of the Russian commercial system which allowed economic practices to flourish. Tangible examples of this phenomenon include the increasing wealth of the Russian Orthodox Church as a result of Mongol patronage, and the rise of Moscow as a political center due

to the adoption of various Tatar establishments. Haleprin resolves this dichotomy by explaining "Unquestionably, the conquest was a catastrophe, but a catastrophe need not have permanent effects. The Russian economy recovered from the devastating campaigns of 1237-1240 and survived the harsh regimen of taxation and exploitation that followed. Furthermore, by fostering international trade, especially with the Orient, the Golden Horde fostered the resurgence of the Russian economy and the subsequent growth of Russian power."

The legacy of the Mongol conquest continues to be a subject hotly debated by scholars in the field of Russian history. Some consider the period to be responsible for the "backwardness" which dominated Russia in relation to Europe for the next several centuries. Others see the era as a masked blessing which provided Russian society with the elements to successfully expand and diversify. Both approaches however, concur in that they respect the repercussions, positive or negative, that the Mongols had on the Russian nation. Halperin states "The Horde's bureaucratic evolution, foreign policies, and internal politics all had enormously important consequences for Russia and must be part of any coherent vision of the times." Arguably, the legacy of the Golden Horde is equally pertinent to a holistic understanding of many modern Russian institutions and attitudes as well.

BDT says

An easy read for a period of history with lots of names, dates, and battles, yet almost exceedingly so. The work is very short despite covering several centuries of history, and at times glosses over important concepts. A good intro for someone with no background on the Golden Horde's influence on medieval Russia, yet limited in further extended discussion.

Sean McCarrey says

This book was very dry, but still it was a fascinating look at Russia during the time of the Golden Horde. It not only explores this period, but it also explores the prejudice and biases of historians since that time.

Fred Dameron says

A thesis paper disguised as a book. If you're really into Russian history it's a good read if not, it's a thesis.

Naomi says

This was an excellent introduction into the impact of the Mongolian imperialists in Russia both at the time of their domination (which was 200 years - an incredible period of time), and in their lasting effect on Russian life and culture since - in some ways quite obvious but in others more subtle and archaic. I was most

interested in the shift of seat of power from Kiev to Russia and how this came about.

Charles says

Great info, very readable.

Madison says

Despite the overwhelming lack of historical recordings, Halperin manages to weave a concise and readable story of the Russians under the Tatar-Mongol Yoke. Halperin describes how he drew his conclusions as well as the reasons why it is so difficult today to understand the true impact of the Mongols on Russian history and development.

Nina says

Short, informative, to the point, with ample evidence and strong logic, this book filled in the gaps left by my Soviet education in my understanding of my own people's history.

Shannon says

Surprisingly readable, and pretty damn interesting.

Jan-Maat says

In 1575 Ivan the Terrible abdicated as Tsar in favour of one Symeon Bekbulatovich. Symeon was a Chingisid, a descendant of Genghis Khan.

Halperin's book aims to show why such a seemingly bizarre action might have been an explicable piece of political theatre in sixteenth century Russia by examining both the complexities of Mongol influence and the relative silence of the Russian sources. It is a good introduction to a complex and engaging subject.

The starting point is the idea of an ideology of silence. History was recorded by churchmen writing in an explicitly Christian context and in common with the rest of Europe portrayed relations between Christians and non-Christians as dominated by conflict, preferring to ignore and remain silent about non-warlike, peaceful relations which have to be inferred from the sources.

Halperin shows that the Russian sources took an ideology of silence further than other medieval Christian writers by attempting to largely ignore the fact of the conquest of the Russian Princes in the early 1240s by using the same language as they had done to describe earlier conflicts between the Russians and the Polovtsy, using terms like raiding or plundering and ignoring the reality of being a part of the Mongol

Empire until it was coming to end in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Naturally the argument turns on the nature of the source material. At places Halperin comes across as sweeping in his judgements but then again he was engaging with deep rooted models, taking issue with Karamzin and Solovyov who wrote at the beginning and towards the end of the nineteenth century respectively.

The subject of the "Tatar Yoke" (as much as the question of Russia's origins) has tended to have wide ranging political resonances and it is noteworthy how much Halperin attributes to internal developments within the Moscow state, whether that be the decline of town assemblies, the rise of the nobility and the development of the autocratic rule of the Grand Princes (later Tsars) that has often been blamed on the Mongol influence instead. Some of his views have been nuanced since, for instance Ostrowsky in Muscovy and the Mongols argues that the seclusion of elite Muscovite women in the *Terem* was a custom adopted from Byzantium rather than a local innovation.

Ivan the Terrible's abdication didn't last long, he formally restored himself as Tsar in 1576, but the incident suggests something of the enduring complexities of the relations between the conquered and the conquerors.

Aneel says

I grabbed this book from Quincy probably almost a decade ago. It was one of the texts of a Russian history class he was taking. It's been on my shelf since. I'm not sure why it suddenly looked appealing, but I started it. It's very dry. I'm sure the historical detail is fascinating to scholars in the field. Less so to me. Now that I've started something else, I'll probably never finish this.

Jakob Zetwick says

Interesting but inconclusive history. That's mostly because Russian primary source documents were destroyed. Not an easy read.

Lesley says

Halperin attempts to argue a thesis based on non-existent evidence and does a phenomenal job. An interesting twist to an old history.
