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Original paper



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The Mongolian Imperial Idea in the Works of Russian Historians before 1991

Abstract

The article examines the history of approaches to the study of Mongolian imperial ideology of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries in Russian scholarship. This timeline-specific subject had not yet emerged as an independent field of research either in Russia or abroad. Nevertheless, historians, philologists, and scholars from other disciplines have addressed various aspects of this problem. In particular, considerable attention has been devoted to the correct translation and interpretation of the opening phrase of khanate *yarlyks* (charters) and ultimatums (“By the Power of Eternal Heaven!”), which postulates the source of legitimacy of the supreme authority of the Mongol khans not only over their own people, but over the entire world. The first scholar to arrive at a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of Mongolian imperial doctrine was V.V. Grigoriev by the early 1840s; however, for a number of reasons, further research development was



long delayed. During the years of Soviet rule, under conditions of the absolute dominance of the Marxist-Leninist conception of the world historical process and as a result of the assertion of the unconditional priority of socio-economic factors over ideological ones, the study of the nomadic world encountered serious difficulties. The Mongol Empire found itself on the periphery of scholarly interests in Russia. The role of Chinggis Khan in its creation was downplayed, and the formation of the empire was explained primarily by the feudalization of Mongolian society. The internal and foreign policies of the Mongols were often interpreted in a simplified manner, seen as being motivated solely by the thirst for profit of the khan–noyan elite. Attempts were made to prove that ordinary Mongolian herdsmen had no need for plundering and aggressive wars and were forced into robbery and murder. Chinggis Khan himself was ascribed an aspiration to enslave the entire world, although no contemporary source reports such intentions. These notions, which originated as early as the 1930s, continued to dominate Russian historical scholarship right up to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

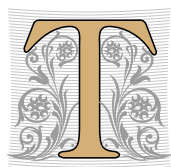
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o date, scholarship possesses a substantial body of historiographical work on the Mongol Empire and its founder, Chinggis Khan (1162?–1227). Domestic historiography, from the inception of Mongol studies to the early 1950s, is surveyed in a highly substantive article by A.Yu. Yakubovsky (1886–1953)¹. Despite the depth of this publication — arguably one of the best in the country — it is necessary to consider the context of its time, as the assessments of this Marxist historian sometimes diverge sharply from contemporary views, particularly regarding questions concerning the manifestations of “idealism” in the works of various authors. Among the relatively recent overviews, one may note the doctoral dissertation of A.A. Nevsky, which, however, is markedly unsatisfactory², as well as O.V. Lushnikov’s book, which attempts to encompass the entirety of global historiography on the empire³. Subsequently, a voluminous monograph by V.D. Dugarov (1959–2023)⁴ appeared, though it is notably deficient in conceptual coherence, as has been observed previously⁵. The historiography of Chinggis Khan is also addressed in a study by E.R. Nesterova⁶. Beyond these works, there exists a wide range of publications devoted to individual figures, different schools, and specific periods of domestic Mongol studies.

¹ *Якубовский А.Ю.* Из истории изучения монголов периода XI–XIII вв. // Очерки по истории русского востоковедения. М.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1953. С. 31–95.

² *Невский А.А.* Отечественная историография образования Монгольской империи (конец XIX — XX вв.): дисс. ... к.и.н. Улан-Удэ, 2006. 203 с.

³ *Лушников О.В.* Монгольская империя в историографии XVIII–XX вв. Казань: Фэн, 2009. 116 с.

⁴ *Дугаров В.Д.* Российская историография истории Монголии. Улан-Удэ: Изд-во БГУ, 2014. 376 с.

⁵ *Тишин В.В.* [Рец. на:] В.Д. Дугаров. Российская историография истории Монголии / Науч. ред. Л.В. Курас. Улан-Удэ: Изд-во Бурят. госуниверситета, 2014. 376 с. // Восток (Oriens). 2016. № 6. С. 212–217.

⁶ *Нестерова Е.Р.* Личность и деятельность Чингис-хана в историографии // Scripta antiqua. Вопросы древней истории, филологии, искусства и материальной культуры: альманах. Т. 5 / Гл. ред. М.Д. Бухарин. М.: Собрание, 2016. С. 214–230.

Nevertheless, the history of research on Mongol imperial ideology, i.e., the 13th–14th centuries, has yet to be written — a fact that is hardly surprising, given that the subject itself rarely attracts scholarly attention. In our view, however, it is a matter of importance, as it enables a more nuanced understanding of the decision-making of Chinggis Khan and his successors.

In simple terms, Mongol imperial ideology consisted of a justification by the medieval Mongols themselves of their legitimate right to rule the entire world. It is well known that subjugating others solely by brute force is not entirely effective; far better is the instillation of obedience through reference to a higher authority. In theistic societies (virtually all of those existing in medieval Western Eurasia) such authority was God (or Allah), whereas for the nomads of Central Asia and the peoples of the Far East, it was the deified Sky. Accordingly, the Mongols needed to “demonstrate” to all peoples that they must submit, for this was the will of God (or the Sky). Consequently, refusal to obey the Mongol Khan amounted to disobedience to God (or the Sky), and the khan, as executor of divine command, was obliged to punish the impertinent severely. It follows that only the Mongol Empire was pleasing to the Higher Powers, and it was the only one having the legitimate right to rule on earth; no independent countries or peoples could exist in principle. Unfortunately, the empire lacked a constitution in the modern sense, in which these ideas might have been clearly codified. As a result, scholars are compelled to reconstruct Mongol ideology almost piecemeal, drawing upon a range of sources, most of them non-Mongolian and thus often heavily distorted. This task is further complicated by stereotypes about Central Asian nomads that took shape since the time of the “father of history”, Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 484 — c. 425 BCE), and the first Chinese historiographer Sima Qian (145 or c. 135 — c. 86 BCE). For more than two millennia, historians in different countries have accused steppe peoples of insatiable greed, and their leaders of boundless lust for power. The same accusations have frequently been leveled against the Mongols and Chinggis Khan. In general, the sources provide solid grounds for such reproaches, and it would be entire-

ly unscientific to portray the nomads as “noble savages” selflessly carrying out the will of Heaven. Nevertheless, ignoring the mental and ideological dimension of their actions inevitably leads to a one-sided and erroneous picture. All scholars who have worked with sources on the Mongol Empire have encountered references to Eternal Heaven and to the fact that it was in the name of Heaven that Chinggis Khan and representatives of his “Golden Lineage” demanded submission from others; yet the true significance of these words has rarely been adequately appreciated.

Russian Mongolian studies declared themselves brilliantly already in the first half of the nineteenth century. A distinctive feature of their emergence and development was the substantial contribution made by first-class historians, numismatists, and archaeologists who were not specialists in Mongolian studies: N.Ya. Bichurin (Father Iakinf) (1777–1853), Ch.D. Frähn (1782–1851), P.S. Saveliev (1814–1859), P.I. Kafarov (Palladius) (1817–1878), I.N. Berezin (1818–1896), V.P. Vasiliev (1818–1900), V.G. Tiesenhäusen (1825–1902), K.P. Patkanov (1833–1889), and a number of others. Owing to their efforts, professional Mongolists gained access to a wide range of sources translated from Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, and other languages that shed light on the history of Mongolian-speaking peoples, as well as to substantial methodological developments. In Russia there appeared editions of the *Genealogy of the Turks* by the Khivan khan Abul-Gazi (1603–1664, reigned 1645–1663); the first chapters of the *Yuan Shi* in the translation of N.Ya. Bichurin; the *Precious Summary* by the Ordos prince Sagan-Setsen (1604–after 1662) in the Mongolian original and in the German translation by J. Schmidt (1779–1847); the anonymous *Golden Chronicle* in Mongolian and in a Russian translation by the learned Buryat lama Galsan Gomboev (1822–1863); portions of Rashid al-Din’s *Compendium of Chronicles* (1247–1318) translated by I.N. Berezin; and many other Eastern, as well as Western, sources and Russian chronicles. An important aid was provided by the Golden Horde *yarlyks*, issued to Russian metropolitans, which attracted the close attention of Russian scholars. Close contacts with Mongolian-speaking peoples living both within the Russian



Vasily Vasilievich Grigoriev.
From open sources

Empire and in Mongolia itself also played a role. All this rapidly brought Russian Mongolian studies to the forefront of international scholarship.

As far as can be judged, the first scholar to present a fairly accurate exposition of Mongolian imperial doctrine — not only in Russia but in the world — was Professor V.V. Grigoriev (1816–1881) of St. Petersburg University, who based his conclusions to a considerable extent on his study of khans' letters and *yarlyks*: “Like the Chinese emperors, the great Mongol khans styled themselves ‘sons of Heaven’ and recognized no one on earth as their equal. They considered the entire globe to be their lawful possession, all sovereigns and all peoples to be their slaves, and any resistance to their authority to be rebellion deserving cruel punishment”.⁷ Further on, in a footnote providing examples from the sources, he elaborated his idea: “The successors of Chinggis were firmly convinced that Heaven had or-

⁷ Григорьев В.В. О достоверности ярлыков, данных ханами Золотой Орды русскому духовенству. М.: Университетская типография, 1842. С. 19-20.

dained them to be rulers of the whole world. They said and wrote this to everyone and everywhere. For this reason, at the beginning of their conquests, when the Mongols went to war against any people, they demanded submission as something due to them, and regarded resistance to their arms as impudent opposition to the will of Heaven, which called forth from them, as instruments of that will, the extermination of the guilty. When a ruler whom the Mongols summoned to onerous submission decided to yield and become their vassal, he was obliged without fail to travel to the emperor in order to attest his allegiance”⁸. Although V.V. Grigoriev did not uncover the deeper causes of such notions among the medieval Mongols, he essentially stated everything that could characterize the Mongolian imperial idea at the level of knowledge of his time. A brilliant explanation of the Mongolian doctrine of universal monarchy would appear only a century later in an article by E. Voegelin (1901–1985), who likewise relied on the study of khans’ decrees⁹.

From the mid-1840s onward, scholars began to gain access to a new category of sources — Mongolian metal credentials known as paiza (paizi, tokens/tablets), the inscriptions on which were executed in Uyghur or Phags-pa script and, like the khans’ decrees, opened with the words “By the Power of Eternal Heaven!” The first to read such an inscription in Phags-pa script was Archimandrite Avvakum (Chestnoy) (1801–1866) in 1846; however, he made an error by taking the word *mönke* (“eternal”) to be the personal name of the Khagan Möngke (1251–1259). The reason for this mistake was the isolated placement of the word, similar to the way the imperial title was customarily set apart on paper in China. The publisher and commentator of the translation, V.V. Grigoriev, accepted Avvakum’s opinion but, knowing that the Phags-pa script had been created only by 1269 on the order of Khubilai (1260–1294) by the lama Phags-pa (1235–1280), when Möngke was already dead, assumed that the writing on the paiza was Tangut script, invent-

⁸ Ibid. P. 21-22.

⁹ Voegelin E. The Mongol Orders of Submission to the European Powers, 1245-1255 // Byzantion. Vol. XV. Boston, 1941. P. 378-413.



Minusinskaya paiza.
From open sources

ed by the first Tangut emperor Yuan-hao (1038–1048) and later borrowed by the Mongols¹⁰. The German Mongolist and Tibetologist J. Schmidt, who lived in Russia, reasonably objected that the inscription was executed in Phags-pa script and that the word in question should be related not to the khagan but to Heaven¹¹. Naturally, V.V. Grigoriev rose to Avvakum's defense, and he was joined by N.Ya. Bichurin, who regarded Schmidt's criticism as an attack on Russian scholarship; Schmidt responded sharply¹². N.Ya. Bichurin

¹⁰ Григорьев В.В. Объяснение древней монгольской надписи, найденной в Сибири // Журнал Министерства внутренних дел. 1846. Т. XVI. С. 126-149.

¹¹ Шмидт Я. Монгольская квадратная надпись из времен монгольского владычества // Библиотека для чтения, журнал словесности, наук, художеств, промышленности, новостей и мод. 1846. Т. LXXIX. Отд. III. С. 1-5. Also published in: Санктпетербургские ведомости. 1846. № 249. С. 1095-1096.

¹² See: Банзаров Д. Пайзе, или металлические дощечки с повелениями монгольских ханов // Записки Санктпетербургского археологическо-нумизматического общества. 1850. Т. II. Вып. 1. С. 72-97; Шастина Н.П. Значение трудов Н.Я. Бичурина для русского монголоведения // Очерки по истории русского востоковедения. Сборник 2. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1956. С. 195-197.

considered the disputed Mongolian formula to be analogous to the standard phrase of Chinese imperial manifestos *feng tian yun* (“by the will of Heaven”) ¹³, in which, as we can see, the word “eternal” is absent. ¹⁴ A.A. Bobrovnikov (1822–1865), who also worked with monuments in Phags-pa script, not only accepted Bichurin’s interpretation but went even further, asserting that the Mongols, from the time of Chinggis Khan, had adopted this formula in imitation of the Chinese, so that the Mongolian phrase “By the Power of Eternal Heaven” was nothing more than a translation from Chinese. “The matter is clear,” the orientalist concluded ¹⁵. However, the next stereotypical phrase from the preamble of Chinggisid decrees — now usually translated as “by the fortune of the khagan” (referring to his inherent charisma) — caused difficulties for Bobrovnikov, which he nevertheless successfully resolved ¹⁶. In essence, however, the German scholar was correct. Grigoriev’s judgments are all the more surprising because he was well acquainted with this very standard Mongolian formula that had generated the polemic and that prefaced the khans’ *yarlyks* he had studied ¹⁷. Although this point of view was far from universally accepted, in the end this promising line of scholarly inquiry reached an impasse for more than a century. An illustration of this may be found, among other

¹³ *Бичурин Н.Я.* Замечания по поводу спора о монгольской надписи времен Монкэ-хана // Финский вестник. 1847. Т. 17. № 5. Отд. IV. С. 4. The full phrase reads as follows: “奉天承运 *fèng tiān chéng yùn*,” i.e., “By the Will of Heaven and the Mandate of Destiny.” I thank my colleague O.A. Koroleva for consultation on this matter.

¹⁴ By contrast, A.M. Pozdnev discerned in the opening formula of the khans’ decrees and in the inscriptions on *paizas* a Mongolian original rendered into Chinese and translated it as “By the Power of Eternal Heaven,” though he drew no historical conclusions from this (Лекции по истории монгольской литературы, читанные ординарным профессором С.-Петербургского Университета А.М. Позднеевым в 1896/97 акад. году. [Т. II] / Записал и издал студент Х.П. Кристи. СПб.: Типо-литография И. Трофимова, 1897. С. 101-102, 114, 135, 154).

¹⁵ Памятники монгольского квадратного письма, объясненные А.А. Бобровниковым, с дополнениями В.В. Григорьева. СПб.: Типогр. Императорской Академии наук, 1870. С. 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* P. 45–48.

¹⁷ *Григорьев В.В.* О достоверности ярлыков. С. 58–59.

things, in Grigoriev's own "theory of shocks". According to this theory, the sudden attack of one nomadic people upon another forces the latter to flee in search of a new homeland, where it in turn falls upon an unsuspecting third people and likewise compels it to take flight. Thus the defeated become victors, and nomads move from place to place, also pressing upon sedentary populations. Grigoriev explained the "furious passion for destruction" among nomads accustomed to the open steppe by their hatred of everything that obstructed free movement and restricted the horizon¹⁸. There was, therefore, no need, in his view, to seek any ideological justification for these purely mechanical movements.

F.I. Erdmann (1793–1862), a German who taught at Kazan University, published in Russian a series of essays on Chinggis Khan that are notable for their systematic distortion of Mongolian names and terms, with the author insisting on the correctness of his altered forms. At the same time, his attention was drawn to a submission-demanding yarlyk of Chinggis Khan, preserved in the retelling of Muslim authors and declaring that the entire earth from sunrise to sunset had been granted to the Mongols. Erdmann cites the text of this decree according to Rashid al-Din and Mirkhond (1433–1498) but does not specify who exactly bestowed the whole world upon the Mongols¹⁹. His reflections on Providence, which, through the hands of the Mongols, awakened Russia from a deep sleep, are also of interest²⁰. His work was later published in full in German²¹, but it did not receive high appraisal in scholarship.

¹⁸ Григорьев В.В. Об отношении между кочевыми народами и оседлыми государствами // Журнал Министерства народного просвещения. 1875. Ч. CLXXVIII. С. 1-27.

¹⁹ Эрдман Ф.И. К истории Чингис-хана // Журнал Министерства народного просвещения. 1844. Ч. XLIV. С. 75-77. The authenticity of this yarlyk has been questioned by a number of modern scholars; however, V.V. Barthold considered Juwayni's (1226–1283) account plausible (*Бартольд В.В. Туркестан в эпоху монгольского нашествия. Ч. II. Исследование. СПб.: Типогр. В. Киршбаума, 1900. С. 457*), and we share his opinion.

²⁰ Эрдман Ф.И. *Op. cit.* С. 83-84.

²¹ Erdmann F. von. *Temudschin der Unerschütterliche: nebst einer geographisch-ethnographischen Einleitung und den erforderliche besondern Anmerkungen und Beilagen.* Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1862. IX+656 s.

The *History of the Mongols* by O.M. Kovalevsky (1800/1801–1878), written between 1843 and 1851 but published only recently, contains no original ideas relevant to our topic. The author believed, for example, that Chinggis Khan’s plans of conquest expanded in proportion to the growth of his resources for waging war²² and it was only his descendants that “considered themselves rulers of the universe and demanded unconditional submission from all”²³. Yet when it came to the question of what impelled an orphaned Mongolian youth to become master of half the world, Kovalevsky adopted an idealistic position and offered no real explanation: “a wondrous fortune accompanied Temüjin in all contingencies, and, like other Asian conquerors, he was guided by a kind of fatalism, as if without any moral idea”²⁴. Even less substantial in this respect are N.I. Veselovsky’s *Lectures on the History of the Mongols*, which amount to a simple narrative account of events²⁵.

Close in outlook to Kovalevsky was, somewhat later, Tsyben Zhamtsarano (1881–1942). Having visited in 1909–1910 the territory of the present-day Inner Mongolia, where the sanctuary of Chinggis Khan at Ejin Horo was located (today the site of a museum complex), the Buryat scholar wrote in his report: “The Mongols, who shattered entire kingdoms, cut paths through the highest mountains and crossed immense rivers; the Mongols, who displayed an incredible power to overcome obstacles, were undoubtedly inspired not only by ambition and not merely by thirst for gain: their worldview and their religion must have played a role of one kind or another”. Thanks to their religious beliefs, “the Mongols constantly felt above and beneath them the cooperation and will of the gods – the tengri. And Chinggis, in the eyes of the masses, appeared only as a messenger of Tengri; he was a hero,

²² Ковалевский О.М. История монголов / Подг. к изд., предисл., коммент., прилож. И.В. Кульганек, В.Ю. Жуков; отв. ред. И.Ф. Попова. СПб.: Нестор-История, 2024. С. 273.

²³ Ibid. P. 365.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 237.

²⁵ Веселовский Н.И. Лекции по истории монголов. СПб.: Изд. кружка ориенталистов при факультете восточных языков, 1909. 142 с.



Chinggis Khan Museum-Memorial. Complex at Ejin Horo
(Inner Mongolia, PRC).

Photo by the author. June 2025

he was divine”²⁶. Such an openly idealistic interpretation, based moreover on contemporary ethnographic material, found no support in Russian academic circles.

The General Staff officer M.I. Ivanin (1801–1874) addressed Mongolian themes twice. In the first edition of his work²⁷ he largely followed A.K.M. d’Ohsson (1779–1851) and relied on several other authoritative studies of the Mongols, thereby inheriting the errors and Eurocentrism of his predecessors. Calling Temüjin a genius, Ivanin attached decisive importance to the influence of Chinese culture upon him, apparently having in mind the Jin Empire: “Probably, educated China was for him in his youth what Europe later became for our Peter the Great”²⁸. Chinggis Khan, he argued, conceived the conquest of the whole world²⁹. Unlike the

²⁶ Поездка в Южную Монголию в 1909-1910 гг. Отчет Ц. Жамцарано // Известия Русского Комитета для изучения Средней и Восточной Азии в историческом, археологическом, лингвистическом и этнографическом отношениях. Серия II. 1913. № 2. СПб.: Типогр. Императорской академии наук, 1913. С. 51.

²⁷ *Иванин М.* О военном искусстве и завоеваниях монголов. СПб.: Военная типография, 1846. 64 с.

²⁸ *Ibid.* P. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Cf.: *ibid.* P. 38.

Arabs and the Crusaders, the Mongols were driven not by religious fanaticism but by “thirst for plunder, power, and blood”³⁰. Ivanin depicted the Mongols as absolute savages who hated sedentary life and education, so that “they appeared to the modern world not so much as conquerors as exterminators of the human race”³¹. Almost thirty years later a second, substantially expanded and revised edition of Ivanin’s book appeared³². It likewise lacked originality, though it was fairly thorough and, for its time, not without merit. Nevertheless, the author continued to assert that Chinggis Khan planned the conquest of the world³³ and once casually remarked, without evidence, on his desire that his descendants continue the work he had begun³⁴.

The great Russian orientalist V.V. Barthold (1869–1930), in a number of his works — above all in the classic study *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* — revealed the mechanisms of the formation of the Mongol Empire and traced the causal connections that enabled a previously obscure nomadic tribe to achieve domination over vast expanses of Eurasia. Yet Barthold paid relatively little attention to the problems of Mongolian imperial ideology. He was among the first to express doubt that Temüjin had been a descendant of the Khagan Qutula (d. c. 1162); in his view, by adopting for his people the name “Mongols”, Temüjin laid claim to kinship with this figure of early Mongolian history³⁵. Evidently, descent from the not particularly noble lineage of his father Yesügei (d. 1167) was insufficient grounds for claims to power over all Mongolian-speaking tribes. It was necessary to discover among one’s ancestors those who had once stood at the head of the semi-legendary confederation known as the “Khamag Mongol

³⁰ Ibid. P. 6.

³¹ Ibid. P. 22.

³² *Иванин М.И. О военном искусстве и завоеваниях монголо-татар и среднеазиатских народов при Чингис-хане и Тамерлане. СПб.: Типограф. т-ва «Общественная польза», 1875. XII+252 с.*

³³ Ibid. P. 18, 36, 40, 41.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 40.

³⁵ *Бартольд В.В. Туркестан. С. 410.*



Vasily Vladimirovich Bartold.
From open sources

Ulus”. Chinggis Khan built his state on aristocratic foundations for himself, his descendants, and his closest followers; the people were merely an instrument in the hands of his chosen elite³⁶. Of great importance to us are Barthold’s remarks concerning Chinggis Khan’s first message to the Khwarazmshah with assurances of friendship. On the one hand, he states: “There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of these words; it is unlikely that Chinggis Khan at that time dreamed of world dominion”³⁷. On the other hand, he convincingly demonstrates that the Mongol invasion of the Khwarazmshah’s lands would in any case have occurred later³⁸. There is no contradiction here: the intentions of the Mongol ruler in 1218 could (and had to) differ from his later plans as a consequence of the rapid and unpredictable development of events. Setting out on the western campaign, Chinggis Khan could not be

³⁶ Ibid. P. 414, 499.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 424.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 431.

absolutely certain of its favorable outcome; all the more so, any dreams of conquering Europe at that time would have been simply absurd. As for the “heavenly” justification of power, the orientalist only once mentions (with reference to K.P. Patkanov) Chinggis Khan’s conception of the empire as the domination of nomads over the “civilized peoples”, whom God Himself had delivered into Mongol hands for exploitation³⁹.

V.V. Barthold did not agree with V.P. Vasiliev’s view that Temüjin was entirely under the influence of the Chinese and the sinicized Khitans⁴⁰, and he shared the opinion of I.N. Berezin, who, while acknowledging the considerable impact of Chinese culture upon the nomads, nevertheless believed that Chinggis Khan possessed “the sound sense of a savage full of energy” and that through the enactments of his *Yasa* he erected a barrier to the spread of that culture within the state he created⁴¹. Barthold assigned the principal role in nomadic movements to economic causes⁴². He considered Chinggis Khan at first to have been merely “the leader of a band of adventurers”⁴³. In a special article devoted to him in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Barthold wrote: “It is impossible to prove that Chingiz Khan cherished grand plans of conquest during his early career in Mongolia. His first campaigns against the neighboring sedentary countries were aimed only at plunder; only much later did Mongol power become firmly established in those lands. The expeditions to the west were undertaken initially in pursuit of enemies who had taken refuge there; only in

³⁹ Ibid. P. 498.

⁴⁰ Васильев В.П. История и древности восточной части Средней Азии, от X до XIII века, с приложением перевода китайских известий о киданях, чжурчженях и монголо-татарах. СПб.: Типогр. Императорской Академии наук, 1857. С. 118, 134, 141, 145.

⁴¹ Березин И.М. Очерки внутреннего устройства Улуса Джучиева // Труды Восточного отделения Императорского археологического общества. 1864. Ч. VIII. С. 403-404.

⁴² Бартольд В.В. Образование империи Чингиз-хана // Записки Восточного отделения Императорского русского археологического общества. 1896. Т. X. С. 105-119.

⁴³ Barthold W. Čingiz-khān // Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vol. 1. Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1913. P. 856.

the course of events did these expeditions gradually develop into deliberate conquests”⁴⁴.

The year 1917 divided Russian scholarship, including Mongolian studies, into two streams: some scholars continued their research at home, while others emigrated. In the present article we shall focus on the former, yet it is necessary to touch upon one figure from among the émigrés who left a particularly deep mark on Russian “Chinggis studies” – the Kalmyk Erenjen Khara-Davan (1883–1942). He was a physician and public figure rather than a professional historian, which did not prevent him from writing and publishing in Belgrade in 1929 a book on Chinggis Khan that became extraordinarily popular in Russia, including within academic circles, after its reissue in Elista during the years of perestroika⁴⁵. This circumstance compels us to say a few words about it. The book represents a consistent idealization of the Mongol ruler and of the empire he created, which, in the author’s view, rested on moral principles and legality. “He (Chinggis Khan. – *Yu. D.*) had no personal needs to which, like other monarchs spoiled by fortune, he would have sacrificed the higher aims of his policy. His entire life was devoted to the realization of his loftiest ideal – the creation of a single world kingdom... The ideal of Chinggis Khan was the establishment of a united kingdom of mankind, for only then, as he rightly believed, would mutual wars cease and conditions be created for the peaceful flourishing of humanity in both spiritual and material culture”⁴⁶. In recounting the life and exploits of his hero, the author embellishes information drawn from literature with invented details in the reality of which he evidently firmly believed. One of his sources was the biography of Chinggis Khan by the American historian and writer Harold Lamb (1892–1962), who was strongly inclined toward imaginative reconstruction. All this, together

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 858–859.

⁴⁵ *Хара-Даван Э. Чингис-Хан как полководец и его наследие. Культурно-исторический очерк Монгольской империи XII–XIV века. Изд. 2-е. Элиста: Калмыцкое книжное издательство, 1991. 196 с.*

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 130, 131.



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with at times very inaccurate quotations from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Rashid al-Din's *Compendium of Chronicles*, and other Eastern works, makes the book under consideration rather remote from historical reality. At the same time, the author was not devoid of occasional insights and hypotheses that deserve the attention of modern historians.

The Russian-Polish linguist V.L. Kotwicz (1872–1944) published his most important works relevant to our topic abroad⁴⁷, yet we cannot pass over this remarkable scholar in silence, if only because before his departure he managed to publish a note on an allegedly authentic conversation between Chinggis Khan and his sons concerning which pleasure was greatest of all. Kotwicz regarded this short example of epic creativity as sufficiently ancient. The most interesting element in it, in our opinion, is the words of Ögedei,

⁴⁷ Kotwicz W. Les Mongols, promoteurs de l'idée de paix universelle au début du XIVe siècle // La Pologne au VIIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques. Vol. 1. Varsovie: Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 1933. S. 199–204; Kotwicz W. Formules initiales des documents Mongols aux XIII-e et XIV-e ss. // Rocznik Orientalistyczny. T. 10. Lwów, 1934. P. 131–157.

which contain a clear program of state administration entirely devoid of militarism and expansionism. Chinggis Khan endorsed it⁴⁸. This is one of the very few texts that give preference to Ögedei, whose descendants, as is well known, lost supreme power in 1251, a circumstance that cast a shadow over the founder of this branch of Chinggis Khan's "Golden Lineage".

The famous traveler G.E. Grumm-Grzhimailo (1860–1936) – a naturalist who also proved himself a talented anthropologist and historian – compiled a comprehensive history of Central Asia from antiquity to the beginning of the twentieth century, devoting due attention to the Mongol Empire as well. The volume of interest to us appeared in 1926, but it had been completed by December 1917; for this reason, it can with equal justification be classified as part of the pre-revolutionary Russian scholarship. At any rate, no traces of Marxism are to be found in the chapters devoted to the empire. Accordingly, the author attached considerable, though not exaggerated, importance to the personality of Chinggis, while not forgetting the ideological aspect of events: "Chinggis was a world conqueror just as Alexander the Great had been before him and Napoleon after him, and his deep conviction that Heaven had chosen him to establish a world empire on earth did not differ from the pretensions of the Austrian monarchs to rule the universe – *Austriae est imperare orbi universo*"⁴⁹. At the same time, Grumm-Grzhimailo believed that Chinggis Khan had conducted his military campaigns without any preformulated plan, and that if a plan was devised at all, it embraced only the setting of an immediate objective⁵⁰. From this it would seem logical to conclude that he had no global idea of conquering the entire world. Nevertheless, the author correctly discerned a feature of the nomadic mentality that several decades later would prove highly important for Mongolian studies in explaining

⁴⁸ Котвич В. Из поучений Чингис-хана // Восток. Журнал литературы, науки и искусства. Кн. 3. М.; Петербург: ГИЗ «Всемирная литература», 1923. С. 94-96.

⁴⁹ Грумм-Гржимайло Г.Е. Западная Монголия и Урянхайский край. Т. II. Л.: Ученый комитет Монгольской республики, 1926. С. 521.

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 449.

the success of steppe leaders in building nomadic empires — namely, the belief that a fortunate leader is assisted by Eternal Heaven itself, and therefore that nothing is more reasonable than to join such a person. Here Grumm-Grzhimailo entered into sharp contradiction with the emerging Soviet historical paradigm, which, as will be shown below, asserted that Chinggis Khan and his closest associates mercilessly plundered and exploited their own people. He wrote: “The success of all his (Chinggis Khan’s. — *Yu. D.*) campaigns and the untold riches that fell to the lot of his troops, that is, to the people, invested all his demands with the significance of divine commands and were accepted not only without murmur but with reverence and unquestioning obedience. Under such conditions, and with the moral uplift experienced by the Mongol people in his time, the moral transformation of the masses which Chinggis claimed as his achievement is entirely conceivable”⁵¹. This idea particularly struck A.Yu. Yakubovsky, who remarked: “Subsequently, the idealization’ of Chinggis Khan and his military campaigns in Grumm-Grzhimailo’s work assumes truly monstrous proportions”⁵². Undoubtedly there is some exaggeration here, yet, considering the memory that Chinggis left among the ordinary Mongol people, one may assume that Grumm-Grzhimailo was, on the whole, not far from the truth. Oppressed and plundered people would hardly have remembered their tyrant kindly, much less deified him; but the issue is not even this; it is rather the very possibility of exercising violence on the steppe. Contrary to the convictions of Soviet historians, it is far more difficult to exploit nomads than sedentary peasants⁵³. Every

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 437.

⁵² *Якубовский А.Ю.* Из истории. С. 80.

⁵³ Since in a class society exploitation cannot but exist, it had to be found in Mongolian society of the imperial period as well. This task was carried out by an exceptionally rare specialist, fluent in Mongolian and Chinese—N.Ts. Munkuev (1922–1985)—though one cannot agree with him in everything. The author repeatedly emphasizes the severity of state taxes and duties and the unlimited exploitation of arats by noyans, but the excerpts from sources cited by him do not give such certainty (for example, regarding taxation of Semuren and Tammachi troops in the Yuan Empire—these were, after all, not Mongols) (*Мункуев Н.Ц.* О формах эксплуатации монгольских аратов в XIII–XIV веках // *Материалы по истории и филологии Центральной*



Cover of the first edition of B.Ya. Vladimirtsov's book
The Social System of the Mongols. Mongolian Nomadic Feudalism (1934).
From open sources

herdsman on the steppe is at the same time a freedom-loving warrior, and he has various means of resisting a displeasing khan, from migrating to a more loyal leader to physically eliminating the oppressive ruler. The sources contain ample examples of this kind. Only under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) did conditions more favorable to lawlessness develop in Mongolia; it was precisely these conditions that lay before the eyes of the first Russian researchers.

Азии. Вып. 2. Улан-Удэ: Бурятское книжное изд-во, 1965. С. 75-79)). At the same time, N.Ts. Munkuev reports on livestock collections initiated by Mongol khans to assist impoverished arats (Ibid. P. 71-72, 74). Although there is no reason to idealize relations between different strata of Mongolian society, nothing is known of any noticeable anti-noyan movement among ordinary nomads either in the Middle Ages or in the Modern period, a point cautiously noted in Soviet literature as well (*Залкинд Е.М. Очерк генезиса феодализма в кочевом обществе. Барнаул: Изд-во Алтайского ун-та, 2012. С. 208-209; Марков Г.Е. Кочевники Азии. Структура хозяйства и общественной организации. М.: Изд-во Московского ун-та, 1976. С. 87, 102).*

In 1934 the book by B.Ya. Vladimirtsov (1884–1931), *The Social Structure of the Mongols: Mongolian Nomadic Feudalism*⁵⁴, was published, a work destined to become the cornerstone of the emerging edifice of Soviet Mongolian studies. The author did not live to complete it, but the chapter on the Mongol Empire had been finished, although he did not explain the causes of the empire's emergence. In his review of the book, A.Yu. Yakubovsky noted that Vladimirtsov had failed to recognize class struggle as the principal driving force of political genesis in Mongolia at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and had instead concentrated on the struggle for power among feudal lords; consequently, he had taken a step backward in comparison with Barthold's conclusions on this issue⁵⁵. Although Vladimirtsov is not regarded as a Marxist, his work is written in a strictly materialist vein. Questions of ideology are not addressed in it. They are likewise bypassed by N.N. Kozmin (1872–1938), whose book on nomadic feudalism appeared in the same year⁵⁶ but, for a variety of reasons, did not achieve wide recognition.

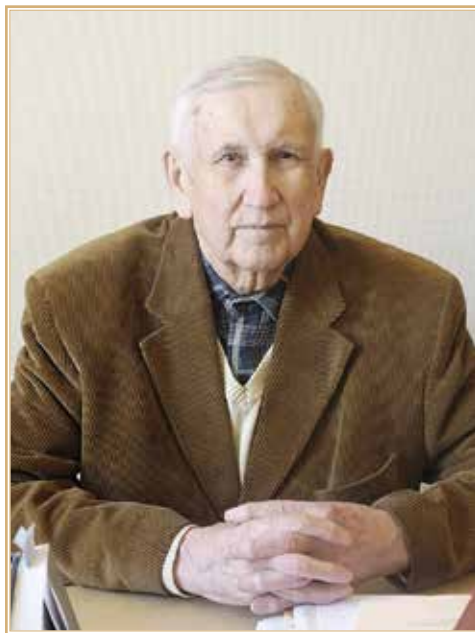
Almost all subsequent Soviet scholarly literature on the Mongols and nomads in general was grounded in the Marxist-Leninist framework based on dialectical materialism, which regarded a society's spiritual culture as a derivative of its mode of production. This approach hindered research into the ideology of nomadic empires, including the Mongol Empire, which at that time had not yet emerged as an independent field of scholarly inquiry. As a result, it produced a one-sided and often rather simplistic understanding of the causes behind the emergence of the Mongol state.

Soviet historiography asserted that only a dialectical-materialist approach to the phenomenon of the Mongol Empire could reveal the internal mechanisms that brought it into existence. Hence

⁵⁴ *Владимирцова Б.Я. Общественный строй монголов. Монгольский кочевой феодализм.* Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1934. 224 с.

⁵⁵ *Якубовский А.Ю. Книга Б.Я. Владимирцова «Общественный строй монголов» и перспективы дальнейшего изучения Золотой Орды // Исторический сборник.* Т. V. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1936. С. 301-302.

⁵⁶ *Козьмин Н.Н. К вопросу о турецко-монгольском феодализме.* Иркутск: ОГИЗ, 1934. 150 с.



Evgeny Ivanovich Kychanov.
From open sources

the intense focus on the social structure of Mongol society and the economy of nomadic pastoralism, which, in principle, might have clarified much if it were not for the ideological constraints within which scholarly work was permitted. Searching for evidence of class struggle in a society where no classes existed, within the context of the five-stage schema of socio-economic formations (sometimes modified to account for nomadic structures or the “Asiatic mode of production”), was unlikely to yield tangible results. At the same time, historians seemed to forget that prior to the Mongols, the same steppes had already seen the emergence of powerful, complexly organized political entities — such as the Xiongnu, Rouran, ancient Turks, and Uyghurs — commonly referred to as nomadic empires. Why, then, should the Mongols have needed to reinvent the long path from a primitive-communal society to feudalism⁵⁷?

Considerable effort was expended on determining what constituted a means of production in the nomadic world — land or

⁵⁷ История Монгольской Народной Республики / Гл. ред. Б.Д. Греков. М.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1954. С. 86.

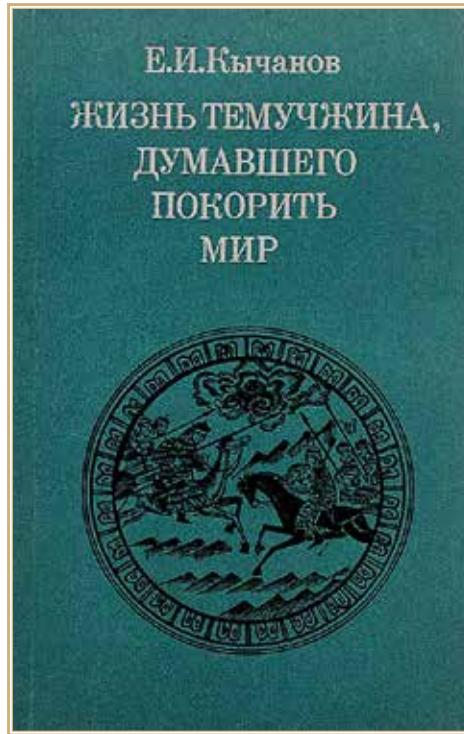
livestock, whether nomadic feudal lords owned land resources, and what form of dependency was implied by the Mongol term *unagan-bogol*.

Since history was assumed to be made primarily by the masses rather than by individuals, Chinggis Khan's significance was downplayed as much as possible, though no one dared entirely deny his contribution to world history. Typically, Chinggis was evaluated positively while unifying the nomads, but this assessment reversed as soon as attention turned to his expansionist wars beyond the steppes. Earlier scholars — V.V. Barthold and B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, who had held Chinggis Khan in high regard as the creator of a world empire, and, especially, Russian émigré historians, who considered the positive impact of Mongol conquests and acknowledged the ideological motives driving the Mongol ruler to establish heavenly order on earth — faced harsh criticism⁵⁸.

It is therefore unsurprising that only two biographies of Chinggis Khan were published in the Soviet period. In 1922, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov published a short book intended for a general audience, *Chinggis Khan*, in which he occasionally mentioned the significance of Chinggis's religious beliefs in shaping his extraordinary destiny. For example, he wrote: “Temüjin now began to reflect on the fact that it was indeed decreed and determined by Heaven that he should become the successor of the Mongol khagans and restore the greatness of the Mongol lineage”⁵⁹. To achieve this, he needed the support of the steppe aristocracy, to which, according to Vladimirtsov, he himself rightly belonged by birth. The author's well-known hypothesis that Temüjin represented the interests of the aristocracy in opposition to his *anda* (blood brother) Jamukha (?–c. 1205) — the so-called “steppe democrat” — is of little importance here. After all, the class status of an individual is determined by Eternal Heaven, and Vladimirtsov notes that Temüjin's supporters already regarded him as predestined by Heaven upon his

⁵⁸ Мерперт Н.Я., Паушто В.Т. Георг Вернадский. Монголы и Россия // Вопросы истории. 1955. № 8. С. 180–187.

⁵⁹ Владимирцов Б.Я. Чингис-хан. Берлин; Петербург; М.: Изд-во З.И. Гржебина, 1922. С. 40.



Cover of the first edition of E.I. Kychanov's book
The Life of Temujin, Who Thought to Conquer the World (1973).
From open sources

first proclamation as khan, a view likely shared by Temüjin himself⁶⁰. His belief in celestial patronage was further reinforced after his second enthronement in 1206, when the “nine white banners” was consecrated with the spirit-protector of the Chinggis lineage (*sulde*), and his authority was sanctioned by Eternal Blue Heaven, by whose power he henceforth reigned as khan⁶¹. Overall, Vladimirtsov's book was well received. V.V. Barthold, in his review, recognized it as “the best currently available”, though he gently reproached the author for perhaps giving “too much weight to religious contemplation in explaining Chinggis Khan's actions”⁶².

⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 45.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 72.

⁶² Бартольд В.В. [Рец. на:] Б.Я. Владимирцов. «Чингис-хан». Издательство З.И. Гржебина. Берлин-Петербург-Москва. 1922. 176 стр. // Восток. Журнал литературы, науки и искусства. Кн. 5. М.; Л.: ГИЗ «Всемирная литература», 1925. С. 254.

A.Yu. Yakubovsky approaching the work from the perspective of Marxism, dismissed it as a “refined idealist work”⁶³.

The second biography appeared only half a century later. Its author was the prominent Soviet scholar E.I. Kychanov (1932–2013), one of the world’s leading specialists in the Tangut language and the history of the Tangut state, as well as an excellent connoisseur of the history and culture of Central Asia and China. The author’s stance is already indicated in the title of his book, *The Life of Temüjin, Who Sought to Conquer the World*, thereby aligning with the official assessment of the famous Mongol’s activity. At the same time, Kychanov’s work stands out not only for its vivid, engaging style alongside rigorously scientific argumentation but also for avoiding sharp criticism of predecessors or of bourgeois scholarship, which, under the prevailing Soviet doctrine, was deemed inherently incapable of reaching the truth due to its flawed methodology and rejection of dialectical materialism. Kychanov also mentions Eternal Heaven, whose protection and assistance evidently supported the founder of the Mongol Empire from his youth⁶⁴. True to his conceptual approach, the historian argued that his subject, after fully avenging the Jurchens for past grievances, turned his attention westward toward the rising Khwarazmian Empire, and had planned the campaign there even before the “Otrar catastrophe”⁶⁵. In a letter to Ala ad-Din Muhammad (1200–1220), Chinggis Khan delineated spheres of influence, calling himself “lord of the East” and the Khwarazmshah “lord of the West”, from which Kychanov concluded: “This is the first and highly important evidence that, after his victories over the Jin, Chinggis no longer intended to confine his state to the bounds of Mongolia, but conceived in terms of the countries of the world”⁶⁶. Moreover, he regarded the West as a potential acquisition, and therefore the biographer fully concurs with I.P. Petrushevsky (1898–1977) that the instigator of the ensu-

⁶³ Якубовский А.Ю. Книга Б.Я. Владимирцова. С. 304.

⁶⁴ Кычанов Е.И. Жизнь Темучжина, думавшего покорить мир. М.: Наука, 1973. С. 32, 43, 78.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 106-107.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 109.



Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky.
From open sources

ing war was Chinggis himself, not the Khwarazmshah, even though irreconcilably anti-Mongol Muslim authors such as Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233/1234) and Juzjani (c. 1193–after 1260) attribute the blame to the latter. Nevertheless, in this case, little else could have been expected, given that all Soviet scholars were effectively bound to follow the dogma of Chinggis Khan's supposed lust for world domination.

At the same time, it is crucial, when regarding the statements of Soviet (and other) historians skeptically, not to fall into the opposite extreme of denying any possibility that ultramonarchical ideas could have arisen in his mind. Being a strong and gifted individual, Chinggis Khan undoubtedly evolved in his worldview and conception of his role, and there is reason to believe that it was during the Khwarazm campaign that he may indeed have developed a sense of a divinely ordained function as ruler of the universe. No one could have prevented him from believing that he had devoted his life to combating evil, restoring violated justice, and thus serving as the earthly instrument of Eternal Blue Heaven. Revenge against the Tatars, Merkit, Taichiud, Tangut, Jurchens, the traitor Wang Khan (?–

1203), Jamukha, and now the Khwarazmshah, who had trampled his peaceful initiatives — this is the path of a heavenly warrior! The death of enemies and the appropriation of their wealth constituted only the external aspect and inevitable consequence of establishing a Heaven-sanctioned world order.

Returning to Kychanov's book, it should be noted that in this light his statement, "intoxicated by victories, Chinggis Khan's warriors, and of course he himself above all, were already seriously contemplating the conquest of the entire world known to them",⁶⁷ does not appear exaggerated or formulaic. According to several contemporary historians, such as M. Biran and R. Dunnell, the unexpectedly swift defeat of the Khwarazmian Empire convinced Chinggis of his heavenly mission, marking a turning point in his career. His subsequent target was the rebellious Tangut state, to which he turned after the victory over Khwarazm, and where he spent his final years. Yet the idea of Mongol dominion over the entire universe was only beginning to take shape in the 1220s, and one cannot disagree with the author's observation that "after Chinggis Khan's death, the conquest of the entire world known to the Mongols came to be regarded as his direct legacy"⁶⁸. No statement attributed to Chinggis in contemporaneous sources mandates warfare until he rules over all lands and peoples; this notion first appears only in the report of Plano Carpini (1182–1252), who heard it somewhere (and evidently more than once) during his journey to Mongolia in 1245–1247, though it can be safely assumed that by that time Mongol society as a whole had already been convinced of the reality of such a legacy.

The second, substantially expanded edition of E.I. Kychanov's monograph appeared in 1995⁶⁹. It can rightly be regarded as the best book on Chinggis Khan in the Russian language.

Other figures associated with the creation and administration of the Mongol Empire did not receive, in the USSR, even journal

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 121.

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 132.

⁶⁹ *Кычанов Е.И. Жизнь Темучжина, думавшего покорить мир. Чингис-хан: личность и эпоха.* М.: Восточная литература, Школа-Пресс, 1995. 273 с.

articles, let alone monographs. In general, relatively few scholarly works on the Mongol Empire were published in the Soviet Union, and there was no comprehensive monograph — except for a Russian-language publication by the Mongolian scholar Ch. Dalai (1930–2009), which filled many gaps in domestic scholarship⁷⁰. Soviet historians, like their Mongolian counterparts, tended to focus on events in the recent history of the Mongolian people, emphasizing their “leap” from feudalism to socialism. While Chinggis Khan himself remained, in the Mongolian People’s Republic, effectively taboo, attention to this topic in the USSR was also discouraged, leaving the subject on the periphery of domestic Oriental studies for many years. Nonetheless, this did not prevent the publication of a number of first-class source editions and research works (by S.A. Kozin, Ts.Zh. Jamtsarano, N.N. Poppe, L.S. Puchkovsky, S.D. Dylykov, and others), some of which will be discussed below. For now, we return to the pre-war period.

It is necessary to note the quality of publications of that era. Often, they were merely simplified retellings of what was already known about Chinggis Khan’s struggle for sole power in the steppes and his Mongol campaigns in Northern China and Khwarazm, clearly adapted for a broader reading public. Early Mongolian history was presented from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, with particular emphasis on economic issues. Special attention was given to the oppression by khans and noyans of both conquered peoples and their own *arats*, alongside documentation of popular unrest and liberation struggles, which were meant to constitute the essential novelty of these narratives. Causes of internal and external conflicts were often omitted or interpreted arbitrarily, leaving the origins of many events obscure and easily misleading to the unprepared reader. Occasionally, there were even egregious errors. One example is a pre–Great Patriotic War article formally authored by A.Yu. Yakubovsky, but so sanitized

⁷⁰ Чулууны Далай. Монголия в XIII–XIV веках. М.: Наука, 1983. 232 с.



Cover of the first edition of the collective monograph
History of the Mongolian People's Republic (1954).
From open sources

that it is difficult to recognize it as the work of this leading Soviet Orientalist⁷¹.

The spiritual world of the nomads, and consequently the ideology of the Mongol elite, was particularly neglected. This aspect was extremely underdeveloped, if not entirely ignored, despite earlier breakthroughs in this area during the first half of the nineteenth century. At best, historians repeated the thesis concerning Chinggis Khan and his followers' belief in Heaven's (or God's)⁷² protection, yet priority was always given to strictly earthly, socio-economic processes that mobilized the vast nomadic populations. It

⁷¹ Якубовский А. Монгольская империя // Исторический журнал. 1940. № 3. С. 87-98. An entirely different impression is produced by the chapters he wrote in the book *The Golden Horde*, which went through three editions between 1937 and 1950.

⁷² See: Чимитдоржиев Ш.Б. Россия и Монголия. М.: Наука, 1987. С. 12.

would, however, be unfair to accuse Soviet scholars of intentionally silencing Mongol imperial ideology. First, they pursued other areas of Mongolian history with considerable success; second, the mental world of the nomads remained largely unstudied by global scholarship as well⁷³. Even the classics of domestic Oriental studies could not fully penetrate the decision-making processes of Chinggis Khan and his “golden lineage”, given the sources available at the time. For instance, comparing the outlooks of Tamerlane (1336–1405) and Chinggis, V.V. Barthold assessed the latter’s cognitive abilities rather skeptically: “Chinggis Khan’s worldview remained fundamentally that of a bandit chieftain”⁷⁴. Later, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov offered a broader generalization, equating the authority of all Mongol khans of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to the prerogatives of a “bandit gang chieftain”⁷⁵. The authority of these scholars was sufficient to ensure that Soviet Mongol studies did not dwell on this issue.

Another authoritative figure emerged shortly thereafter. In 1937, the first volume of the classical work of A.K.M. d’Osson was translated and published in Irkutsk. The work had already received high praise from both V.V. Barthold and B.Ya. Vladimirtsov. Ahead of its time, this work remained largely relevant for more than a century after its original French publication, though some of its judgments were erroneous, obscured by the author’s high reputation. D’Osson depicted the Mongols as worse than wild beasts, and his portrayal of Chinggis Khan’s moral character — who supposedly “was forcibly proclaimed emperor”⁷⁶ — was expressed in terms far from scientific⁷⁷. Yet the main error relevant

⁷³ Дробышев Ю.И. Эволюция представлений о роли ментального фактора в возникновении Монгольской империи в западной исторической науке // Золотоордынское обозрение (in print).

⁷⁴ Бартольд В.В. Улугбек и его время // Записки Российской Академии наук. 1918. Т. XIII. № 5. С. 33.

⁷⁵ Владимирцов Б.Я. Общественный строй монголов. С. 80.

⁷⁶ Д’Оссон К. История монголов от Чингиз-хана до Тамерлана. Т. I. Чингизхан / Пер. и предисл. Н. Козьмина. Иркутск: ОГИЗ Восточносибирское областное изд-во, 1937. С. 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 218.

to our topic lies elsewhere. In the introduction, d’Osson persuades readers of the reality of Chinggis Khan’s supposed testament to conquer the entire world: “After defeating Persia, Chinggis Khan returned to Tangut, annihilated the population of that state... and, stricken by illness, died in the devastated country, leaving to his sons the completion of the world’s conquest”; and slightly later: “Thus, fulfilling the last will of Chinggis Khan, his descendants, half a century after his death, ruled over almost all of Asia”⁷⁸. The book is also noteworthy for the translator’s preface, which provided a competent overview of the existing literature on Chinggis Khan and the empire he created.

In the same year, the first edition of *The Golden Horde* by B.D. Grekov (1882–1953) and A.Yu. Yakubovsky appeared, which over the next thirteen years evolved from a solid popular-science book into a substantial academic monograph⁷⁹. However, the ideological motivations behind Mongol expansion were not addressed.

In the fateful year of 1941, Soviet scholarship was enriched by three important source publications on the medieval Mongols: V.G. Tizengauzen’s long-prepared collection of Persian materials on the Golden Horde⁸⁰, N.N. Poppe’s⁸¹ *Square Writing*, and *The Secret History of the Mongols* translated by S.A. Kozin⁸². Of these, the last two are of particular interest here.

N.N. Poppe’s work is valuable not only for introducing Mongolian square-script monuments into wide scholarly circulation. The scholar provided annotations to the texts, including a detailed analysis of the phrase “By the power of Eternal Tengri and the maj-

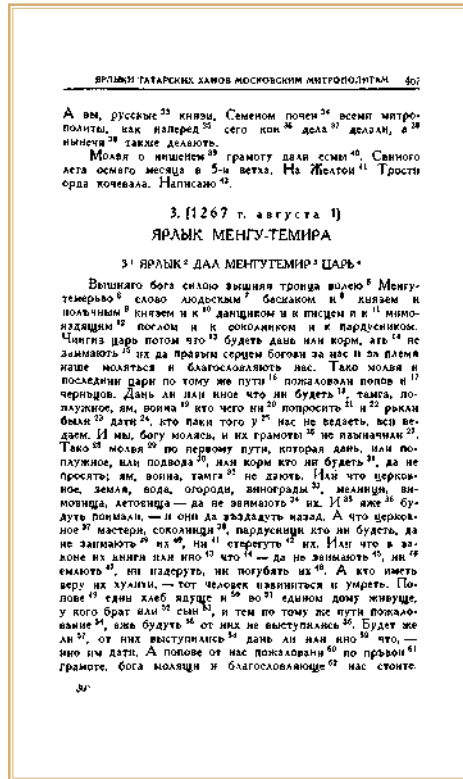
⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 2. See also: Ibid. P. 217-218.

⁷⁹ Греков Б.Д., Якубовский А.Ю. Золотая Орда. Л.: Гос. социально-экономическое изд-во, 1937. 204 с.; Греков Б.Д., Якубовский А.Ю. Золотая Орда. Л.: ОГИЗ Госполитиздат, 1941. 208 с.; Греков Б.Д., Якубовский А.Ю. Золотая Орда и ее падение. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1950. 478 с.

⁸⁰ Тизенгаузен В.Г. Сборник материалов, относящихся к истории Золотой Орды. Т. II. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1941. 307 с.

⁸¹ Поппе Н.Н. Квадратная письменность. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1941. 165 с.

⁸² Козин С.А. Сокровенное сказание. Монгольская хроника 1240 г. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1941. 619 с.



A page from the book *Monuments of Russian Law*. (1955) with the text of Mengu-Timur’s yarlyk, beginning with the Mongol “imperial” preamble.
From open sources

esty of the emperor”, which opens the decrees of khans and members of the khaganate court⁸³. Numerous specialists had contemplated this phrase, proposing various translations before and after Poppe’s study⁸⁴. His interpretation is very close to contemporary understanding.

Let us turn now to S.A. Kozin’s preface to *The Secret History*, without delving into the text itself (which remains a true treasure

⁸³ *Ponne H.H. Op.cit. C. 92-101.*

⁸⁴ Here one should mention I.A. Klyukin (1889–1938), who proposed a different translation of the opening words of the letter of Arghun Khan (1284–1291) to the French king, fundamentally altering its meaning: “In the name (for the sake) of the power of the eternal Tengri, in the name of the majesty of the king (Qubilai), I, Arghun, speak” (*Клюкин И.А. О чем писал Иль-Хан Аргун Филиппу Красивому в 1289 г. (К разбору древнейших памятников монгольской письменности). Владивосток: Студенческое издательство, 1925. С. 3).*

trove of information on Chinggis Khan's life and the worldview⁸⁵ of him and his contemporaries). The author proposes the intriguing idea that Temüjin, whose mother and brothers did not favor him, was burdened by a family legend concerning his birth with a blood clot in his hand, "seen as a portent of terrible, fateful doom". Kozin suggests that this notion haunted the young, inquisitive Temüjin and eventually led him to recognize his divinely predestined mission on earth, the specifics and path to which were revealed by events in his childhood and youth⁸⁶. However, this mission was not to subjugate the entire world. Rather, his task was "to crush and destroy the anarchy of the disintegrated feudal-tribal order by eliminating its strongest representatives, along with personal enemies, and to subject all others to unified authority", in other words, to create a centralized Mongol state in the steppes⁸⁷. Accordingly, to suppress feudal lords, Temüjin relied on "the upper strata of the peasantry"⁸⁸. Life's vicissitudes strengthened his belief in the assistance of Eternal Heaven and Mother Earth⁸⁹.

Kozin's words appear to have left little trace in Soviet Mongol studies, yet the book itself remains a staple reference for many contemporary Russian scholars.

In 1954, the collective monograph *History of the Mongolian People's Republic* was published, prepared through the joint efforts of historians from the USSR and the MNR⁹⁰. The Mongol Empire was allocated only 38 pages out of 384, resulting in inevitable schematization and simplification. According to the editors' position, the

⁸⁵ See: Дробышев Ю.И. Чингис-хан о власти (по материалам «Сокровенного сказания монголов») // Вестник Института востоковедения РАН. 2020. № 2. С. 198-209.

⁸⁶ Козин С.А. Op. cit. С. 65.

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 66.

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 66.

⁸⁹ Ibid. P. 67.

⁹⁰ On the difficulties of producing this work, see: Юсупова Т.И. К истории первого совместного советско-монгольского научного проекта по подготовке однотомника «История МНР» // «Я рад, что стал монголоведом». К 85-летию С.К. Рощина / Отв. ред. С. Чулуун. Улаанбаатар: АДМОН, 2015. С. 271-293.

emergence of the empire was due to the class stratification of the Mongol tribes, which led to the formation of the noyan elite.⁹¹ This elite could not be satisfied by the previous tribal and clan structures and required an apparatus of coercion in the form of the state. Once such an apparatus was established, “alongside the exploitation of Mongol arats, the plundering of foreign peoples became the primary objective of Chinggis Khan, the noyan aristocracy, and their retainers — the nukers”⁹². Since the aspirations of the Mongol elite fully explain the logic of their foreign policy actions, there was no need to elaborate on the reasons for specific military campaigns: in 1211, Chinggis simply leads his army against the Jin Empire; in 1218, the Mongols occupy Eastern Turkestan and Semirechye (Jetisu); the war with Khwarazm is said to arise from an “escalation of relations” between Chinggis Khan and the Khwarazmshah; and his final military enterprise — the destruction of the Tangut state — is left unexplained. In a similar vein, the continuation of expansionist wars after Chinggis Khan’s death is presented very briefly.

⁹¹ История Монгольской Народной Республики / Гл. ред. Б.Д. Греков. М.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1954. С. 85.

⁹² Ibid. P. 91. It was precisely this “main goal” that was attributed to Chinggis Khan and his associates in the two subsequent editions of this book (История Монгольской Народной Республики / Гл. ред. Е.М. Жуков, Б. Ширендыб и др. М.: Наука, 1967. С. 113; История Монгольской Народной Республики / Гл. ред. А.П. Окладников, Ш. Бира и др. М.: Наука, 1983. С. 134). A similar opinion, see in: Очерки истории СССР. Период феодализма. IX-XV вв. Ч. I / Отв. ред. Б.Д. Греков. М.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1953. С. 795, 798, 799, 801. It is worth noting, however, that this multi-volume work is the only Soviet-era publication known to us in which a “seditious” idea—clearly ahead of its time—was expressed: “Apparently, at first Chinggis Khan did not intend to extend his conquests toward Persia and wished that between his possessions in Transoxiana and Persia there should be no cultivated lands such as the *rustags* (districts) of the Merv oasis” (Ibid. P. 808). The quotation is taken from a section written jointly by I.P. Petrushevsky and A.Ya. Yakubovsky—both excellent specialists in the history of the region described, though we cannot yet determine the precise authorship; we are inclined toward the latter, since the former consistently advanced in his works the idea of Chinggis’s unwavering striving for world domination. In the West, similar ideas about the deliberate creation by Chinggis Khan of “a sort of no man’s land” in eastern Iran were expressed by R. Grousset (*Grousset R. The Empire of the Steppes*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970. P. 243-244). Today this opinion is generally accepted.

No mention is made of the role of Heaven in political events, although the authors acknowledge that “the ideological basis of early feudalism” in Mongolia was shamanism in a “somewhat modified and complex form”⁹³. This reflects the spiritual culture of Central Asian nomads that is now commonly referred to as Tengriism, named after the sky deity, Tengri. It should generally be noted that Tengriism is primarily a cult of Heaven, which, under conditions of centralized power in the steppes, becomes radically politicized and brought to the forefront, acquiring certain features of monotheism, while “classical” shamanic practices remain on the periphery of social life.

The tone established in the first edition of this work was preserved in its two subsequent editions. Materials on the imperial period of Mongol history continued to be presented very briefly (with the same errors — for example, Ögedei’s reign is incorrectly dated from 1228), and the ideological aspect was completely absent. The 1983 edition provided a very good bibliographical review, but the sources and manuals listed were evidently insufficiently utilized by the authors, although the section on medieval Mongol culture was noticeably expanded.

The study of *khan* decrees (*yarlyks*), begun long before the Revolution, continued. Interest in this topic flared episodically. By the mid-1950s, a new annotated edition of these texts was prepared, providing Soviet readers with some insight into the ideological foundations of the Golden Horde (references to the “power of the Almighty God”, the greatness of the khans’ “forefathers”, and the *Yasa*)⁹⁴. Later, A.P. Grigoriev (1931–2010) addressed the topic using much broader material, focusing on medieval Mongolian diplomacy. In particular, he provided detailed analyses of the preambles of Chinggisid letters and *yarlyks*, which articulate fundamental tenets

⁹³ История Монгольской Народной Республики, 1954. С. 81. A similar view was held by the major Soviet theorist of nomadism E.M. Zalkind (1912–1980), who believed that stating this fact was sufficient for elucidating the ideological life of Mongolian society in the imperial period (*Залкинд Е.М.* Op. cit. С. 185).

⁹⁴ Ярлык татарских ханов московским митрополитам // Памятники русского права. Вып. 3 / Под ред. Л.В. Черепнина. М.: Гос. изд-во юридич. лит-ры, 1955. С. 463-491.



Cover of the first edition of the collective monograph
The Tatar-Mongols in Asia and Europe (1970).
From open sources

of Mongol ideology. Grigoriev published the results of his research in a series of articles and several monographs, among which a small but highly significant 1978 work deserves special mention⁹⁵.

Another relevant study on Mongol diplomatic relations was S.Z. Zakirov's (1908–?) monograph, based on his 1947 dissertation, which examined in detail the contacts of the Golden Horde khans with Egyptian sultans against the backdrop of the international context of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Zakirov noted that the “foundation of the administrative system” for both the Jochids and their rivals, the Hulaguids, was Chinggis Khan's *Yasa*⁹⁶, but he did not attach importance to the imperial formulations at

⁹⁵ Григорьев А.П. Монгольская дипломатика XIII–XIV вв. (чингизидские жалованные грамоты). Л.: Изд-во ЛГУ, 1978. 136 с.

⁹⁶ Закиров С. Дипломатические отношения Золотой Орды с Египтом (XIII–XIV вв.). М.: Наука, 1966. С. 105.

the beginning of Mongol khan letters prior to their conversion to Islam and did not cite them at all⁹⁷. Although Zakirov did not deny the role of religion in politics, his book contains no traces of the Mongols' previous beliefs, yet we must remember that it was on those beliefs that their foreign policy was initially based.

In 1962, attention returned to Chinggis Khan: two articles devoted to him were published in leading Soviet journals, by a RAS member I.M. Maisky (1884–1975) and a collaborative work by N.Ya. Merpert (1922–2012), V.T. Pashuto (1918–1983), and L.V. Cherepnin (1905–1977)⁹⁸. This was not coincidental, but a response to the celebration in the same year of the 800th anniversary of Chinggis Khan's birth in Maoist China⁹⁹, where the formidable conqueror was revered as a representative of one of the minority nationalities within the “family of peoples” of the Middle Kingdom, credited with initiating its reunification after centuries of fragmentation. His grandson, Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan dynasty (1271/1272–1368), also received honors. Soviet historians were obliged to emphasize that the Mongols' successes were due not to the genius of their leaders, but to the weakness of their enemies, who were unable to overcome feudal divisions and unite against

⁹⁷ However, S.Z. Zakirov cited a passage from the work of the Mamluk encyclopedist al-Qalqashandi (1355–1418) stating that the correspondence of the descendants of Chinggis Khan before their conversion to Islam consisted of “rudeness and open challenges to enmity” (Ibid. P. 126-127; *Тизенгаузен В.Г. Сборник материалов, относящихся к истории Золотой Орды. Т. I. СПб.: Издано на иждивение графа С.Г. Строганова, 1884. С. 415*). Such was the general impression of various peoples who received Mongol ultimatums. It was shared by many Russian and Western historians of the 18th–20th centuries.

⁹⁸ *Майский И.М. Чингис-хан // Вопросы истории. 1962. № 5. С. 74-83; Мерперт Н.Я., Паушто В.Т. Черепнин Л.В. Чингис-хан и его наследие // История СССР. 1962. № 5. С. 92-119.*

⁹⁹ The *Secret History of the Mongols* does not provide an exact date for the birth of Chinggis Khan; Chinese medieval sources report that he was born in 1162, while Rashid al-Din gives 1155. In the context of ideological confrontation with the PRC, it was preferable for Soviet scholars to side with the Persian historian. Moreover, this date was followed by Karl Marx himself (*Маркс К. Хронологические выписки // Архив Маркса и Энгельса / Под ред. В. Адоратского. Т. V. М.: Гос. изд-во политической литературы, 1938. С. 219*). However, this principle was not strictly observed.

a common threat, whether in the East or the West. Nevertheless, almost nothing new emerged in terms of content. While all the authors engaged with Mongol studies to varying degrees, none was a professional Mongolist. It can be assumed that the application of Marxist-Leninist methodology in analyzing the emergence of the Mongol Empire, and Chinggis Khan's role in this process, yielded results that allowed for such generalizations, but the method was probably not the most suitable instrument for this purpose.

The growing interest in Chinggis Khan in the West, and particularly his glorification in the PRC, should have stimulated the study of Mongol imperial history in the USSR. Scholars such as I.P. Petrushevsky, B.I. Pankratov (1892–1979), N.P. Shastina (1898–1980), A.A. Ali-Zade (1906–1979), A.G. Galstyan (1908–1979), L.L. Viktorova (1921–2006), N.Ts. Munkuev, Z.M. Bunyatov (1923–1997), L.A. Borovkova (1930–2011), and others made invaluable contributions to Soviet Mongol studies through both the publication and translation of essential sources and the exploration of specific topics. Despite their critical stance toward the legacy of V.V. Barthold, who never became a true Marxist, these historians often relied on his work. B.Ya. Vladimirtsov's *Social Structure of the Mongols* became, for many, a kind of “sacred text”, albeit one not entirely exempt from criticism: some considered that the author had exaggerated the development of feudal relations in Mongol society¹⁰⁰.

In 1970, the collection *Tataro-Mongols in Asia and Europe*¹⁰¹ was published, featuring articles by both established specialists and relatively unknown scholars, resulting in considerable variation in the quality of the material. By this time, disputes between the USSR and the PRC had reached an armed climax. The idealization of

¹⁰⁰ Румянцев Г.Н. Труды Б.Я. Владимирцова по истории монголов // Филология и история монгольских народов. Памяти академика Бориса Яковлевича Владимирцова. М.: Изд-во восточной литературы, 1958. С. 81. Naturally, even here there were their own “heretics,” such as S.E. Tolybekov (1907–1995), V.F. Shakhmatov (1908–1964), and G.E. Markov (1923–2018), who did not share Vladimirtsov's views and engaged in heated debates with his “orthodox” followers.

¹⁰¹ Татара-монголы в Азии и Европе / Отв. ред. С.Л. Тихвинский. М.: Наука, 1970. 476 с.

Chinggis Khan and his creation — a vast Eurasian empire — played an important role in Maoist propaganda, as all territories once under Mongol control, now considered one of the indigenous peoples of the Middle Kingdom, were declared *de jure* a part of China. In practical terms, this implied a denial of the independence of the MPR and non-recognition of Soviet ownership of territories in the Far East, giving events of centuries past immediate relevance. Soviet scholars, in cooperation with their Mongolian colleagues, were tasked with demonstrating the groundlessness of these claims¹⁰², which fortuitously aligned political necessity with the promotion of Soviet scholarship, which — as noted — had shown only limited interest in studying the Mongol Empire¹⁰³.

Naturally, the volume was not free of ideological clichés. Its articles were meant, using extensive factual material, to refute Chinese historians and propagandists and to demonstrate the incalculable hardships inflicted by Mongol conquests on various countries and peoples, including the Chinese themselves, as well as ordinary Mongol herders. The authors mainly analyzed the socio-economic and military-political problems of the empire's formation, giving little attention to the mental or ideological factor. Following a firmly established position in Soviet and Mongolian scholarship, they evaluated Chinggis Khan positively for uniting nomadic peoples, but understood his campaigns beyond the steppes strictly negatively, attributing to him *a priori* the desire for world domination, while viewing the true cause of Mongol expansion as the consolidation of feudalism in the steppes. The instigator of wars was always pre-

¹⁰² Thus, in 1980 a well-argued and moderately polemical brochure by leading Mongolian historians was published in Mongolia in Russian: *Bira Sh., Ishjamts N., Sandag Sh.* The Maoist Falsification of the History of the MPR and Historical Truth. Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House, 1980. 56 pp. The aforementioned monograph by Ch. Dalai was likewise clearly aimed at debunking Chinese political myths.

¹⁰³ Probably the same circumstance accounts for the appearance of translations by V.S. Taskin (1917–1995) and A.G. Malyavkin (1917–1994) of excerpts from Chinese sources on the pre-Mongol nomads of Central Asia and, more generally, for the serious attention paid by Soviet scholars to the history of this region in antiquity and the Middle Ages during the 1960s–1980s.

sented as either Chinggis Khan himself or his descendants — a consensus among Soviet historians. Even in the case of the war with Khwarazm, I.P. Petrushevsky attributes the initiation of the conflict to Chinggis Khan; moreover, the scholar is convinced that the conquest of Central Asia “was only meant to be the initial stage in the conquest of all of Western Asia and Eastern Europe”¹⁰⁴. Similarly, the 1222–1223 raid of Jebe and Subedei (Subutai) to the Russian borders is interpreted as “the beginning of the implementation of Mongol plans of conquest in Eastern Europe”¹⁰⁵. “The sole aim” of the Mongols was “to subjugate all,” asserts A.G. Galstyan¹⁰⁶. The articles by N.P. Shastina and L.N. Gumilev (1912–1992) offer a different approach: Shastina impartially examines the image of the great Mongol as reflected in medieval Mongolian literature, while Gumilev makes an intriguing attempt to unravel the intrigues of the khan’s court that influenced the ideological content of the Secret History of the Mongols¹⁰⁷. Overall, the publication of this collection marked a major step forward, and it is no coincidence that seven years later it was reissued with some additions and corrections¹⁰⁸.

Soviet historians specializing in Russian¹⁰⁹ studies actively promoted the idea that the Mongols were driven by a desire for world

¹⁰⁴ *Петрушевский И.П.* Поход монгольских войск в Среднюю Азию в 1219–1224 гг. и его последствия // *Татаро-монголы в Азии и Европе* / Отв. ред. С.Л. Тихвинский. М.: Наука, 1970. С. 110.

¹⁰⁵ *Черепнин Л.В.* Монголо-татары на Руси (XIII в.) // *Ibid.* Р. 183.

¹⁰⁶ *Галстян А.Г.* Завоевание Армении монгольскими войсками // *Ibid.* Р. 171.

¹⁰⁷ *Шастина Н.П.* Образ Чингисхана в средневековой литературе монголов // *Ibid.* Р. 435–454; *Гумилев Л.Н.* «Тайная» и «явная» история монголов XII–XIII вв. // *Ibid.* Р. 455–474.

¹⁰⁸ *Татаро-монголы в Азии и Европе* / Отв. ред. С.Л. Тихвинский. Изд. 2-е. М.: Наука, 1977. 504 с.

¹⁰⁹ We do not consider here the works of pre-revolutionary historians, as we have done so in special articles: *Дробышев Ю.И.* Монгольская империя и ее идеология в освещении дореволюционных российских историков: от Лызлова до Карамзина // *Монголия — Россия: век независимости — век сотрудничества* / Сост. и отв. ред. И.В. Кульганек, Т.И. Юсупова. СПб.: ООО ИД «Петрополис», 2021. С. 156–169; *Дробышев Ю.И.* Монгольская империя и ее идеология в освещении дореволюционных российских историков: от Полевого до Преснякова // *Золотоордынское обозрение*. 2022. Т. 10. № 3. С. 537–564.

domination. This position not only obviated the need to investigate the reasons for their appearance on the Russian frontier — since, if the Mongols’ goal was to conquer the entire world, they inevitably had to reach Rus’ — but also served to bolster national pride by asserting that only the heroic resistance of the Eastern Slavs had saved an ungrateful Europe from inevitable subjugation by the bloody Mongol hordes¹¹⁰. “The successors of Chinggis Khan, faithful to his precepts, were preparing to cast a noose over humanity”, wrote V.T. Pashuto¹¹¹. Soviet authors often polemicized with Western scholars, who maintained that the Mongols’ objective was limited to Hungary — whose king, Béla IV (1235–1270), had harbored fleeing Cumans and thus exposed his country to attack — and, of course, could not accept the claim that the Mongols’ withdrawal in 1242 was prompted by the death of Ögedei¹¹². Soviet historians were more inclined to assert than to substantiate with evidence the reality of Mongol plans to conquer Rus’ and all of Europe¹¹³. For fairness, it should be noted that, to this day, no incontrovertible evidence exists either confirming the Mongols’ intention to subjugate all Western countries or definitively proving their unwillingness to advance beyond Hungary. Indeed, the

¹¹⁰ The designation of the Mongols as “Mongol-Tatars” or “Tatar(o)-Mongols,” common in scholarly and journalistic literature of those years, is of no significance for us today.

¹¹¹ Паушто В.Т. Внешняя политика Древней Руси. М.: Наука, 1968. С. 283.

¹¹² Паушто В.Т. Героическая борьба русского народа за независимость (XIII век). М.: Гос. изд-во политич. лит-ры, 1956. С. 6-8. In this respect, the fundamental works of major Soviet scholars A.N. Nasonov (1898–1965) and G.A. Fedorov-Davydov (1931–2000) stand apart; they linked the Mongols’ withdrawal from Europe to the death of Ögedei while at the same time believing that Chinggis had conceived the conquest of the entire world (Насонов А.Н. Монголы и Русь (история татарской политики на Руси). М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1940. С. 9, 117; Федоров-Давыдов Г.А. Кочевники Восточной Европы под властью золотоордынских ханов. М.: Изд-во МГУ, 1966. С. 233).

¹¹³ Паушто В.Т. Героическая борьба. С. 147, 150, 151, 159; Очерки истории СССР. С. 830, 836; Каргалов В.В. Монголо-татарское нашествие на Русь. XIII век. М.: Просвещение, 1966. С. 9, 15-20; Каргалов В.В. Внешнеполитические факторы развития феодальной Руси. Феодальная Русь и кочевники. М.: Высшая школа, 1967. С. 63-64, 66-67 и сл.

imperial ideology, which appears to have crystallized around the mid-reign of Ögedei, would have theoretically driven the Mongols to conquer all lands known to them, but one must distinguish between theoretical ambition and practical capacity, and avoid attributing omnipotence to medieval Mongols. Even in devastated Hungary, they failed to capture all castles and cities, and the principalities of Galicia–Volhynia did not submit immediately. At the same time, their appearance in Poland and their advance to the Adriatic have entirely understandable causes, unrelated to the overarching goal of conquering Europe.

One of the last significant works produced during the Soviet era was an article by I.Ya. Zlatkin (1898–1990), prepared specifically for the planned republication of B.Ya. Vladimirtsov’s works on the centenary of his birth. However, this project was delayed by several decades, and the book was not published until 2002, rendering Zlatkin’s assessments somewhat anachronistic for an era that had largely abandoned the Marxist interpretation of history¹¹⁴. The article is a critical examination of Vladimirtsov’s historical works. While generally appreciative, Zlatkin noted that Chinggis Khan and *The Social Structure of the Mongols* seemed to have been written by two different authors: in the first, Vladimirtsov explains Chinggis Khan’s role in Mongol and world history from an idealist perspective, whereas in the second, he adopts a dialectical-materialist framework¹¹⁵. This distinction is indeed largely accurate. The criticism of early Vladimirtsov is indicative of Soviet scholarship’s rejection of any attempt to explain underlying “base” phenomena in terms of their “superstructure”:

“In our view, the principal shortcomings of Chinggis Khan lie in its idealist interpretation of the era, its relocation of the causal nexus from the material world to the realm of ideas and emotions, its neglect of the objectively historical tendencies in the development of Mongol society, where the transition from pre-class to class-

¹¹⁴ Златкин Б.Я. Борис Яковлевич Владимирцов — историк // Владимирцов Б.Я. Работы по истории и этнографии монгольских народов / Ред.: В.М. Алпатов и др. М.: Восточная литература, 2002. С. 13–48.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. P. 27.

based feudal relations and a class-feudal state was concluding, and its failure to understand that this objectively historical context shaped the life and activities of Chinggis”¹¹⁶.

From this perspective, it follows logically that under the socio-political and economic conditions prevailing in Mongolia by the late twelfth century, the consolidation of the nomads around a particularly capable leader was practically inevitable. Such a leader would first unify the peoples “living within felt walls”, then launch a series of predatory raids against the neighboring agrarian societies — as had always been the practice¹¹⁷— and ultimately attempt to subject them permanently to his authority. However, since such a chieftain, however remarkable, was in practice merely a representative of the class of high nomadic feudal lords, these lords, driven by an inherent desire for enrichment, would inevitably direct him toward new sources of profit. Systematic plundering of conquered lands required the creation of an administrative apparatus and the development of logistics, so the emergence of an empire was almost inevitable, whether or not its founder intended it. In this context, attempts to probe the inner thoughts of Chinggis Khan are futile, because the course of history is governed by objective laws rather than the wishes of a particular individual. As a result, the ideological dimensions of the political processes that produced the Mongol Empire were either ignored or reduced to a crude schematic by Soviet historians, losing their heuristic potential entirely.

It is regrettable that, on certain questions concerning Chinggis Khan and the state he created, domestic scholarship regressed far backward, effectively returning to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European conceptions of the Mongols, and, until the collapse of the USSR, largely reproduced ideas expressed by Voltaire (1694–1778)¹¹⁸ and Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800). For

¹¹⁶ Ibid. P. 30.

¹¹⁷ Плетнева С.А. Кочевники Средневековья. Поиски исторических закономерностей. М.: Наука, 1982. С. 115.

¹¹⁸ Залкинд Е.М. Вольтер об империи Чингисхана // Известия Сибирского отделения АН СССР. Серия общественных наук. 1977. Вып. 1. С. 87-94.

example, in the next programmatic treatment of Chinggis Khan after the 1962 articles, M.S. Kapitsa (1921–1995), then Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences (and likewise not a Mongolist), identified the main aim of the great Mongol and his successors as, “alongside the exploitation of the arats, the plundering of foreign lands, the conquest of new territories, and enrichment at the expense of the subjugated peoples”¹¹⁹. It is easy to see that this almost literally repeats the idea expressed in the 1954 *History of the MPR*. Given an already available explanation, as in 1954, there was no need to question the causes of Chinggis Khan’s wars against Jin, Xi Xia, or Khwarazm: the Mongol aristocracy’s thirst for wealth, constrained by Mongolia’s narrow economic base, on one hand, and the “internal contradictions” of their opponents, on the other, explained any successful military enterprise, although the author, adhering to Soviet tradition, acknowledged that Chinggis was motivated by the idea of creating a universal empire¹²⁰.

The prevailing ideology also produced another, somewhat curious but predictable distortion in Mongol studies. The friendship between the USSR and the MPR, and the communist doctrine more broadly, compelled scholars to insist that the wars, raids, and plundering were solely the prerogative of the khans and noyans, whereas ordinary arats allegedly desired only peaceful life in their native steppes. This depiction appears in the *History of the Mongolian People’s Republic*. Viewed against the abundant medieval sources on Mongol campaigns, it appears fantastical:

“In the 13th century, when the most important campaigns for conquest and plunder were undertaken, the Mongol military-noyan aristocracy sought to corrupt ordinary warriors, compelling them to pillage the peaceful populations of agrarian

The contemporary historian O.V. Lushnikov has described this phenomenon as a return of Soviet scholarship to the “Eurocentric myths of the 18th–19th centuries” (Лушников О.В. *Op. cit.* С. 82, 96, 98).

¹¹⁹ Капица М.С. Ещё раз о роли Чингис-хана в истории // Вопросы истории. 1988. № 7. С. 54.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 55.

lands. When the period of conquest ended, the Mongol nomads, for the most part, returned to livestock husbandry and transformed from warriors into peaceful laborers”¹²¹. A slightly softened version is presented later in the book: “The ideals of the common nomad were opposed to the interests of the steppe aristocracy. If the goals of the feudal lords were directed toward conducting raiding expeditions, as reflected in feudal literature, the common people’s thoughts were devoted to peaceful labor, animal husbandry, etc”¹²².

Both statements are reproduced almost verbatim in the second and third editions of the History of the MPR¹²³. Unfortunately, this appealing narrative was far removed from reality¹²⁴. Moreover, how could one explain the unprecedented cruelties and mass executions — including women and children — frequently reported in the chronicles of the many lands subjected to Mongol invasion? Whose hands carried out these acts?

I.P. Petrushevsky repeatedly attempted to reconcile the countless medieval reports of Mongol atrocities with Soviet ideological postulates. In a brochure published in late 1941 in Baku and intended to boost the fighting spirit of the Azerbaijani people by recalling their resistance to Mongol invaders, Petrushevsky assigned responsibility for acts of cruelty exclusively to Chinggis Khan and his descendants:

“It would be a grave error to view the mass killings of the population as spontaneous acts of brutality by the Mongol people in general, as some European historians suggested. In reality, the

¹²¹ История Монгольской Народной Республики, 1954. С. 104.

¹²² Ibid. P. 117. Cf.: Паушто В.Т. Героическая борьба. С. 119. In his article A.Yu. Yakubovsky expressed himself even more cautiously on this point: “The habit of raids and booty, instilled from childhood in the steppe, created in the nomad—primarily within the ruling stratum of the tribe—the view of the predatory raid as an undertaking, the participation in which was considered an honor” (Якубовский А.Ю. Из истории. С. 92).

¹²³ История Монгольской Народной Республики, 1967. С. 127, 142; История Монгольской Народной Республики, 1983. С. 146, 164.

¹²⁴ Крадин Н.Н. Кочевые общества (проблемы формационной характеристики). Владивосток: Дальнаука, 1992. С. 124-125.



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Mongol people were not inherently cruel and bore no responsibility for these acts. They were organized political acts carried out by Chinggis Khan and his successors, intended to eliminate the most active elements of the population and to create mass panic in the lands targeted for conquest”¹²⁵.

It is true that Mongol terror was most likely a deliberate, purposeful policy, yet it was executed by ordinary arats without coercion from above; such was the psychology of medieval nomads. No sources indicate that nomads — Mongol or otherwise — were ever *compelled* to plunder or kill. On the one hand, the justification of the “brotherly” people is understandable. On the other, when these lines were written, the memory of the initial devastation wrought upon Soviet citizens at the outset of the Great Patriotic War was still fresh, when German workers and peasants, clad in military uniform, methodically and mercilessly killed fellow laborers instead of turning their weapons against the common enemy — the German

¹²⁵ Петрушевский И.П. Из героической борьбы азербайджанского народа в XIII-XIV веках. Баку: Изд-во АзФАН, 1941. С. 16.

bourgeoisie. The ideology of National Socialism proved far more powerful than the international solidarity of class interests. There are strong grounds to believe that something similar occurred in the 13th century. Later, in the preface to the academic translation of the famous Ilkhanid historian Rashid al-Din, Petrushevsky similarly contrasted the Mongol elite as organizers of terror with the ordinary Mongols as its coerced executors, concluding: “All the more, the Mongol people bear no responsibility in this policy”¹²⁶. Almost two decades later, the scholar reiterated his view: “This was an entire system of mass organized terror, carried out from above (and not from below, by ordinary warriors, as in earlier nomadic invasions)”¹²⁷.

The specialist in Ancient Rus, B.D. Grekov, believed he had found evidence that the noyans and arats in the 13th century were psychologically distinct and behaved differently toward subjugated populations. He drew attention to the positive description of ordinary Mongol soldiers by the preacher Serapion of Vladimir (?–1275), who was clearly not motivated to praise them, and concluded that “Serapion distinguishes between the representatives of power and its apparatus, i.e., those who planned the campaign and used the victory for their own purposes, and those who were compelled to obey and followed their leaders to collect lands and tribute from which they themselves did not benefit”¹²⁸. Unfortunate-

¹²⁶ *Петрушевский И.П. Рашид ад-Дин и его исторический труд // Рашид ад-Дин. Сборник летописей. Т. I. Кн. 1 / Пер. Л.А. Хетагурова. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1952. С. 32.* In another work the scholar discussed this issue at greater length and offered an observation of some interest: whereas mass slaughter was a typical feature of Mongol wars in the age of Chinggis Khan and his immediate successors, by the 14th century their character scarcely differed from ordinary wars in Asia (Петрушевский И.П. Земледелие и аграрные отношения в Иране XIII-XIV веков. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1960. С. 30-32).

¹²⁷ *Петрушевский И.П. Поход монгольских войск. С. 115.* See also: *Бабаян Л.О. Социально-экономическая и политическая история Армении в XIII-XIV веках. М.: Наука, 1969. С. 151.* Returning to the analogy with the Great Patriotic War, one may recall the occasional clumsy attempts to shift responsibility for atrocities from the German nation to the German elite, or at least from the Wehrmacht to the SS.

¹²⁸ *Греков Б.Д., Якубовский А.Ю. Опр. cit, 1941. С. 176.*

ly, the historian overlooked the fact that ordinary Mongols were strongly bonded only among themselves, as noted by, among others, Plano Carpini, who had the opportunity to observe them closely, while treating others with extreme arrogance and contempt, and certainly without the slightest compassion. It should be noted that, perhaps, no other Soviet historian expressed such ideas so categorically. Viewed today, these statements elicit a certain leniency toward scholars who, in that era, had to fit facts into ideological templates (“such were the times”), although “easy” and liberal periods are generally rare.

Soviet historians consistently emphasized the nomadic feudal lords’ desire for enrichment, often without fully appreciating that, unlike farmers or artisans, for a nomad the true measure of wealth was livestock (primarily horses) rather than piles of gold or bolts of silk¹²⁹. Horses, in particular, were immediately confiscated from defeated enemies, reducing them to the status of “incomplete men” and depriving them of the capacity to engage in steppe warfare,

¹²⁹ It is no accident that the Mongolian word *mal* means both “livestock” and “wealth” (Большой академический монгольско-русский словарь / Под общ. ред. А. Лувсандэндэва и Ц. Цэдэндамба; отв. ред. Г.Ц. Пюрбеев. Т. II. М.: Academia, 2001. С. 314-315). Indicative in this regard is a conversation of the well-known Russian scholar, writer, and statesman A.I. Levshin (1797–1879) with a wealthy Kazakh: “Once I asked the owner of 8,000 horses why he did not sell part of his herds each year. He replied: ‘Why should I sell my pleasure? I have no need of money; I would have to lock it in a chest where no one would see it. But now, when my herds roam the steppe, everyone looks at them, everyone knows they are mine, and everyone says that I am rich’” (Левшин А.И. Описание киргиз-казачьих, или киргиз-кайсацких, орд и степей. Часть третья: Этнографические известия. СПб.: Типогр. К. Крайя, 1832. С. 83-84). A similar testimony is found in Rashid al-Din’s historical work: “Mongolun possessed complete prosperity and wealth. ... Every few days she ordered the herds to be driven together; the horses and livestock could not be counted because of [their] multitude, but when from the summit of the mountain where she sat to its foot, where there was a great river, so many animals stood that the ground was entirely covered with hooves, she would say: ‘Everything has been gathered in full!’—otherwise she ordered a search for the missing herds” (Рашид ад-Дин. Сборник летописей. Т. I. Кн. 2 / Пер. О.И. Смирновой. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1952. С. 18).

and were expropriated from subjugated peasants¹³⁰. Transporting treasures year-round across the steppe was not customary, even among prominent steppe rulers. The nomadic lifestyle, mentality, and economic structure were inherently uncondusive to accumulation. American Orientalist Owen Lattimore (1900–1989) accurately observed that “it is the poor nomad who is the true nomad”¹³¹. Naturally, nomads never refused spoils, and descendants of conquerors quickly adapted to luxury once settled, which ultimately contributed to their decline – but that is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

It should be added that alongside Mongol studies, Russian and Soviet Turkologists (V.V. Radlov [1837–1918], P.M. Melioransky [1868–1906], S.E. Malov [1880–1957], S.G. Klyashtorny [1928–2014], I.V. Stebleva [1931–2021], D.D. Vasiliev [1946–2021], and many others) sought out, published, and interpreted runic monuments of the Turkic khaganates (6th–9th centuries), which clearly expressed ideas of non-divine selection and universal authority of the khagans, similar to the Mongols¹³². These political declarations, engraved in stone, are far more coherent and expansive than the scattered fragments of information about Mongol cosmological ideology found across diverse sources. Today, Turkologists continue to debate the relationship between indigenous political con-

¹³⁰ Али-Заде А.А. Социально-экономическая и политическая история Азербайджана XIII–XIV вв. Баку: Изд-во АН АзССР, 1956. С. 127-128.

¹³¹ Lattimore O. The Geographical Factor in Mongol History // The Geographical Journal. 1938. Vol. 91. No. 1. P. 15.

¹³² Атлас древностей Монголии. Вып. 1–4 / Издан по поручению Императорской Академии наук В.В. Радловым. СПб.: Типогр. Императорской Академии наук, 1892–1899; Радлов В.В., Мелиоранский П.М. Древне-тюркские памятники в Кошо-Цайдаме. СПб.: Типогр. Императорской Академии наук, 1897. 45 с.; Малов С.Е. Памятники древнетюркской письменности. Тексты и исследования. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1951. 452 с.; Малов С.Е. Енисейская письменность тюрков: Тексты и переводы. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1952. 116 с.; Малов С.Е. Памятники древнетюркской письменности Монголии и Киргизии. М.; Л.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1959. 111 с.; Кляшторный С.Г. Древнетюркские рунические памятники как источник по истории Средней Азии. М.: Наука, 1964. 215 с.; Стеблева И.В. Поэзия тюрков VI–VIII веков. М.: Наука, 1965. 148 с.; Васильев Д.Д. Корпус тюркских рунических памятников бассейна Енисея. Л.: Наука, 1983. 127 с.

cepts and those borrowed from China, preserved in the Old Turkic stelae, while specialists in the Mongol Empire discuss the relative contribution of both to the formation of Mongol notions of their privileged status in the universe. In the Soviet period, however, these materials were rarely used by scholars to address questions of legitimization of supreme power among medieval Mongols, most likely because such a question was not even considered. Nevertheless, Soviet scholars could have drawn on this information from the excellent Russian-language monograph by the Mongolian historian Shagdaryn Bira¹³³.

What was novel about the approaches of Soviet Mongol studies to the origins of the Mongol Empire? While earlier researchers attributed the primary cause of Mongol invasions to an insatiable thirst for plunder, Soviet scholars approached the issue more selectively: according to them, only the ruling elite sought to plunder neighboring peoples (and even their own), whereas ordinary Mongols merely aspired to a peaceful life in their native steppes. The prevailing view in domestic scholarship held that the process of class formation in the Mongol steppes had produced a ruling khan-noyan stratum, dissatisfied with the income derived from the exploitation of arats, which prompted them to seek plunder externally, necessitating the unification of forces under strong khan authority. Once this occurred, continuous raids on neighboring countries began, which after 1215 evolved into attempts to consolidate the conquered lands for systematic and continuous expropriation, including taxation. This, in turn, required the organization of governance, giving rise to the vast empire. Naturally, the lion's share of revenues flowed into the khan's treasury, while ordinary warriors continued to endure the same privations as before¹³⁴. Mongol domination hindered the development not only

¹³³ *Бира Ш.* Монгольская историография (XIII-XVII вв.). М.: Наука, 1978. С. 8-9, 30-31.

¹³⁴ In speaking of the difficult situation of ordinary Mongols during the imperial period (above all those who remained in Mongolia itself), Soviet historians were not greatly distorting the truth. Precious stones, golden vessels, and costly garments looted in China or Iran did little to ensure survival in the

of the subjugated territories but also of Mongolia itself, and even set it back in some respects. Even during the perestroika period, Mongolists continued, seemingly out of habit, to assert that the relations of domination and subordination within the Mongol Empire exhausted the material and human resources of the Mongol people, “which subsequently caused the decline and backwardness of pastoral Mongolia relative to European countries”¹³⁵. Different socio-economic conditions in various parts of the empire, coupled with the national liberation struggles of subjugated peoples, inevitably led to its collapse.

Ultimately, adherence to the framework of historical materialism led Soviet scholarship to a dogmatic interpretation of the events of the 12th–14th centuries. Yet not all scholars, even those formally Marxist, reproduced the ready-made ideological templates. For example, the cultural approach of the renowned Leningrad Mongolist L.L. Viktorova (1921–2006) literally opened new horizons, providing a completely novel perspective on the processes contributing to the formation of the Mongol Empire. Viktorova demonstrated the role of the historical predecessors of the Mongols — the Mongolic-speaking Khitans, who in the 10th — early 12th centuries controlled the steppes and likely transmitted to them certain ideas borrowed from Chinese political philosophy. She was the first in the USSR to highlight the significance of the Kerait Khanate as a mediator in transmitting the cultural-political legacy of the Liao Empire, which collapsed in 1125, and recalled the presence at the khan’s court of Kerait officials of noble Mongol lineage, including Temüjin and Jamukha. Khitans, descending from the former imperial Yelü family, also stopped there as Jurchen emissaries. Viktorova argued that young Temüjin’s exposure to

harsh conditions of Central Asia, where the decisive factor has always been the possession of sufficient livestock. Livestock expropriated in distant campaigns was generally consumed there, while animal husbandry in Mongolia has for centuries suffered—and continues to suffer—even today from climatic disasters.

¹³⁵ Гольман М.И. Предисловие // Чимитдоржиев Ш.Б. Россия и Монголия. М.: Наука, 1987. С. 5.

the institutions of one of the most advanced political formations in Mongolia at that time, combined with Khitan cultural influence, prepared him for his role as a statesman and inheritor of the Khitan imperial legacy¹³⁶. The famous Khitan advisor Yelü Chucai (1189–1243) was not summoned by Chinggis Khan until 1218. The ideas of L.L. Viktorova were further developed by the Novosibirsk historian and cultural scholar G.G. Pikov in the post-Soviet period. I am convinced that the key to understanding the reasons for the transformation of Chinggis Khan's nomadic polity into a world empire lies precisely here.

The collapse of ideological dictates in the USSR in the late 1980s – early 1990s led to a wide dispersion of opinions and the introduction of methodologies from various European and North American academic schools. This opened alternative avenues for exploring questions about how and why the Mongol Empire had emerged, what Chinggis Khan himself had sought, and what role ideology had played in historical processes. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the newfound freedom of scholarly discourse, it is important to remember that domestic Oriental studies stood on the shoulders of giants from the Soviet era, who, in turn, had developed the ideas laid down by the classics of pre-revolutionary Russian scholarship.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.

¹³⁶ Викторова Л.Л. Монголы. Происхождение народа и история культуры. М.: Наука, 1980. С. 171-175. This is mentioned in the *Secret History*: “Chinggis Khan sent word to his anda Jamukha: ‘Out of hatred you separated me from my khan and father. It used to be that whichever of us rose earlier had the right to drink from the blue cup of the khan and father. Rising earlier, I obtained the right to drink from it. From that time, you hated me out of envy. Drain now the blue cup of our father and khan! You will not take much from me!’” (Козин С.А. *Op. cit.* § 179. This remarkable fact, strongly reminiscent of the traditional steppe institution of hostage-taking, for some reason did not attract due attention from historians.



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