

THE TATAR YOKE:  
THE IMAGE OF THE MONGOLS IN THE MEDIEVAL RUSSIA

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From the "Introduction":

This monograph should provide considerable data, much of it unexpected, for the construction of a more nuanced analysis of the literary etiquette determining the treatment of Russo-Tatar relations in the medieval sources.

The present work is an attempt to present a chronological exploration of this treatment. (The only two previous attempts have been brief articles, superficial, out-dated, and flawed by uncritical approaches to the sources.) Thematic problems or texts which do not fit into this sequential framework I have dealt with elsewhere. Following an introductory chapter which gives a general picture of Russo-Tatar relations, I shall analyze, text by text, the presentation of the Mongols in the medieval Russian sources, beginning with the first Russian encounter with the Tatars in 1223 and ending with the "formal" liberation of Russia in 1480. The order is determined by the events described rather than by the texts, which were often written much later.

The simplistic picture of Russo-Tatar relations in existing historiography is a distortion. Scrupulous attention to the real content of the sources reveals a complex and often contradictory set of attitudes. To observe that the Russian bookmen were hostile to the Tatars is scarcely to scratch the surface. In the analyses that follow we shall see, among other things: how Russian attitudes toward Tatars varied from region to region and from epoch to epoch; how the bookmen went to great lengths to discriminate between the image of the khan and the image of the Tatars in general; how political events were translated into religious terms so they could be reconciled with the Orthodox Christian Weltanschauung; and how Russian intellectuals avoided the concepts of conquest and liberation in discussing Russia's relationship with the Mongols. The variegated mosaic that emerges comes far closer to suggesting the nature of medieval Russian attitudes toward their conquerors than modern concepts of patriotism and national liberation imposed on medieval writers by modern readers.