

Golden Horde, an anachronistic and misleading term for an area more appropriately called the Ulus of Jochi or Khanate of Qipchaq (although Arabic sources at times refer to it as the Ulus of Batu or Ulus of Berke). In Russian sources contemporary to its existence, the term *Orda* alone was used to apply to the camp or palace, and later to the capital city, where the khan resided. The term *Zolotaia Orda*, which has been translated as “Golden Horde”, first appears in Russian sources of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, many decades after the end of the Qipchaq Khanate. In a travel account of 1624 concerning a journey he took to Persia, the merchant F. A. Kotov describes coming to the lower Volga River: “Here by the river Akhtuba [i.e., the eastern effluent of the Volga] stands the *Zolotaia Orda*. The khan’s court, palaces, and [other] courts, and mosques are all made of stone. But now all these buildings are being dismantled and the stone is being taken to Astrakhan’.” We can understand *Zolotaia Orda* here to mean the capital city of the Qipchaq Khanate. Of the two capitals of that khanate—“Old” Sarai or New Sarai (referred to in the historiography as Sarai Batu and Sarai Berke, respectively)—Kotov’s description most likely refers to New Sarai at the present-day Tsarev archaeological site.

In the *History of the Kazan’ Khanate (Kazanskaia istoriia)*, which some scholars date to the second half of the sixteenth century and others to the early seventeenth century, the term *Zolotaia Orda* (or *Zlataia Orda*) appears at least 15 times. Most of these references seem to be to the capital city—that is, where the khan’s court was—but some can by extension be understood to apply to the entire area ruled by the khan. The problem with accepting the reliability of this work is its genre, which seems to be historical fiction. Given the popularity of the *History of the Kazan’ Khanate* (the text is extant in over 200 manuscript copies), one can understand how the term “Golden Horde” became a popular term of reference. What is more difficult to understand is why.

Neither Kotov nor the author of the *History of the Kazan’ Khanate* explains why they are using the term “Golden Horde.” It does not conform to the steppe color-direction system, such

that black = north, blue = east, red = south, white = west, and yellow (or gold) = center. The Qipchaq Khanate was not at the center of the Mongol Empire but at its western extremity, so we should expect the term “White Horde”, which we do find although rarely in sources contemporary to its existence. Even then the term “White Horde” seems to apply only to the khanate’s western half, while the term “Blue Horde” identifies its eastern half. One could refer to the palace or the camp of any khan as “golden” in the sense that it was at the “center” of the khanate, but in no other case is it used to refer to a khanate as a whole.

In the eighteenth century, Princess Ekaterina Dashkova suggested the term “Golden Horde” was applied to the Qipchaq Khanate “because it possessed great quantities of gold and the weapons of its people were decorated with it.” But this conjecture seems to fall into the realm of folk etymology. Others have suggested the term refers to the golden pavilion of the khan, or at least a tent covered with golden tiles (as the fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battuta described the domicile of Khan Özbek). Yet, khans in other khanates had similar tents or pavilions at the time, so there was nothing that would make this a distinguishing trait of the Qipchaq khan or of his khanate, let alone a reason to call the khanate “golden.” Vernadsky proposed that “Golden Horde” may have been applied to the Khanate of Qipchaq (or Great Horde) only after the separation of the Crimean Khanate and Kazan’ Khanate from it in the mid-15th century. It would have, accordingly, occupied a central or “golden” position between the two. Yet, neither of the other khanates, in the evidence available to us, was designated white or blue (or red or black) as we would then expect to see.

Thus, we are left with three intractable considerations: (1) we have no evidence that the Qipchaq Khanate was ever referred to as “Golden Horde” during the time of its existence; (2) the earliest appearance of the term in a non-fictional work is one written more than 100 years after the khanate’s demise and refers specifically to the capital city where the khan resided, not to the khanate as a whole; and (3) no better reason offers itself for calling the Qipchaq Khanate the “Golden Horde” than an apparent mistake in a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century

Muscovite work of fiction.

The Khanate of Qipchaq was set up by Batu (d. 1255) in the 1240's after the return of the Mongol force that invaded central Europe. Batu, thus, became the first khan of a khanate that was a multi-ethnic conglomeration consisting of Qipchaqs (Polovtsi), Kangli, Alans, Circassians, Rus', Armenians, Greeks, Volga Bulgars, Khwarezmians, and others, including no more than 4000 Mongols who ruled over them. Economically, it was made up of nomadic pastoralists, sedentary agriculturalists, and urban dwellers, including merchants, artisans, and craftsmen. The territory of the khanate at its greatest expanse reached from Galicia and Lithuania in the west to present-day Mongolia and China in the east, and from Transcaucasia and Khwarezm in the south into the forest zone of the Rus' principalities and western Siberia in the north. Some scholars dispute whether the Rus' principalities were ever officially part of the Qipchaq Khanate or merely vassal states. These scholars cite the account of the 14th-century Arabic historian al-Umari to the effect that the Khanate consisted of four parts: Sarai, the Crimea, Khwarezm, and the *Desht-i Qipchaq* (the western Eurasian steppe). Since most Rus' principalities were not in the steppe but in the forest zone north of the steppe, they would seem to be excluded. Other scholars argue that we should not put too fine a point on what al-Umari understood as the northern limit of the *Desht-i Qipchaq*, for, according to Juvaini, Jochi, the son of Chinghis Khan and father of Batu, was granted all lands to the west of the Irtysh River "as far in that direction as the hooves of Tatar horses trod," which would seem to include the Rus' principalities conquered in campaigns of 1237–1240. In addition, a number of Rus' sources refer to the Rus' principalities as *ulus* of the khan.

The governmental structure of the Qipchaq Khanate was most likely the same as that of other steppe khanates and was led by a ruler called a "khan" who could trace his genealogical lineage back to Chinghis Khan. A divan of *qarachi beys* (called *ulus beys* in the 13th and 14th centuries), made up of four emirs, each of whom headed one of the major chiefdoms, constituted a council of state that regularly advised the khan. The divan's consent was required for all

significant enterprises on the part of the government. All important documents concerning internal matters had to be “counter-signed” (usually by means of a seal) by the *qarachi beys* for them to go into effect. Their witnessing was also required for all agreements with foreign powers to become official. The khan was not allowed to meet with foreign ambassadors without the *qarachi beys*, as representatives of the major chiefdoms, being present. At times an assembly called a *quriltai* advised the khan but could also be called to choose a new khan or depose the reigning khan. Notable men from the ruling class made up the *quriltai* and this included the khan’s relatives and retinue, religious leaders, as well as other members of the nobility from the ruling class’s lower ranks. The government was set up on a dual-administrative basis with a vizier in charge of civilian administration, including record-keeping and the treasury. The *beklaribek* (head of the *qarachi beys*) presided over military administration. The clan of each *qarachi bey* held the highest social and political status within its chiefdom with people of every social status in descending order down to slaves beneath.

Six of the early khans of the Qipchaq Khanate were sky worshipers, the traditional religion of the Mongols. One of the early khans, Sartaq (r. 1256–1257), may have been a Nestorian Christian and another, Berke (r. 1257–1267), was Muslim. But all the early khans followed policies of religious toleration. In the early 14th century, Khan Özbek (r. 1313–1341) converted to Islam, which from then on became the official religion of the elite of the Khanate and spread to most of the rest of the population. The Rus’ principalities, however, remained Christian, since the Rus’ Church enjoyed the protection of the khans as long as the Rus’ clergy prayed for the well-being of the khan and his family.

The Qipchaq Khanate had extensive diplomatic dealings with foreign powers, both as part of the Mongol Empire and independently. It maintained agreements with the Byzantine Empire and Mamluk Egypt. It fought incessantly with the Ilkhanate and maintained alternating periods of agreement and conflict with the Grand Dukes of Lithuania. It maintained extensive commercial dealings with Byzantium, Egypt, Genoa, Pisa, and Venice to the west as well as with

the other Mongol khanates and China to the east. During the 14th century, a high Islamic Turkic culture emerged in the Qipchaq Khanate.

At the end of the 13th century, the Qipchaq Khanate survived a devastating civil war between Khan Tokhta and the Prince Nogai. After the assassination of Khan Berdibek in 1359, the khanate went through over 20 years of turmoil and endured another devastating civil war, this time between Khan Tokhtamish and the Emir Mamai. In 1395, Tamerlane swept through the khanate, defeated the army of Tokhtamish, and razed the capital cities. In the middle of the 15th century the Qipchaq Khanate began to split up with the Crimean Khanate and Kazan' Khanate separating off. Finally in 1502, the Crimean Khan Mengli Girey defeated the last khan of the Qipchaq Khanate, absorbed the western part of the khanate into his domains, and allowed the setting up of the Khanate of Astrakhan' to govern the rest. The Qipchaq Khanate, nonetheless, lasted far longer as an independent political entity than any of the other *ulus* granted by Chinghis Khan to his sons.

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