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# The Horde

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HOW THE MONGOLS  
CHANGED THE WORLD

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## Note on Transliteration

This book includes many terms originating in non-English languages. Most of these terms have numerous acceptable English spellings. I have attempted throughout to prioritize both accuracy and legibility.

Spellings of persons' names follow well-established English-language forms (e.g., William of Rubruck, Michael Palaiologos). The common spelling of Genghis Khan, however, is given here under its historically correct form of Chinggis Khan, a usage shared by most historians of the Mongol Empire. I use common Europeanized spellings of titles such as caliph and emir. Place names are also given in common anglicized forms when these are available (e.g., Caucasus, Herat). I sometimes reference current geographic terms (e.g., China, Europe) that may appear anachronistic in context; however, these terms are useful for orienting readers and hopefully won't offend specialists.

For the spelling of Mongolian terms and names, I largely follow the system employed by Christopher Atwood in *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. These spellings are based on the Uighur-Mongolian script, as pronounced in the Mongolian language of the relevant time period. In some cases, however, I use more common forms (e.g., Hülegü instead of Hüle'ü). And in some cases Mongolian terms are given in their Turkic and Russian forms (e.g., *tarkhan*, *yarlik*), in accordance with common usage in the sources and in scholarship.

Arabic words and names have been transliterated according to the system used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, except that I omit the dot diacritic (e.g., I use h instead of ḥ). In most cases the transliteration of Persian and Turkic words follows the same simplified system. Russian has been transliterated according to the system of the Library of Congress, without diacritics. For Chinese names I have employed the pinyin system.

# Introduction

## A POWER OF A NEW KIND

The Horde was neither a conventional empire nor a dynastic state, even less a nation-state. It was a great nomadic regime born from the Mongol expansion of the thirteenth century, an equestrian regime that became so powerful it ruled virtually all of today's Russia, including western Siberia, for almost three centuries. The Horde was the most enduring regime of all those that descended from the Mongol conquerors. Yet, despite the rich evidence we possess about the Horde, it remains little understood. Far more has been written about the Ilkhanids, the Mongol rulers of the Middle East, and the Yuan, the dynasty inaugurated in China by descendants of Chinggis Khan. The fascinating tale of the Horde remains as though behind a veil.

This book reveals the Horde's story, which begins in the East Asian steppe where, in the early thirteenth century, Chinggis Khan united the nomads—Mongols and other steppe peoples—and began building the largest contiguous empire in the world. Chinggis gave four of his sons each his own *ulus*, his own people, and territory in which to establish themselves. Key to this history is the inheritance of Jochi, Chinggis's eldest and chief heir. Jochi was entrusted with the conquest of the steppe

west of Mongolia, a vast region that reaches its ecological limits in Hungary. Jochi, however, slighted his father, and Chinggis stripped his priority to the throne. The consequences were profound. In the 1240s, after Jochi died, his sons, warriors, and their families moved to the temperate zone between the Volga-Ural region and the Black Sea where they established a new kind of Mongol administration, largely independent of the empire. The Jochid pioneers maintained Mongol practices but would never go back to Mongolia. In less than three decades, a few thousand people became hundreds of thousands, creating a sophisticated social organization able to sustain their own imperial formation. This multitude recognized itself as *ulus Jochi* and referred to their empire as *Orda*—the Horde.

The Horde was a flexible regime, able to adapt to internal changes and external pressures. The Horde was also wealthy and powerful enough to rule its neighbors and secure autonomy from the Mongol center. Jochid leaders recalibrated relations with the other descendants of Chinggis to maintain stability, and they kept control of the cities and trade routes between the Aral and Black seas, securing critical commercial avenues. Indeed, the Horde dominated Eurasian continental trade and, in the process, shaped the trajectories of Russia and Central Asia until the sixteenth century.

Historians know this mighty and influential regime as the Golden Horde or the Qipchaq Khanate, a reference to the Qipchaq people, prior inhabitants of the lands the Horde took over. These scholars increasingly have recognized the Horde's historical significance and yet rarely have attempted fully to explain it. This book seeks to examine the Horde on its own terms, to grasp how this regime emerged, developed over the centuries, adjusting and transforming while keeping its nomadic character. Importantly, we need to put native concepts, such as *ulus*, *sarai* (sedentary cities the nomads built, including a major one called simply Sarai), *khan* (ruler), and *beg* (nomadic leaders) front and center to explain the Horde from within.

This book not only captures the obscured social and political nature of the Horde, it also reconsiders the Horde's legacy—its impact on global history. In the second half of the thirteenth century, economic exchange intensified, integrating almost all of Eurasia. Today most historians have accepted the notion of a Mongol world empire, coalescing in one eco-



conomic system the main subsystems of the Eurasian landmass, roughly divided into East Asia, the Islamic world, the Slavic world, and Europe.<sup>1</sup> Under Mongol domination, faraway regions of the globe came into contact more than superficially and, for at least a century spanning the mid-1200s to the mid-1300s, these regions were linked in a common network of exchange and production. For the first time, people and caravans could travel safely from Italy to China.

Historians used to call this unprecedented commercial boom *Pax Mongolica*, the Mongol Peace, in reference to the post-conquest stability of the Mongol dominions and the far-flung exchange that stability enabled. Yet, as recent scholarship notes, relations among the descendants of Chinggis Khan were not peaceful. Nor was there peace, exactly, between the Mongols and the peoples they conquered. The notion of peace here should be understood more clearly as conquered peoples' acceptance of Mongol domination. But we need not discard the concept just because the word "peace" is not entirely appropriate. Here I reexamine the *Pax Mongolica* as the Mongol exchange: a macro-historical phenomenon on par with such world-shaping phenomena as the Trans-Saharan trade or the Columbian exchange. Understood as the Mongol exchange, the global moment created by Chinggis Khan's successors comes into focus.<sup>2</sup>

The Mongol exchange is a monumental shift that facilitated the flourishing of art, the development of skilled crafts, and the progress of research in various areas such as botany, medicine, astronomy, measurement systems, and historiography. The increased production and circulation of manufactured objects, often driven by Mongol leaders themselves, is another major effect of this world phenomenon. Ceramics, manuscripts, textiles, music, poetry, weapons: the Mongols wanted everything to be produced and distributed inside their territories. The Mongols also imported goods and enacted policies to attract traders. The khans valued merchants, granting them lofty distinctions, legal privileges, and tax exemptions. Nomads invested in travel equipment, weaponry, and fashionable clothing, and they craved furs, leather, and imported luxury fabrics made of silk and cotton. The steppe had its understood social markers, some of which necessitated manufacture and trade: carrying expensive weapons indicated status; so did wearing jewels, belts, hats, fine robes, and leather boots. High-ranking women had a distinctive way of dressing and wore a conical headdress (*ku-ku*

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Pottery figure of a Mongol man (China, fourteenth century). Mongol herders, male and female, wore a *deel*, a large overcoat made from cotton, silk, or wool. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Gift of Elizabeth V. Cockcroft, by exchange, 2008)

or *boqta*) as a widely recognized symbol of their status. The “Mongol fashion” made an impression on foreign travelers, who noted that many people, even Europeans, wanted to look like them.

In some senses, manufactured objects were luxuries for the nomads, yet the nomads were not frivolous. Luxuries were vital to the Mongol political economy. Long-distance exchange and circulation of manufactured goods were not essential to subsistence, yet they were the backbone of the social order. Mongol economics relied on the circulation of these goods, in particular their redistribution from the khan to the elites to the commoners, a system that simultaneously reinforced social rank, created bonds of dependence, and gave even the least in society a reason to feel invested in the success of the regime. Steppe nomads further understood circulation as a spiritual necessity. Sharing wealth mollified the spirits of the dead, the sky, and the earth.

Across Eurasia, the Mongols enjoyed clear hegemony over the circulation of goods from the mid-thirteenth until the mid-fourteenth



Illustration of a bowl with an image of a panther (Horde, fourteenth century). Big cats were symbols of rule; khans collected them for prestige and for hunting.

century, and while some of the Mongol regimes faltered in this period, the Horde continued to facilitate long-distance trade. The Mongols built dense economic connections from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea to China. This was due in part to their integrative policies: the Mongols welcomed new subjects into their societies, regardless of those subjects' origins, religions, and ways of life. Even freshly defeated enemies were brought into the fold. The Mongols shrewdly combined state power—over treaties, currency issuance, taxation, supervision of roads—with liberal exchange policies. Although tributes were a key source of revenue, the Mongols provided tax exemptions in order to encourage commerce. And the Mongols approached partnerships fluidly, making alliances on the basis of common interest rather than ethnic or religious affiliation—although they exploited such affiliations as well. In the 1260s the Jochid elite even converted en masse to Islam in order to win powerful friends and trading partners in Muslim-ruled lands. Berke Khan, the Jochid leader at the time, did not lack true religious conviction, but nor were he and his top advisors blind to the realpolitik benefits of their decision and nor did they scorn non-Muslim partners.

The Jochid conversion solidified links between Mongol imperialism and Mamluk Egypt, one of many relationships that made the Mongol exchange a global phenomenon. The Jochids also established trading relationships with Russians, Germans, Genoese, Venetians, Byzantines, and Greeks, and their trade network at times could reach as far as Flanders. In truth, the Columbian exchange should be seen in part as a legacy of the Mongol exchange, as historians have established that Christopher Columbus was looking for a quicker, safer route to India, possibly after he had heard of Marco Polo's travels to the Mongol imperial center in the Far East.<sup>3</sup> The Mongol exchange, on this view, is not really a historical turning point from the medieval to the modern, although the Pax Mongolica tends to be perceived this way. Rather, the Mongol exchange transcends the separation between medieval and modern. The Mongol exchange bridges the gap between the ancient world's Silk Road and the modern world's Age of Exploration, transforming our historical perception of both.<sup>4</sup>

We must distinguish between the Mongol exchange and the Mongol Empire, as they are not the same thing. Certainly it is important to note their mutual influence: how they produced each other, how they interacted with each another, and how they finally parted ways, as the

dynamics and effects of the Mongol exchange lasted long after the collapse of the empire. One of the remarkable dimensions of the interaction between empire and exchange is that the empire did not disrupt the exchange. The Mongols interfered with the economic organization of their subjects and projected their power farther than any other imperial formations of their time. Yet the Mongols understood that control over craft production, currency, traders, harvests, and crops had to be flexible and supple, and respectful of the practices and traditions of dominated peoples. Thus, for instance, when Mongols conquered new territories, they usually minted coins that were familiar to the locals and were easily accepted in existing circuits of exchange. Furthermore, the Mongols did not try to extract value from subjects no matter the cost to the subjects—that is, the Mongols did not enslave their subjects and work them to death, as much later colonial regimes in the Atlantic world did. Rather, the goal of Mongol imperial oversight and intervention was to motivate and empower subjects to produce and trade across the empire, thereby enriching their Mongol overlords. Why was there no clash between globalization and empire building during the height of Mongol domination? This is a phenomenon that needs explaining, and I believe the explanation lies in the unique imperial policies of the Mongols.

Over the past several decades, scholarship on the Mongols has developed tremendously. Thomas Allsen's work is especially important.<sup>5</sup> He was the first to demonstrate that the Mongol Empire must be understood as an integrative system beyond the regional divisions—the Chinese territory, the Middle Eastern territory, the Qipchaq steppe, and so on—that formed in the wake of Chinggis Khan. Drawing on Allsen's work, a new generation of historians has reinterpreted the history and legacy of the empire. Masterfully conducted by Michal Biran, Nicola Di Cosmo, Peter Jackson, Hodong Kim, Timothy May, David Morgan, and others, new research demonstrates that a holistic view is necessary to understanding the functioning of the Mongol Empire.<sup>6</sup> What happened in Qaraqorum, the Mongol imperial capital, resonated deeply in Sarai, the Jochid capital on the lower Volga River. (Readers should not be misled by terms such as "capital." These cities were built and favored by the khans, but the khans did not live in them except during annual festivals and on other special occasions. As I detail throughout the book, khans lived on the road, migrating with their people and herds.)

Scholars have begun to sweep away old stereotypes of marauding plunderers showing instead that the Mongol Empire was a complex political, social, and economic entity resembling a federation or a commonwealth. Our challenge now is to combine the bird's-eye view with a microhistory perspective of Mongol Eurasia. The idea of global microhistory is to connect the local and world registers, in order to deepen our understanding of both. The small scale, the voices of individual people and the scenes of their lives, provides details that inform world-wide history. The voices of individual people may be hard to track down, especially from early periods. But the task is not impossible, especially when the voices are those of the Horde—a well-documented case, if not one that has otherwise received comprehensive treatment.<sup>7</sup>

Holism has shown us that the Chinggisid empire was full of mutual influences, as its various portions shaped each other. But that does not mean the empire was a monolith. Its diversity emerges in microhistorical accounting. The empire fostered several enduring nomadic regimes led by the Jochids, Chagatayids, Ögödeids, and Toluids, named for four sons of Chinggis Khan. Each of these regimes deserves to be studied separately, in detail. This study focuses on the Jochid regime—the Horde—illuminating its particular implementations of and departures from Mongol styles of rule and examining the longstanding effects of Jochid policies on global history.

While scholars have recognized that nomads could create complex political structures, scholars also have yet to fully grasp the nomads' level of agency in the Mongol exchange, in particular the Horde's impact on Eurasian geopolitics. Large questions remain. In what ways did the Mongols, the Horde in particular, shape the world around it? How were the Horde and other Mongols shaped by their encounter with the outside world? How did Mongol rulers adapt their inherited traditions of governance without losing their nomadic and historically anchored identities?

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The Horde transformed as the world around it changed. As such, the Horde was also a product of the Mongol exchange. This raises the question of the weight of the Horde's agency on the global system, especially on the so-called peripheries of northern Eurasia and Siberia.

Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of the Mongol integrative system lies in the rise of northern Eurasia, specifically Russia. The political and economic development of the Russian principalities under the Horde's domination also enabled the Horde to grow out of the Mongol matrix. Russian vassalage was a relationship that influenced both partners—the Russians and the Jochids—decisively.

Much of the Jochid influence on Russia derived from the Horde's trade policies, which helped to create the largest integrated market in premodern history, a network that connected the circuits of the Baltic, the Volga, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea in a single operative system, which was itself linked to Central Asia, China, the Middle East, and Europe. Against the enduring stereotype of parasitical nomads, we find that the Horde generated wealth. Consummate generalists, nomadic leaders repurposed military logistics to enhance long-distance trade, drawing on the army's messenger system (the *yam*) to ship goods and commercial orders. And while the Horde and other Mongols were primarily herders, they also learned to manipulate their environment and exploit natural resources such as salt, medicinal herbs, and wood. They planted millet and organized extensive fish farming. They firmly controlled access to grasslands, trade routes, and marketplaces and enticed foreigners to trade near their headquarters. The Mongols also took advantage of the skills and capacities of those they conquered. Hordes expanded their commercial networks in part by taking over existing nexuses of craft and trade. The goal was not to pillage these locations—although the Mongols sometimes did pillage—but to encourage the inhabitants to continue the work at which they already excelled so that the Mongols could reap the rewards through taxation. Thus even if few Jochids settled in the subjugated port towns and salt-mining villages of the Black Sea region, the Horde benefited by taxing the merchants and producers plying their trades there. The result was dramatic, as the Horde filled in the gap between markets east and west, north and south, enabling a continental economic order.

The Horde's social, political, and economic systems were products of both continuity and change. All were in fact processes, malleable and subject to adjustment as circumstances dictated. Most basically, day-to-day life involved movement, as hordes rarely stayed long in one place. The nomads migrated across their territories, following seasonal

changes to ensure their herds' access to pasture and their own access to suitable campsites. The seasons also dictated when the Mongols made war. Foreign policy, a critical dimension of Mongol-led globalization, was in constant flux. The Jochid khans were especially agile in their diplomacy, forming a complex web of multilateral relations driven by trade and shifting alliances. Mamluk Egypt, Byzantium, Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy, Venice, and Genoa were all involved in commercial exchanges with the Horde; all were at times its allies and at other times its enemies. What looks like political inconsistency was in fact calculated strategy. Even identity was a fluid process, as the Jochids turned to Islam while still embracing the law and spiritual sensibilities of the steppe—law and sensibilities that were themselves the products of generations of development.

The wonder is that the Horde managed to maintain a distinctive social and political order devoted to assimilation and globalization. How? How did it adopt others and adapt to them? How, as the central Mongol Empire collapsed in the second half of the thirteenth century, did the Horde keep alive a system of commercial exchange driven by Mongol methods of governance? Even the best-documented works on the Black Sea trade and the Horde have not properly answered these questions.

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“Horde,” when it was applied to the people of Jochi, was an old word for a new regime. The term itself has a long history that can be traced back to the time of the early Han in China (207 BCE–9 CE).<sup>8</sup> Most historians equate the Mongolian term *orda* with a khan's court and his main military headquarters. Wherever there was a khan or other nomadic leader—whether the great khan, the ruler of the Mongol Empire; the khan of the Horde or another ulus; or the chiefs heading each of the migratory masses in a given ulus or territory—there was a horde. To the Mongols themselves, “horde” had a wide and complex meaning. A horde was an army, a site of power, a people under a ruler, a huge camp. These meanings did not exclude one another; in concert, they captured the sense that the regime was coextensive with its mobile people. A horde did not have to be in one place in order to govern itself or sedentary subjects; hordes migrated, dispersed, and gathered anew,



all while exercising control. Mongols embedded mobility into their strategies of rule, as I discuss in detail in chapter 3.

Much of the literature about the Horde—and other Mongol regimes—uses the word “khanate” to denote the imperial formations that emerged from the Mongol Empire. This term comes from the Persian *khānāt*. Struggling to understand the alien political institutions the Mongols created, Persian administrators coined “khanate,” modeling it on their own “sultanate.” Persians thus emphasized the position of the khan. But while the khan was a leading figure, each regime was a collective power. Jochi’s ulus, Tolui’s ulus, and all the other uluses were jointly ruled. They had a single overarching leader who also led his own horde, while other hordes within the ulus had their own administrators. Major decisions were made by the khan in consultation with advisors and elites, including the administrators of the hordes the khan did not oversee directly. And the ulus’s wealth was shared among all its people, albeit unequally. Given the distributed nature of authority in Mongol society, terms such as “horde” and “ulus” are more useful in describing nomadic power formations than is “khanate.” And many contemporaries writing about Mongol rule did use the term “horde” to name this changeable sort of empire built on mobility, expansion and assimilation, diplomacy, and trade. A power of a different kind required a different kind of name.

The term “horde” entered Persian, Arabic, Russian, and all European languages following the Mongol conquests, and it is widely used today to denote a large crowd of unruly or uncontrollable people. This usage is a distant echo of “horde” as it appears in medieval sources written by travelers, many of them religious men otherwise accustomed to sedentary lives. These observers saw the Mongol power as brutal yet socially constructive. Foreign witnesses admitted the difficulty they faced in grasping who the Mongol newcomers were and what they wanted, and often travelers were scared by what they encountered. From these medieval accounts, permeated by the awe and fear of their authors, we get the modern sense of a horde as a powerful and frightening mass.

When discussing the people of Jochi, I used the term they used for themselves—Horde, with a capital H. I also use the Mongolian appellation ulus Jochi. “Ulus” bears various meanings in the medieval sources, but mostly it refers to the peoples descended from and conquered by

Jochi, Chagatay, Ögödei, and Tolui, the four sons of Chinggis and his chief wife, Börte. In the course of his conquests, Chinggis came to rule many subjects, whom he bequeathed to his heirs. These peoples included warriors and their families, craftsmen, merchants, and farmers. They were nomads, including Mongols and other steppe dwellers, and sedentary peoples. All these people comprised an ulus. Although historians may translate “ulus” as “state” or “empire,” according to contemporaries, an ulus was not primarily a territorial entity but instead bore the sense of a sovereign political community. Ulus Jochi, then, refers the descendants of Jochi together with all their subjects—whether nomadic subjects who fully assimilated, such as the Qipchaqs or Mongols of non-Jochid lineages, or sedentary subjects who maintained a separate ethnic identity, such as the Russians.

As such, ulus differs from horde. A horde is more precisely a nomadic regime or power. An ulus, by contrast, encompasses the people—both the sovereign and all his subjects. The historian and anthropologist Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene points out that, in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources, the meaning of ulus was close to that of the common Mongolian word for people, *irgen*. “The Medieval Mongol ulus was a category of government that was turned into a ‘community of the realm’ and as such it was assumed to be ‘a natural, inherited community of tradition, custom, law and descent’, a ‘people’ or *irgen*,” he writes.<sup>9</sup>

The Horde was socially diverse and multiethnic, but its leadership came from a core of dominant steppe clans, most of them Mongol subgroups: Qonggirad, Kiyad, Qatay, Manghit, Saljut, Shirin, Barin, Arghun, and Qipchaqs. The heads of these groups bore the title of *beg*. As the Horde became increasingly oligarchic in the late thirteenth century, power devolved from the khan to the begs, the nomadic leaders who joined the khan in a governing council. The begs acknowledged the khan’s primacy because he was a descendent of Chinggis Khan’s eldest son, Jochi. But that status did not make a khan all-powerful. To be elevated on the felt rug—the procedure for enthronement—an aspirant had to associate himself with powerful begs. Similarly, to rule effectively, a khan needed the begs on his side. They supported him and, if he failed, deposed him. This was especially the case after the 1350s, during and following a period known as the *bulqaq*—anarchy. In the

course of this period, several pretenders to the Jochid throne struggled to take and keep power. While they foundered, the locus of authority shifted definitively to the begs. They maintained the Horde's governing traditions, sought to elevate new khans who could rule in the image of Chinggis and his descendants, and pursued power for themselves.<sup>10</sup>

No single study has heretofore treated the Horde as a case of effective empire building, but historicizing this specific form of collective power is essential for understanding post-Chinggisid steppe societies and the nomads' role in Eurasian history. I hope that this book will serve as a model for grasping the impact of nomadic empires on world history—and that the book will help readers rethink the conventional view of empires as invariably sedentary powers. Historically, sedentary powers have indeed erected powerful empires, often dominating nomads in the process. But nomads have also established sovereignty over sedentary peoples. By capturing the notion of a moveable state, this book offers a new perspective on collective power and on the fascinating shapes it can take.<sup>11</sup>

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If the Horde were projected on today's maps, it would stretch across a region occupied by Ukraine, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Russia, including Tatarstan and Crimea. The history of the Horde is therefore a shared legacy. That legacy does not belong exclusively to the national narratives of any of these nation-states, narratives centered on linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities that had very different experiences with the Horde and today invest those experiences with a range of meanings. As a result, the historiography of the Horde has tended to depend very much on the standpoint of the historian. Where nationalisms solidified in opposition to Mongol rule, historians have told one kind of story; where nationalisms presume continuity with the Mongol past, historians have told another kind of story.

In Russian nationalist scholarship, the Horde is an alien entity with disruptive effects on the formation of the Russian nation. In the Soviet Union, the Russian experience of vassalage to the Horde was distorted, marginalized, and often simply erased from textbooks. Historians and

archaeologists were not allowed to use the terms “Horde” or “Golden Horde.” Instead, the Mongol regime that conquered the medieval Russian principalities was called the “Tatar yoke.”<sup>12</sup> But Tatars—a group often conflated with Mongols—and other Muslim peoples now living in the Russian Federation see the Horde’s rule as a formative period in their history. Indeed, the Islamization of the Eurasian steppes, Crimea, and Eastern Europe is one of the Horde’s most important legacies. Islam, as practiced in the Horde after the mid-thirteenth century, was a unifying force in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup>

The sweep of the Jochids across so many different peoples was enabled in part by their liberal style of rule. Like most empires, the Horde accommodated diverse religious communities. The toleration practiced by nomadic leaders reflected their respect for wide-ranging approaches to belief and superstition. Indeed, the Mongols readily adopted the spiritual practices of other steppe peoples before striking out into Eurasia with their eyes on conquest, so the idea that a single polity might accommodate multiple belief systems was not unfamiliar to them. Thus the Horde’s steppe descendants could embrace Islam even as they continued to practice their old spiritual traditions, conquered peoples faced no obstacles in practicing their traditions, and religious dignitaries visiting the Horde enjoyed protected status whether they were Muslims, Jews, Armenian Christians, Catholics, Russian Orthodox, or Pagans. Toleration was a pragmatic option. As the Franciscan friar Iohanca put it in 1320, the Jochids “could not care less to what religion someone belongs as long as he performs the required services, pay tributes and taxes and satisfies his military obligations according to their laws.” Toleration also served power aims. In addition to allowing free practice of diverse religions, the Jochids provided special financial and legal protections for Christian and Muslim clergy because the Horde’s leaders knew that the support of religious elites would enhance Jochid legitimacy in the eyes of conquered peoples.

Some of the most significant beneficiaries of Jochid protections were Russian Orthodox clergy and institutions, which blossomed under Mongol rule. Russian scholars—whose work dominates historical writing about the Horde—have lately paid more attention to this process of development, moving beyond nationalist biases by asking questions that do not presuppose the oppressiveness of the supposed Tatar yoke. These scholars are reconciling Russia with the Islamic dimension of its

past: their question is not how Russia survived the Horde, but how the Horde helped to create modern Russia.

English-language scholarship has been more likely to take for granted the Horde's contributions to Russia's development. In particular, the question of the Horde's legacy has often been linked to the rise of Muscovy, the Grand Duchy of Moscow.<sup>14</sup> The goal of this scholarship is to understand how the Horde influenced the institutions of Muscovite power and therefore of Moscow's successor, imperial Russia. Yet, as exciting as this discourse is, it leads to dead ends. Because this scholarship is based primarily on Russian sources, it is limited by the contents of those sources, which are in many ways rich but do not include much information on the Horde's administrative systems. I therefore turn to a range of other sources in order to show how the Horde functioned administratively and how it handled relations with its Russian vassals. When we take as our subject the Horde, rather than the Russians, the Mongol influence on the emergence of Moscow and the development of the Russian imperial state comes into sharper focus.

The Russian principalities experienced extraordinary economic vitality during their vassalage to the Horde. New cities were built—as many as forty in northeastern Russia during the fourteenth century. Artisanal production grew dramatically and trade developed rapidly, bringing Eurasian long-distance commerce to the Baltic sphere, the far north, and small towns such as Moscow itself, which burgeoned only after the Jochids bestowed favor on Moscow's leading family. But while scholars have acknowledged all this, they have struggled to properly explain it.<sup>15</sup> I argue that Russia's economic growth was a product of the Horde's political agenda. The Jochid khans prioritized fluidity in commercial markets and used their foreign policy to ensure the productivity of the fur and silver trades, which were essential to the development of Novgorod, one of the economic centers of the Russian principalities. When Russian princes and boyars objected to granting foreign traders access to their territory, the Jochids forced the Russians to relent, a move that proved extremely valuable to Russian development. At the same time, the Jochids granted Russian elites financial and legal protections that facilitated production in the orchards, fisheries, farms, and craft workshops those elites owned. The Jochid-dominated Eurasian trade network was a source of Russian wealth and therefore power.

If historians have so far failed to appreciate the influence of the Horde on the development of Russian power, they have also misunderstood the political relationship between the Horde and the Russians. Scholars have perceived the Russians as members of a “steppe frontier,” at the periphery of Jochid power, whereas in fact Russians were deeply enmeshed in the nomadic state.<sup>16</sup> The Jochid khans considered the Russian principalities part of their dominion. The Horde took censuses of the people living in the principalities and taxed them. The Jochids did not impose direct rule over the Russians but did closely supervise the grand prince of Vladimir, the highest-ranking figure in the Russian principalities. The principalities benefited from the khans’ military support, land grants, and tax exemptions. Protection for the Russian Orthodox clergy was a constant feature of Jochid politics. The clergy affirmed Jochid sovereignty and in return received lucrative financial benefits that contributed to the church’s thriving. Marriages between Jochid princesses and Russian princes strengthened connections between the Horde’s rulers and their vassals. The Jochids also rewrote the process of succession to the position of grand prince and eventually placed his throne in the hands of the Muscovites. The Jochids in many ways created Moscow’s authority, fundamentally altering the course of Russian history.

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This story begins in the East Asian steppe in the late twelfth century. The steppe was divided among the Mongols and other nomadic groups. Only the most prominent of the groups, such as the Tatars, Kereit, and Naiman, claimed collective names and were recorded in the Persian, Chinese, Russian, and other sources available to historians today. Steppe nomads were not all cut from the same cloth, but they did share a number of political, social, spiritual, and economic institutions. The first chapter provides a broad picture of the complex and dynamic relations among these nomadic groups.

Chapter 1 also traces Chinggis’s rise to power in 1206 and the violent process whereby he and his followers unified the steppe nomads under the banner of the Mongols. I describe the Mongol conquests in Central Asia, a process that was completed in 1221, and uncover the causes of the Mongol expansion. I show that, contrary to the prevailing view, the Mongols did not seek the annihilation of sedentary civilizations. Rather,

Chinggis Khan and his sons' primary goal was the submission of other steppe nomads.

The second chapter opens with Chinggis's apportioning of the Mongol Empire among his sons. The inheritance structure on which Chinggis relied was in part his own invention and in part an adaptation of steppe redistribution systems that long predated him. This is a key theme of the book: Mongol rulers drew on deep traditions of social and political organization but modified these traditions as befit their circumstances. The Jochids were especially innovative, as reflected in their efforts to assert Mongol-style governance over Eastern Europe, where political life was nothing like that of the steppe. Chapter 2 shows how consequential Chinggis's modification of traditional practice was for the future development of the Horde.

The second chapter ends with the Jochid conquest of Hungary in the western margins of the Qipchaq steppe, which would become the new homeland of the Horde's leaders. By the time the Horde established its dominance in the Qipchaq steppe, Chinggis Khan had died. So had Jochi; his successors took on the key tasks of consolidating the Jochid regime. Apparently, before Jochi's death, he profoundly disappointed his father, resulting in Chinggis's rescinding Jochi's place as heir to the position of great khan—the Mongol throne. But the empire survived the tumult and remained expansive, integrating China, Iran, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

The middle part of the book examines the Horde as a new kind of empire. Chapter 3 explores how ulus Jochi organized itself politically and adapted to its natural and human environment. I explain how the ulus handled its first succession controversy, after Jochi's death. The result was a foundational agreement between two of Jochi's sons, Orda and Batu, and the creation of the two wings of ulus Jochi under their leadership: the White Horde (*ak orda*), under Batu's leadership, and the Blue Horde (*kök orda*) under Orda's. The Horde as a whole would be ruled by Batu, whose lineage retained the throne for more than a century. This is another example of tradition and innovation operating in concert. On the one hand, the Jochid lineage remained supreme: no one outside the lineage was considered a legitimate candidate for the office of khan. On the other hand, the traditional priority given to elders over juniors was upset, as Orda was Batu's senior. Much as Jochi, the eldest of Chinggis's sons, was

demoted from his position of seniority, so too was Orda. The balance between seniors and juniors was always critical in Mongol societies; it contoured relations in the family and in the court of administration. It was also subject to revision as needed. By relinquishing his claim rather than fighting for the throne, Orda helped to inaugurate a time of peace within the Horde. This is another theme we will see repeatedly across the book: in the Mongol world, separation was a prophylactic against civil war. The steppe was vast, allowing plenty of space for rivals to part amicably and pursue their own ends with relative autonomy. Thus while the White Horde, under Batu, was the center of Jochid governance, Orda's Blue Horde could function largely on its own while cooperating with the White Horde for the good of the larger ulus Jochi.

Both wings of the Horde thrived in the mid-thirteenth century. The Horde harnessed new lands and sedentary subjects and fostered a dynamic market on the steppes. Contemporary travelers described an impressively organized nomadic society involving large numbers of people and massive encampments with city-like facilities. Observers marveled at the swiftness with which the members of the Horde packed and unpacked during their seasonal migration. These observers noted the nomads' facility in driving animals and fording rivers, their massive carts overflowing with goods, and the security of their communities. Although the Horde was dominated by nomads, Batu encouraged the development of settlements and cities to support sedentary subjects. His regime reflected the imperatives that had driven centuries of nomadic leaders: to enable movement of the herds and accrual of wealth so that riches could be redistributed in accordance with the social hierarchy of the community. Batu and other Jochid leaders pursued these goals using new means, as befit the ecology of their westerly empire and the needs and aptitudes of dominated peoples—another exercise in the flexibility of Mongol governance. Most important among these dominated peoples were the Russians, whose close relationship with the Horde began under Batu. Batu also asserted a great deal of political autonomy from the wider Mongol Empire, yet the Horde remained economically embroiled in the empire, receiving tax money collected by the other uluses while contributing portions of its own receipts in turn. Redistribution and circulation were foundational at every level of the Mongol community.



Chapter 4 begins with struggles for succession to the office of the great khan in the 1260s. The conflict led to a war among Chinggis Khan's descendants. Jochi's ulus broke off from the empire definitively and lost substantial financial resources as a result. Under the leadership of Berke Khan, the Horde had to find new means of economic security and political authority, forging a self-governing entity independent of the great khan and fending off pressure from other Mongols. In particular, the Horde was threatened by the ulus of Hülegü, Tolui's son. Hülegü sought to take over Middle Eastern lands that Chinggis had pledged to the Jochids, and Hülegü nearly strangled the Horde economically through a trade embargo. But the Horde persevered thanks to a complex new trade alliance involving Genoa, Mamluk Egypt, and Byzantium. Berke's public conversion to Islam helped bring the Mamluks into the Jochid fold, while asserting the Horde's independence from the Mongol center. The Jochids lost the war with Hülegü, who was able to consolidate a new Toluid-aligned ulus on the Horde's doorstep. The people of this ulus were known as the Ilkhanids, and at their height they ruled a vast but fractious empire from Syria to Pakistan. But, in a sense, the Jochids won their regime. They would have to tolerate adversaries on their southern border, yet the clash with Hülegü solidified the Jochids' autonomy from the larger empire. The Horde no longer paid allegiance to the great khan, and by the end of the 1260s, the Jochids had definitively recovered from the war. Through military force, taxation, and colonization, the Horde came to dominate the most lucrative trades of the Volga region: the fur, slave, and salt trades. And the Jochids' alliances marked the beginning of the Mongol exchange.

Chapter 5 explores the foundations and effects of the Mongol exchange. Under Möngke-Temür, Berke's successor, the Horde managed a tremendously lucrative network that assured the regime's power and stability and had transformative impact on European politics. Möngke-Temür's reign was a period of peace for the Horde, thanks in part to his shrewd power-balancing instincts. Although the Jochids had secured their independence, Möngke-Temür saw advantages in exerting his influence within the wider Mongol system. Möngke-Temür used his prestige and political acumen to mediate conflicts among the other Mongol uluses and capture the benefits of long-distance trade. In the

late thirteenth century, the Jochids also asserted leadership over their western frontier, dominating portions of Moldavia and deepening their relations with Christian powers. The key figure in the far west was Nogay, an acolyte of Berke whose power continued to mount under Möngke-Temür. After Möngke-Temür died, Nogay attempted to assert himself as khan, but he lacked the pedigree to take office. The result was a painful and transformative civil war within the Horde. Most importantly, the succession crisis following Möngke-Temür's death incubated a new kind of power within the Horde: that of the begs, the nomadic chieftains. It would take several more decades, but eventually the begs would become, for all intents and purposes, the Jochid government.

The Jochids managed to restore order in their ruling houses after the civil war, and the early fourteenth century witnessed the pinnacle of the Mongol exchange. In chapter 6 I consider some of the key effects of Mongol-led globalization. Close to home, these effects included the flourishing of settlements and cities, as diverse peoples flocked to the Horde to trade there, labor in local workshops, and proselytize among the nomads. This process of “steppe urbanization” was encouraged by the Horde's leaders and by other nomadic elites, who financed the construction of stone churches and mosques, palaces, and sizable farms. The nomads also built complex irrigation and drainage systems for their cities, which flooded at times because of their proximity to rivers and inland seas. None of these settlements featured fortifications, towers, or outer walls. The nomads wanted their cities open because, as they said, “He who is afraid, let him build towers.”<sup>17</sup>

In imperial and foreign affairs, Özbek Khan followed the example of Möngke-Temür by working closely with the Genoese, Venetians, Mamluks, and Byzantines. Özbek was fiercely competitive—his was no Mongol Peace. The Eurasian economic development that proceeded under his supervision was the consequence of high-stakes struggle among the Horde, the Ilkhanids, Byzantines, Italians, Germans, and Russians. Under Özbek the Horde took a more muscular and interventionist approach to Russian political affairs, placing the Muscovite princes on the throne of Vladimir, even though other Russian leaders had stronger claims to the office. Özbek also played a delicate game with the Ilkhanids, allying with or attacking them when either option suited him. In the late 1330s, the Ilkhanids suddenly fragmented, which furthered Jo-

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