

On the Edge of Empire: Novgorod's Trade with the Golden Horde

Introduction

Although medievalists have examined many aspects of Novgorod's long history, the subject of the city's interaction with the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries remains relatively unexplored. This is understandable, as Novgorod's history offers much fertile ground for exploration, and its contact with the Mongols was limited, compared to other Russian principalities. Yet despite the limited nature of such contact Novgorod is often perceived as acting as an important commercial transit center between the Golden Horde and its major trading partner, the Hanseatic League.

George Vernadsky, in his *History of Russia*, states "...Oriental goods <...> constituted a valuable item in their <i.e. the Novgorodian cities'> trade with the West."¹ Charles Halperin, goes even further in placing emphasis on Novgorod as a trade nexus between the East and West when he states: "Through Novgorod passed Oriental goods on their way to the Baltic, and European goods on their way to the Golden Horde."² Unfortunately, neither author substantiates these assertions with source materials. Although certain aspects of Novgorod's history are well documented by both archaeological evidence and written sources, neither offer significant substantiation to Novgorod as an important transit center for East-West commerce.

Instead, the sources point to a much narrower scope of trade between Novgorod and the Horde. Although archaeological evidence of this trade certainly exists, it shows such trade to have been considerably more limited than previously suggested. It also suggests that the objects of such trade

¹ Vernadsky, George, *A History of Russia Vol. 4, Russia at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, New Haven, 1959 p.32

² Halperin, Charles, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, Bloomington, 1985. p. 81

largely benefited the city's higher classes, and that with a few exceptions trade with the Horde was limited to luxury items.

Several possible reasons exist to explain why Novgorod did not supply eastern goods to Europe, and western goods to the Golden Horde. Novgorod's geographic distance from the Horde, its tumultuous relations with its neighboring Russian principalities, and the lack of variety of its export items all played a role in limiting its trade potential with the Horde. When the above reasons are viewed in conjunction with the plethora of trading partners available to the Horde, and means other than trade by which the Mongols obtained Novgorod's staple export items, Novgorod's limitations as a trading partner for the Mongols become apparent.

However, although Novgorod did not engage in widespread trade with its Mongol suzerains, the Mongols did shape Novgorod's trade policies and bolstered its position in dealings with the Russian Grand Princes. This paper will, therefore, examine the extent and scope of Novgorod's trade with the Horde and take a brief look at the role of the Mongols in solidifying Novgorod's claims of economic independence from the Russian Grand Princes. But before such an examination is possible, a brief outline of both Novgorod's and the Horde's trade practices is beneficial.

Setting: Novgorod

The Russians first suffered defeat from the Mongol armies in 1223, on the Kalka river. The Russian land lay before the Mongols not as a unified state, but as a fragmented patchwork of mutually hostile principalities. Thus, although after winning their initial victory, the Mongols did not return until 1237, the Russian princes were unable to unite even in the face of impending danger.

By 1240 the Mongols had captured and sacked most major Russian cities.³ Novgorod remained a notable exception. Though the Mongol hosts came close to the city in 1238, they took only the furthest of its outlying towns, Torzhok, which lay closer to Tver' than to Novgorod. So, almost within reach of the second city of Rus', the Mongols turned around and retreated, beleaguered by the spring thaw that made movement impossible.

Despite the fact that the Mongol armies never reduced the city militarily, it like the rest of northeastern Rus' quickly accepted Mongol rule. The Mongols retained the majority of Russian princes who had submitted to Mongol rule in their original positions. As long as the Russian princes aided in the collection of tribute, were loyal to the Khan, accompanied him on military expeditions, and did not stand in the way of Mongol aims, they went largely unmolested after the initial conquest. Furthermore, the Mongols ceremoniously reinvested many hereditary Russian princes with their former holdings, and some of them were treated with great honor and respect in the Horde. Unlike other Russian cities, however, Novgorod did not experience direct Mongol rule. It never had a Mongol governor (called *baskak*) installed to supervise its affairs.

This was largely because Novgorod did not have a hereditary prince. Instead, it was a republic controlled by a boyar oligarchy that was nominally free to choose its princes from the ruling house of Rurik. In practice this meant that although Novgorod usually accepted the Russian Grand Prince or his designee as its head of state, the prince's role in Novgorod was limited. The prince, who did not permanently reside in the city, and bore the brunt of responsibility for contact with the Mongols thus acted as a kind of buffer between his suzerains and the city.

Novgorod lay in the North-west portion of Russian territory, and was further away from the Volga center of Mongol power than any other major Russian city. For the first twenty years of Mongol rule in Russia, in the time when the foundations of Russian-Mongol relations were laid, Novgorod never actually saw a single Mongol⁴. Only in 1257 did several Mongol officials accompany Grand Prince Alexander Nevsky to the city to conduct a census that was to aid in military levies and taxation.

This event set the stage for a limited direct relationship between the city and the Golden Horde. From initial contact until approximately 1380, Novgorod, in the words of Charles Halperin, "...incorporated the Mongol factor into its complex strategies to promote its independence by propitiating and manipulating greater powers."⁵

³ Ryazan' in 1237; Moscow, Vladimir and Torzhok in 1238; by 1240 Chernigov and Kiev. (See Grekov, B and Iakubovski A. *Zolotaia Orda i ieio Padeniie*, Moscow, 1950, pp. 210-217)

⁴ This sweeping statement is based on the utter absence of any mention of a Mongol visit to Novgorod in the chronicles until 1257. It is an event which would have unlikely gone unnoticed.

⁵ Charles Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, Bloomington, 1985. p. 51

By the time of the Mongol invasion, Novgorod had developed into the preeminent commercial center of medieval Russia. The city was from its very foundation well situated to dominate North-West Russia both politically and economically. The Volkhov river, which splits Novgorod in two, connected the city to several navigable waterways. Novgorod was thus within easy traveling distance from the Baltic Sea via these same water routes.

By the twelfth century it had established water routes to the western slopes of the Northern Urals.⁶ The citizens of Novgorod utilized these extensive routes, as well as those stretching to the North Sea, to extort *dan*' or tribute from the indigenous populations residing along them. Agents of Novgorod collected such tribute in kind, largely in fur. Novgorod then traded the items so obtained with both lands lying to its South and Western Europe. By the time of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, Novgorod had established itself as one of the most powerful cities of medieval Russia. The city's far flung commercial relations in large part laid the foundations for its prosperity.

Novgorod enjoyed commercial relations with both East and West in the pre-Mongol period. As the city lay on the way from the Varangians to the Greeks, it successfully capitalized on trade flowing along this route. The city obtained a variety of goods by trade with lands to its East and South. Imports from these lands arrived carried by the Don and the Volga rivers. Along the Volga, via the city of Great Bulgar came goods from the Near and Far East. The Soviet historian Ye. A. Rybina states that it was by this route that boxwood combs arrived from the north shore of the Black sea,⁷ and cornelian and crystal beads were brought from India and Arabia (Basra, Kashmir, Khorasan and Badakh).⁸ Eastern and southern trade in the pre Mongol period, is still better represented by items that came along the Don route via Kiev.

⁶ Afanas'yev, A.P. "The Impact of the Water Routes of Novgorod and Northeastern Rus' on the Physical Environment of the Transvolga in the 12th - 14th Centuries" p. 548 in Soviet Geography September 1989, Vol. XXX, No. 7.

⁷ Rybina, Ye. A. *Arkheologicheskie Ocherki Istorii Novgorodskoi Torgovli X-XIV vv.*, Moscow, 1978 pp. 45-48, although she states later that other goods originating from the Black Sea came up the Don route. The eminent Soviet historian and archaeologist V. L. Ianiin (*Ia Poslal Tebe Berestu*, Moscow, 1998. p.221) states that only the wood for these combs itself was imported, but that the combs themselves were of local manufacture as attested to by both local designs and archaeological finds of pre-fabricated blanks for their manufacture.

⁸Rybina, pp. 51-52. She states that the spread of these beads in Russia roughly corresponds with the spread of Arabic coinage, but she also mentions that the finds of these items in Novgorod proper can not be in any way be considered numerically significant, there being only 65 cornelian beads and 33 crystal beads found there.

Goods carried up the Don, included amphorae from the shores of the Black Sea, walnuts, window pane glass of both Byzantine and Kievan Manufacture, and Trans-Dniestrian amber.⁹

However, even in the pre Mongol period, the trade with the West for which Novgorod became so famous later, was already vastly more valuable to it than trade with the East.¹⁰ Trade with the South and East depended on a long chain of different agents for success. It suffered greatly from a break in any link in this chain. In this respect, trade with the West was remarkably less complicated due to a lack of such intermediaries.

Novgorod was Russia's original window to the West. The earliest mention of Novgorod's trade with the West in written sources can be traced back at least to the tenth century. By the eleventh century the island of Gotland was already a major stopping point for Baltic commerce.¹¹ Gotland survived, in no small part, by importing vast quantities of furs from Russia. Due to its ability to supply these much demanded items, and its unique position close to the Baltic sea, Novgorod became the logical provider of such goods. Though both Gotlanders and Russian merchants fared abroad with their wares,¹² the Gottlanders soon established a permanent "yard" in the city of Novgorod.

Novgorod eventually came to have two German yards, that of the Gotlanders, and later, one that was directed from Lubeck and belonged to the Hanseatic League. As Lubeck's influence grew, the Gott yard also fell under the control of the Hansa. The Germans also had two Catholic churches within the city, and although they were only allowed to stay in the city for limited amounts of time, on the whole they were in a rather privileged position in relation to their Russian counterparts. Whereas the merchants

⁹Ibid. p. 28, p. 30, p. 36, pp. 41-43

¹⁰ Part of the reason for this was that the south-eastern routes were impacted by the pechenegs and the polovtsi long before the Mongols showed up, see Kliuchevskiy *Sochineniia v Vosmi Tomakh*, Moscow 1956. Vol. 1 p. 283 (quoting the Ipatiev Chronicle regarding the Don routes). That the chronicler makes no mention of the Volga routes can have two possible meanings: 1. The Volga way inherently belonged to the steppe or 2. It was not of nearly the same importance as was the Don route before the Mongol invasion.

¹¹ Kostomarov, N. I. *Severnorusskiiia Narodnopravstva*, 2 vol. Saint Petersburg, 1863, Vol. 2 pp.178-179. It is on p.179 that we also first find the tantalizing assertion that even before the Mongol invasion Scandinavia imported Eastern goods through Novgorod, namely: "precious stones, Asian cloths, Arabic and Persian carpets."

¹² Proof of this fact of reciprocal travel is mentioned by Kostomarov (Vol. 2, p. 214) and can be found in the NPL under the year 1188, on p. 39 and pp. 229-230 where it states : "... a na vesnu ne pustisha iz Novagoroda svoikh ni odnogo muzha za more, ni sla vydasha Varyagom, no pustisha ia bez mira."

of Novgorod competed with each other to sell their wares to the German yards at the lowest possible price, the inhabitants of the latter presented a united front to effectively drive up prices for their own merchandise.

The German merchants enjoyed other definite advantages in their trade with Novgorod. They imported goods in limited quantities to create forced scarcity; and in order to depress the prices of Russian goods even further, brought only a thousand Marks each per trip, for any purchases they might wish to make. Those who disobeyed, faced the threat of confiscation of both cash and merchandise.¹³ Hanseatic imports, were subject to a tariff levied by the yard itself. Anyone discovered concealing import items for any reason, faced their immediate confiscation by agents of the Hanseatic League.¹⁴ In addition, the Germans forbade their own to offer credit to the Russians in either merchandise or cash, did not allow Russians into the yard except to conduct business, and limited their interaction with the native population.

The Soviet historian N. A. Kazakova also supports the contention that the Hanseatic League expended great energy to maintain its monopoly on trade in Novgorod. She argues that only through the enforcement of such a monopoly could the Hanseatic League maintain conditions so favorable to itself. To further these aims, Hansa attempted to limit the travel of Novgorod's merchants abroad, and tried to entirely eliminate the presence of non-Hanseatic European merchants in the city itself.¹⁵

The Hanseatic league was mainly interested in Novgorod's exports of raw materials, mostly furs and wax. Although Novgorod exported many different kinds of fur from the city, the mainstays of Novgorod's fur trade were not luxury furs such as marten, sable or beaver, but rather those of the unprepossessing squirrel. Anna Khoroshkevich, a historian specializing in Novgorod's Baltic trade, demonstrates this convincingly for the end of the fourteenth, and the beginning of the fifteenth century.

She describes several loads of furs exported by Hansa as an illustration of general trends prevalent at the time. Based on German merchant logs, she determines that squirrel was the only quantity

¹³ Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 201

¹⁴ Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 198

¹⁵ Kazakova, N. A. *Russko-Livonskie i Russko-Ganzeiskie Otnoshenia, Konets XIV-Nachalo XVI v.* Leningrad, 1975 p.33

export. A most striking illustration, shows that on one ship in 1393, along with 220,000 squirrel furs, there were only sixty beaver furs. Marten and ermine were second to squirrel in importance. Even so, these furs did not make up more than several percent of any given load. According to the same sources, otter and ferret were but occasional exports. Khoroshkevich also points out that Novgorod did not export fox fur, which was instead sometimes imported into the city from the West.¹⁶

Although these figures are for a time period slightly later than that under consideration, one may extrapolate them into the earlier time with some degree of safety, as no drastic changes in Novgorod's fur production had occurred in the intervening period. Only after the annexation of Novgorod, starting in the sixteenth century, and with increased Muscovite economic expansion into Siberia, did luxury furs begin to grow in importance in Novgorod's trade. However, by then Novgorod was but an outpost of Moscow and no longer acted independently.

Wax was also exported in prodigious quantities. Novgorod served as one of two major wax exporters to the Hanseatic League, Lithuania being second. Hansa in turn, exported large quantities of wax to England.¹⁷ While Novgorod obtained its furs largely as tribute from subject peoples or as part of payments in kind to boyar landlords from their tenants, its wax came almost entirely from trade with lands lying to Novgorod's south. Novgorod's northern climes were not nearly as suitable for massive production of apiary products as were those of the Russian South. Novgorod thus served largely as a transit center for the wax trade. The production of wax and honey was also well developed along the Volga river among the Tatar, Cheremis and Chuvash peoples.¹⁸ Part of the wax Novgorod received came from the native non-Russian people residing along the Volga. Aside from furs and wax, Novgorod also exported leather and leather goods. Raw hides predominated in this trade, as the Germans desired only raw materials to keep their own artisans employed.

In return for these items, Novgorod received cloth, wool, salt, silver, herring, glass, amber, grain and horses from the West. By volume, cloth, salt and herring were the mainstays of Western imports into

¹⁶ Khoroshkevich, A. L. *Torgovlia Velikogo Novgoroda s Pribaltikoi I Zapadnoi Ievropoi v XIV-XV vekakh*, Moscow, 1963. Pp. 87-95

¹⁷ Ibid. p.122

the city. As Novgorod's relationship with its Western neighbors was quite uneasy at times, Hansa occasionally banned iron, weapons, horses, even grain and silver for import into the city, as these items were potentially useful to Novgorod's military effort. Despite such tensions, Novgorod did have a permanent office of the Hanseatic League present in the city, and commerce largely remained quite brisk.

Although, with time fewer and fewer Russian merchants ventured abroad to Hanseatic towns, the continual presence of the German yards provided a mighty stimulus to Novgorod's economy. Due to the presence of the Hanseatic League the city obtained a virtual monopoly on European goods entering northeastern Russia. The only other import route for such items lay overland through Lithuania, and this route allowed for limited trade, both due to the hostility between Lithuania and Moscow (sometimes latent, other times not) and the absence of decent land roads in Rus' at this time.

Novgorod's relationship with the Hanseatic League was by no means static; it was complex, and often ambivalent. When examined in the context of its components, this trade engaged most of Europe. Wool came to the city from England, cloth from France and Spain, amber from the Germanic lands. Novgorod's export items went to these same countries after being collected from the Finns and the native populations of the Urals. Despite such wide spread connections, Novgorod's own role in this trade was distinctly provincial. The Hanseatic League viewed the city largely as a supplier of raw materials, and most advantages in this trade lay with the Germans.

Novgorod's most voluminous trade did not really engage a foreign power, but rather the rest of Rus'. Novgorod exported both western goods and local products such as fish and furs to the "lower lands". In return it received startling quantities of grain. As Novgorod's soil was rather poor, famine would have been even more prevalent in Novgorod than it was, had it not been for southern grain.

Although the Hanseatic League sometimes supplied grain to the city, the volume of grain received from the West paled when compared to that imported from the Russian South. Not only did the South serve as a valuable source of grain and wax, the principalities lying between Novgorod and the East acted as an important conduit of Eastern goods flowing along the Volga and Don routes long before the Mongol period.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.126

In his fascinating article on Suzdalia's eastern trade before the Mongol invasion, Thomas Noonan makes a strong case that the princes of Suzdal had a monopoly on trade with Great Bulgar, and thus with Asia in the same way that Novgorod did with the Hanseatic League. As an illustration, he relates that during the twelfth century, while merchants from various Russian cities, such as Torzhok, Smolensk, and Polotsk were taxed in silver for the privilege of having their wax weighed at Novgorod's main scales at the *Ivanskoie sto*; merchants from Suzdal', could pay the fee in pepper if they so chose. He suggests the reason for this was that the merchants of Suzdal' were the only ones with access to enough pepper, obtained via the city of Great Bulgar, to make such a transaction practical for both parties.¹⁹

Thus it is important to remember that although Novgorod may have had independent dealings with Eastern merchants, even before the Mongol invasion, Suzdal' was possibly attempting to monopolize Eastern trade. At the very same time Novgorod itself monopolized trade with the West. By maintaining such monopolies, both opposite corners (relatively speaking) of medieval Rus' upheld their commercial importance in each other's eyes.

As is obvious from the above description, Novgorod had a thriving mercantile economy long before the Mongols ever appeared in Russia. The extent of its commercial dealings was both vast and surprisingly local. Although the city tapped into extensive trade networks involving many different peoples, Novgorod carried out the bulk of its trade with its immediate neighbors. Yet before we examine the impact of the Mongol invasion on Novgorod's trade, and the extent of its trade with the Horde, we must first familiarize ourselves with the Horde's own trade practices.

Setting: The Golden Horde

The Golden Horde was at its foundation part of the Mongol empire. One of the more striking constants in Mongol policy, inherited from Chingiz Khan himself, was a benevolent attitude to merchants of both neighboring states and conquered nations. For example, when through rapid expansion, the Mongol empire first became the neighbor of Khorezm, Khorezm's sultan Mohammed sent merchants to

¹⁹ Noonan, Thomas S. "Suzdalia's Eastern Trade in the Century Before the Mongol Conquest", in Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique, Vol. XIX-4, October-December 1978, p. 379

reconnoiter the Mongol lands. Despite their ulterior motives, the Khan received them well, and paid them handsomely for their goods.

After their visit Chingiz-khan sent envoys to the Sultan, asking for peace and free trade relations.²⁰ The Sultan, unfortunately did not share this attitude. When one of his commanders executed several merchants traveling under the Khan's protection as spies, Mohammed refused to offer him up to the angry Chingiz. This chain of events served as direct provocation for the Mongols to wage all out war. Khorezm was despoiled and absorbed into the Mongol state.

The Golden Horde followed Mongol policy in regard to commerce. When Friar Carpini passed through Kiev on his way back to Rome, he met several merchants there, whose names he offered as witnesses of his journey. Both the names of these merchants, and the very fact of their presence in Kiev in 1247 are a testament to Mongol policy. At this time Kiev was but a shadow of its former self. Carpini himself states that when he passed through it on his way to the Khan, not more than two hundred houses were left standing. Though this is likely an exaggeration, little remained of the city's former glory.

In Carpini's words, he met several merchants from Constantinople who: "came to Russia via the Tartars... The names of these merchants are as follows: Michael the Genoese, Manuel the Venetian, James Reverius of Acre, Nicholas Pisani...".²¹ Although he mentions others, we offer only those names that show a merchant's city of origin. Three merchants are from the most powerful of Italy's cities, and one is from the crusader state of Acre. From the very beginning of their reign, the Mongols encouraged world traders to come into the recently acquired territory of Russia, with commerce in mind.

In large part because of the Horde's reliance on international trade for the maintenance of its economy, in the height of its power the trade routes under its control were remarkably safe. The Syrian born historian Ibn Arab Shah, wrote after the ravages of Timur's conquests. With great nostalgia, he described the conditions enjoyed by a traveler who went from one end of the Horde's possessions to the other in its heyday. "It so happened, that caravans left Khorezm and went by cart calmly, without fear or

²⁰ Ratchnevsky, Paul. *Ghengis Khan, His Life and Legacy*, Thomas Haining tr., Oxford 1992, p. 120

²¹ Dawson, Christopher. *Mission to Asia*, Toronto, 1980 (Originally published as *The Mongol Mission*, 1955) p.71

worry, all the way to the Crimea. This passage takes about three months, and the width of this sea of sand is the length of seven seas... The caravans brought neither supplies, nor feed for the horses, nor did they bother to bring guides along, as the people residing along the way were numerous; and safety, food and drink were all plentiful among the people who lived there.”²²

The Horde itself maintained major trading cities. Several flourished on the Crimean peninsula. When the Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck was on his way to visit Batu Khan’s son Sartak in 1254, he passed through, the city of Sudak (also known as Soldaia or Surozh) on the Crimean peninsula. His sketch of it, shows it for the busy commercial hub that it was. Rubruck states: “In the middle of the south side, [of the Crimea]... there is a city called Soldaia which looks toward Sinopolis, and all the merchants coming from Turkey and wishing to go to the northern lands make their way thither, and similarly those coming from Russia and northern territories who wish to cross to Turkey. The latter bring squirrel and ermine and other valuable furs, while the former carry materials of cotton or bombax, silk stuffs and sweet smelling spices.”²³ Sudak had already been of considerable commercial importance before the Mongol invasions, and retained this importance for quite some time after the break up of the Golden Horde. The Horde took full advantage of its potential.

Probably the major commercial center in the Crimea was Kaffa (now Feodosia). There, as elsewhere in the Mongol empire and its successor states, the population was ethnically and culturally mixed. In Kaffa, however, the Genoese predominated. The Horde allowed Genoa to set up several colonies around the Black sea, the largest of which was Kaffa. The importance of these colonies to European commerce should not be understated. The Romanian scholar G. I. Bratianu went so far as to say that Genoa’s “Crimean colonies completed the circle of settlements which, from the commercial point of view, transformed the Black sea into a Genoese lake.”²⁴

²² Tizengausen, *Sbornik Materialov Otnosiaschikhsia k Istorii Zolotoi Ordy*, Vol. 1: Sources from the Arabic, Saint Petersburg, 1884, p.460

²³ Dawson, p. 90

²⁴ Bratianu, G. I., *Recherches sur le Commerce Genois dans la Mer Noire au XIIIe Siecle*, Paris 1929, p. 197. “*Les colonies de Crimee completaient le cercle des etablissements qui transformaient la mer Noire en lac genois, tout au moins au point de vue commercial.*”

When the Moroccan world traveler Ibn Battuta traveled through the lands of the Horde in the 1330's, he noted that Kaffa was one of the famous ports of the world. While there he counted up to two hundred ships, great and small, in its harbor.²⁵ Yet due to its European flavor he found his stay in that city somewhat disconcerting, for Catholic church bells were not silenced in Kaffa as they were elsewhere in the Islamic world. Ross E. Dunn, historian of Islam, who popularized Ibn Battuta's travelogue (*rihla*), notes that Kaffa "was the most profoundly Latinized of all the Black Sea ports"²⁶.

The Genoese dominance in Kaffa was made possible in part by the attitude of Byzantium after 1261. When the Byzantine emperors were restored, they understandably bore a grudge against Venice for aiding in the Latin Crusade. They thus lent political support to the Genoese. This, did not prevent Venice from eventually establishing several colonies in the Horde. Preeminent among them was Tana (Azov).²⁷ This colony, founded in the early fourteenth century, was never able to become as successful as Kaffa. This was partly because Kaffa was larger, had the superior location, (Tana was located on the Sea of Azov, not the Black Sea,) and partly because Kaffa usually enjoyed Byzantine support as well as that of the Horde.

Crimea as a whole, even aside from the aforementioned famous cities, had a rather cosmopolitan flavor. It drew not only merchants but men of culture. For example, the 1926 archaeological expedition described by Professor Borozdin, found interesting data while examining old gravestones. Among those buried in Stary Krym (formerly Solkhat), were natives of Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, North Africa and the Near East. Among these gravestones were those of an astronomer, an emir, a merchant, and of religious leaders.²⁸

Crimea, wealthy as it was, was an outpost of the Horde. The Horde's twin capitals were two cities known as either as Old and New Sarai, or as Sarai Batu and Sarai Berke. Our most valuable description of Sarai Berke (New Sarai) also comes from Ibn Battuta, who visited it shortly after Kaffa;

²⁵ Tizengausen, Vol. 1 p. 280

²⁶ Dunn, Ross E., *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*, Berkley, 1986, p.165

²⁷ Skrzhinskaya, Ye. Ch., translator and editor, *Barbaro i Contarini o Rossii*, Leningrad, 1971. p.30

²⁸ Borozdin, I. N. *Novyie Dannye po Zolotoordynskoi kulture v Krymu*, Moscow, 1927 pp. 16-17

during the reign of Uzbek Khan, one of the extraordinary periods of the Horde's might and stability. Sarai was so large, he states, that when one morning he rode out on horseback to cross the city from end to end, he did not reach his destination until after noon, did not return home until after sunset. Ibn Batuta also stated of Sarai that "many people inhabit it, Mongols, who are the true masters and residents of this country;... Ossetians;... Qipchaks; Cherkess; Russians and Byzantines... Each nationality resides in its own quarter, and each has its own bazaars. The merchants and foreigners of both Iraqs [Arab and Persian], Egypt, and Syria and other places live in a separate quarter where the merchants goods are protected by a wall."²⁹

The Golden Horde traded with many nations. The list of its trading partners was quite long. Among them were merchants from Genoa, Venice, Pisa, Acre, Muslim held Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Armenia, Cherkassia, Ossetia, and Russia. The list also included merchants from Azerbaidjan, Khiva, Bukhara, Yemen, the local subject peoples of the Mordva and the Cheremis, as well as Chinese merchants trading in Khorezm at the far east of the Horde. Products from all over the known world came through the Horde's possessions, from the wild territories to the north of Great Bulgar, from China, Europe, North Africa, the Persian Gulf, Russia and the steppe itself.

Although the elite of the Horde maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle, agricultural regions around such old cities as Great Bulgar (now Kazan') provided it with a constant supply of grain. From the regions to the far north of that city and from Russia itself came a steady supply of furs. Spices and cloth were brought to the Horde from the East, while European merchants brought a steady stream of precious metals.

The Polish historian Marian Malowist, provides information regarding products exported from Kaffa to Kiev in the sixteenth century. All the products listed were of Eastern provenance. Pearls, jewels,

²⁹ Tizengausen, Vol. 1, p. 306, For the explanation regarding the two Iraqs see: Spuler, Bertold, *History of the Mongols*, New York, 1988 p.198, footnote 14.

silk and morocco cloth, and spices all passed through Kaffa at that time.³⁰ By then, Kaffa captured by the Turks, was no longer a world class trading center.

Lest we question the time lag between the sixteenth century and the time of the Horde's grandeur, let us examine the testimony of Balducci Peglotti, who passed through Tana in the fourteenth century. He presented a mixed list of goods traded in Tana, goods from the West and North as well as those from the East. The following were all available in Tana during his visit: "metals—iron, pewter, copper; spices—pepper, ginger, saffron; jewelry materials—gold, pearls, amber; expensive cloth—silks, brocades, cotton, linens, canvas; leather, wax, wine; wheat, rye and other cereals; various foodstuffs—fish, caviar, lard (*salo*), cheese, cooking oil, honey; furs—sable, marten, ermine, weasel, fox, lynx, and squirrel."³¹

Kaffa and Tana were also thriving slave trading centers. Slaves from the vassal states of the Horde, as well as impoverished Tatars from the Horde itself, were a very valuable commodity to the Italian traders. The Genoese came to Kaffa with such goods as buckram, lace, wine and Mossoul silks, from which the Horde derived considerable profit in tariffs.³² We can see that most of these European and Near Eastern goods were also brought to Tana by the Venetians. Rubruck also mentions other valued European commodities, which he was advised to take along as gifts by the local merchants. Among these were "fruit, muscatel wine, and choice biscuits."³³

And yet, European as they seem, all these colonies were under strict Mongol control. As long as Mongol demands were complied with, trade could go on, but the consequences for resistance were grim. In 1297, Nogay, a powerful Mongol warlord, battled and defeated the ruling khan Tokhta. Having gained control over part of Tokhta's empire, Nogay sent his grandson Aktadji to collect tribute from the Genoese in Kaffa. The latter, apparently doubting the legitimacy of Nogay's control over their colony, slaughtered

³⁰ Malowist, Marian, *Kaffa kolonia genuenska na Krymie I Problem Wschodni w Latach 1453-1475*, Warsaw, 1947 p. 77

³¹ Quoted in Skrzhinskaya, p.51

³² Bratianu, p. 244

³³ Dawson, p. 92

Aktadji at a feast. Nogay's retribution was swift. He gathered an enormous army and after looting Kaffa's treasures, put its inhabitants to the sword and burnt the town.³⁴

It is apparent that the Golden Horde controlled one of the most extensive and developed trade networks of the middle ages. Looking back, it seems intuitive that Novgorod could have only benefited from tapping into this network, and that had it been able to do so effectively it would have reaped enormous rewards. And yet neither the archaeological evidence, nor the written sources show that Novgorod's trade with the Horde was of grandiose proportions. Having asserted throughout this paper that the extent and character of Novgorod's trade with the Horde was limited, the time has now come to demonstrate its actual scope and to attempt and explain why this trade was as limited as the author keeps insisting it was.

Novgorod's Trade with the Golden Horde

The two main bodies of sources for dealing with this period are the written and the archaeological. Written sources are divided into those written in Russian and those written in other languages. Although the division may seem arbitrary, it is relevant to the examination of Novgorod's trade with the Horde. Russian language primary sources, although well acquainted with the political situation in Russia, are extremely limited regarding any specific information regarding life, or conditions in the Horde. Although Russians traveled to Sarai on a regular basis, there is not one description of the city in Russian sources. Also, though they do mention Russian merchants in the Horde, they do not mention any specifically from Novgorod. One may only surmise that these merchants accompanied the political missions sent by Novgorod in the fourteenth centuries, and provided the capital for their political activities in the Horde.

Foreign sources, detailed as some of them may be regarding events in the Horde, suffer the same problem in reverse. They are not at all well informed about the various principalities and cities of Russia, and thus lump all Russians present in the Horde into one undifferentiated group. Thus although these sources may relate that Russian merchants were present in the Horde, and even sometimes enumerate

³⁴ Tizengausen, Vol. 1 pp. 112-113

their wares, they give no clue as to whether these merchants originated from Suzdal', Tver', Moscow, Novgorod, Kiev, or yet another Russian city.

The most concrete data about the specifics of Novgorod's trade with the Horde comes from archaeological evidence. This approach also has obvious limitations. Not every item is equally well preserved over time. While it is relatively easy to find ceramic shards and trace them to a specific region of manufacture, it is next to impossible to find well-preserved items manufactured from animal furs after several centuries in the ground. Even if such items were to be located it would be more than challenging to trace the route their raw materials took prior to the manufacture of such an object.

However, evidence does exist to broadly outline the changes in Novgorod's eastern trade brought about by the Mongol conquest. After the Mongol invasions, Kiev was greatly reduced in importance both as a political and a commercial center. The import of items Novgorod had once received by the Don route came to a halt. Rybina states that the amphorae that Novgorod used to receive from the south disappear from the archaeological record with the Mongols' arrival, as do walnuts, rings of Kievan and Byzantine manufacture, and rose-slate spindles³⁵.

On the other hand, the volume of goods imported via the Volga grew with time. Although the Volga trade experienced a decline in volume during the thirty years between approximately 1238 and 1268, after this time it gradually regained momentum.³⁶ Its increase was obvious in the import of boxwood,³⁷ as well as novel items from the East. Among these new goods was glazed ceramic ware from the Horde itself, as well as a rough fabric called *zendyan*', manufactured in Bukhara.³⁸

The import of glazed ceramics from the Horde entirely replaced those imported from Iran, now a hostile state under Ilkhanid control. Foreign ceramics of any kind, however, were luxury items, and not widespread in their distribution through Novgorod. Ceramics produced in the Horde were mostly found

³⁵ Rybina, p. 29; p. 30; pp. 33-34; pp. 26-27

³⁶ Ibid, p. 49

³⁷ Ibid, p.46

³⁸ Ibid, p. 83, p.98 It is true that the presence of the latter on the Novgorod market is attested to by a birch bark letter found in the layer corresponding to the end of the fourteenth, beginning of the fifteenth century, (#125) but there is no real reason not to suppose it to have shown up in Novgorod somewhat earlier as well.

on two boyar estates.³⁹ One of these estates belonged to the family of posadnik Ontsifor Lukinich.⁴⁰ A glazed ceramic chalice was also found in the sarcophagus of a Novgorodian cleric named Nikifor dating to the fourteenth century in the Sophia cathedral.⁴¹

Aside from ceramics and *zyanden*' there is little in the archaeological record to argue for significant commerce between the Horde and the city. The only other items that show a connection between the two are purely circumstantial. There is a writing tool found near Sarai that finds a parallel in execution to one found in Novgorod.⁴² There is a stone icon of either Italian or Byzantine manufacture found in Novgorod that has a parallel found in Sarai. The icon excavated in Novgorod is most interesting as it was found in layers dating to the middle of the twelfth century. It thus made its way to the city either shortly before the Mongol incursions or immediately thereafter.⁴³

Yet another fascinating item was found in the village of Berezovka, on the left bank of the river Usa, a tributary of the Volga. An area which is now part of Berezovka was once a settlement of mixed ethnicity on the territory of the Golden Horde. Its population had consisted of Russians, Bulgars and Tatars. Amongst the digs carried out there between 1950 and 1954 the team found a bead that otherwise had a rather narrow band of distribution around its presumed center of manufacture: Novgorod.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there is no way to say definitely that this item was brought to the site by commerce, rather than as a possession of one of the Russian settlers or captives. Among other Russian settlements

³⁹ Podvigina, N.L. *Ocherki Sotsialno-Ekonomicheskoi i Politicheskoi Istorii Novgoroda Velikogo v XII-XIII Veke*. Moscow, 1976 p.68

⁴⁰ Rybina, p. 51

⁴¹ Poluboiarinova, M. D. *Russkiiie Liudi v Zolotoi Orde*, Moscow 1978 p. 48 Poluboiarinova calls this cleric a *vладыка*, which implies an archbishop of Novgorod, and his burial in the Sophian cathedral would also argue likewise, yet the Primary Novgorod chronicle does not mention any Nikifor in that office, indeed the closest that it comes to that name is the bishop Nikita who was primate in the beginning of the twelfth century. There was however a Nikifor as archimandrite of the Iuriev monastery in the fourteenth century. (See Nasonov, A. N. ed. *Novgorodskaiia Pervaia Letopis' Starshego i Mladshego Izvodov*, Leningrad, 1950 (Reprinted in *Slavic Printings and Reprintings* vol. 216, The Hague 1969). p. 100, p. 475)

⁴² Poluboiarinova, p.85

⁴³ Podvigina, p. 66; Poluboiarinova, p.53

⁴⁴ Poluboiarinova, p. 102; p. 112

on the territory of the Horde, in layers spanning its later years, the teams found large numbers of ceramic shards, which paralleled various styles of ceramic production, some of them common to Novgorod.⁴⁵

Although the above list is not exhaustive, it is representative of the objects tying the city and the Horde. The question arises, where is the evidence of Novgorod's export of the vast array of oriental products that the Horde dealt in? There appears to be no mention of any export of spices, pepper, or gems by Novgorod to the West in primary sources. Archaeological evidence of their transit via Novgorod to the West is also not to be found.

Indeed in regards to pepper and spices, one will instead encounter Khoroshkevich's assessment, based on German sources, that Novgorod was in no position to export these items from the Horde to the West, but "conversely, pepper, ginger and raisins were all exported from Lubeck and other West European cities to the East."⁴⁶ It is important to note that the written sources dealing with the import of pepper and spices refer to the sixteenth century. Khoroshkevich does mention Novgorod exporting very small quantities of silk to the West in the fourteenth century. The situation regarding pepper could have possibly been somewhat different in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but this evidence does not bolster the image of Novgorod as a large scale middleman between East and West.

The Mongols did exert a definite political influence on Novgorod's trade patterns. Novgorod's commerce became a subject of Mongol patronage as early as 1270. In that year, Novgorod's citizens revolted against their prince Iaroslav Iaroslavovich, and ejected him from the city. Novgorod's citizenry perceived Iaroslav to act in a manner contrary to the charters he had signed when he first took the city's seat. One of the purely internal causes for this revolt was that the prince had taken foreigners (almost certainly foreign merchants) who lived in Novgorod out of the city.⁴⁷

Iaroslav sent his creature Ratibor, (who had been elected to city office at the prince's insistence and ejected along with him,) to the khan, Mengu-Timur to plead his case. Ratibor told the khan:

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.89; p.91; p.93; p. 95 p.108

⁴⁶ Khoroshkevich, Anna Leonidovna. *Torgovlia Velikogo Novgoroda s Pribaltikoi I Zapadnoi Ievropoi v XIV-XV vekakh*, Moscow, 1963. P.209

⁴⁷ NPL, p. 88, pp. 319-320

“Novgorod does not to listen to you, we asked for tribute for you, and they chased us out, and killed some, and looted our homes, and disrespected Iaroslav”⁴⁸.

The khan was ready to send a punitive force against such disloyal subjects, but due to the influence of Iaroslav’s brother Vasiliy Iaroslavovich,⁴⁹ Novgorod was spared. Vasiliy informed the khan that Iaroslav himself was the guilty party, and that his ejection from Novgorod had nothing to do with the city’s attitude towards the Tatars. Lacking the Horde’s military support, Iaroslav sued for peace. When he returned, Iaroslav did so accompanied by two Tatar envoys sent to re-install him on the seat of the city.⁵⁰ Though initially rebuffed, Iaroslav resumed his seat as a result of a deal brokered by the city’s bishop, but only when he signed a charter accepting the city’s will.⁵¹

At about this time Mengu-Timur issued at least one charter (*iarlyk*) in support of Novgorod’s commerce. This *iarlyk* (or *iarlyki*), unfortunately, did not survive, however, in the Novgorod charters (*gramoty*) we do have definite proof of the existence of such a document or documents.

There are two extant charters which bear Mengu-Timur’s name. One offers churches immunity from taxation, the other deals with Novgorod. The latter is a *gramota* given by Iaroslav as prince of Novgorod allowing German merchants free travel through his lands. To the author’s best knowledge it is the only extant princely charter, which quotes an order (*slovo*) of a Mongol khan. It is worth quoting in full: “Mengu-Timur’s word to Prince Iaroslav: give the German merchants way into your lands. From Prince Iaroslav to the people of Riga, to the great and the young, and to all: your way is clear through my lands; and who comes to fight, with them I do as I know; but for the merchant the way is clear.”⁵²

This charter is most commonly dated as being granted between the years 1266-1272. The 1266 date is that of Mengu-Timur’s assumption of the throne of the Golden Horde, 1272 is the date of

⁴⁸ NPL, p. 89, p. 320

⁴⁹ See Presniakov, *Obrazovaniie Velikorusskago Gosudarstva*, Petrograd, 1918, (Reprinted: Europe Printing The Hague, 1966) p. 131, also footnote 3 on p. 75 and footnote 3 from p.74 continued for an interpretation of Vasiliy’s motivations in acting against his brother.

⁵⁰ Valk, S. N. *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova*, Moscow, 1949. (Hereafter GVNP) p.11

⁵¹ NPL, pp.84-89

⁵² GVNP, Gramota #30, p57 “*Mengu-Temerevo slovo kl’ Iaroslavu kniaziiu: dai put’ Nemetskomu gostiu na svoiu volost’. Ot’ kniazia Iaroslava ko Rizhanom” i k’ bolshim” i k’ molodym”, i ko vsem’’: put’ vash’ chist” iest’ po moieiy volosti; a kto mne ratnyi, s tim” sia sam” vedaiu; a gostiu chist” put’ po moieiy volosti.*”

Iaroslav's death.⁵³ The charter documents the khan's intervention in favor of Novgorod's commercial interests by forcing its prince to allow foreign merchants passage through his lands. This charter is congruent with the Mongols' attitude towards trade, and is not at all surprising. It demonstrates a clear and evident self interest on the part of the Horde, for while it views Novgorod's trade as a viable economic undertaking worthy of the khan's patronage, this interest is strongly motivated by a desire to extract maximal tax revenue from an area that flourished on Western commerce.

But this is not the only mention of the Mengu-Timur's support for Novgorod's commercial actions. Although he is not mentioned by name in an agreement (dated 1270) between Novgorod and Iaroslav, that agreement mentions a gramota of the tsar, allowing Novgorod's merchants travel throughout the Suzdal lands without restraint. "And for our guests (merchants) to be guests in the Suzdal lands without border, by the Tsar's gramota."⁵⁴ This obviously also refers to a iarlyk of Mengu-Timur's based on its dating.

Do both of the above listed *gramoty* refer to the same iarlyk or do they refer to different documents? Although ultimately beyond proof, it is quite possible that they refer to the very same document. As mentioned, two Mongol envoys came to seat Iaroslav on the seat of Novgorod, and it is possible that they brought instructions from Mengu-Timur which found expression in both of these documents, provided we accept a date no earlier than 1270 as the date for Iaroslav's charter to the Germans. Although there is not enough evidence to categorically state this is the case, it is quite possible that one original iarlyk found expression in two subsequent documents.

⁵³ To narrow this dating further it could also be seen as having been issued either at the request of either Novgorod and/or the Germans after Iaroslav's return in 1270, (as amongst the grievances listed against him by the citizens of Novgorod is that he led foreigners <i.e. foreign merchants> out of the city). As it would seem foolish for a prince relying on Mongol support to contravene an order put forth by his suzerain after the receipt of such an order, it is unlikely that this charter would have been given earlier than Iaroslav's return. Yet another argument in favor of this dating stems from the fact that Mengu-Timur sent two envoys to seat Iaroslav in Novgorod in 1270. (see GVNP, Gramota # 3 p.11 for mention of the envoys on the reverse of the Gramota.) If one accepts the account in the Nikonian chronicle, it is also possible that the military clause could have been in response to those German troops present in the Novgorod coalition sent against Iaroslav before his return to the city mentioned therein. (Presniakov, p. 77, in citing the often unreliable Nikonian Chronicle accepts the plausibility of such troops in the combined Novgorodian armies as such aid would have been quite in line with the politics of the Livonian Order against the Grand Prince.) Unfortunately no firm evidence to shore up this assumed dating exists to the best knowledge of this author.

More curious still, is the fact that the wording present in the agreement between Novgorod and Iaroslav regarding the freedom of the city's merchants to travel through the lower lands repeats itself almost verbatim in later agreements between the city and its princes until the time of Ivan III. In all such charters save one, the authority for this freedom is the "*tsesareva gramota*".⁵⁵ These agreements span a period of almost exactly two hundred years. During the later hundred years of this period it was unlikely for Novgorod to continue receiving iarlyki from the khans of the Horde, as Moscow progressively usurped the right of sole contact with the Horde. This author is therefore inclined to see a single iarlyk issued by Mengu-Timur quoted repeatedly as precedent, not unlike the charter given the city by Iaroslav the Wise.

This theory finds strong circumstantial support in the work of V. Grigoriev, the nineteenth century researcher of the Horde's iarlyks extant in Russian translation. He states that quite quickly, when the people of Russia came to know the Mongols, they called these charters by their Tatar name, i.e. *iarlyk*. The word became so accepted, that it eventually entered the Russian language itself, albeit with the meaning of "label". In the early days of the Horde's control, however, the Russians consistently referred to them as "*gramoty*." As proof of this he quotes the Volhyn chronicle entry for 1255, and the now familiar agreement of Iaroslav with Novgorod. However, as early as 1303, Grigoriev finds evidence of them being referred to as *iarlyki*.⁵⁶

It is then understandable why the term "*gramota*" was applied to the iarlyk in 1270. Continual references to the iarlyki as *gramoty* in Novgorod's agreements as late as 1471 are puzzling, however, unless they point to the probability that an outdated term became ossified upon entering the formulaic language of Novgorod's agreements with their princes.

⁵⁴ GVNP, p. 13, Gramota #3 "A *gosti nashemu gostiti po Suzhdal'skoi zemli bez*" *rubezha, po tsesareve gramote.*"

⁵⁵ GVNP, p.16 Gramota #6; #7 (1304-1307); p.20 #9 (1307-1308); p.22 #10 (?); p. 28 #14 (1326-1327); p.30 #15 (1371); p.36 #19 (1435); p.41 #21(1446-1447); p.48 #26 (1471) The dating given is that of Valk, Ianin's (in *Novgorodskii Akty XII-XV vv. Khronologicheskii Kommentariy*, Moscow, 1991) often differs by several years, but as these dates are used purely for illustration of the distribution of such documents, these differences are immaterial.

⁵⁶ Grigor'iev, V. *O Dostovernosti Iarlykov Dannykh Khanami Zolotoi Ordy Russkomu Dukhovenstvu*, Moscow, 1842 pp. 11-12

Thus the importance of the Mongols' political intervention on Novgorod's trade with the West and the Suzdal' lands should not be underestimated. Even if it had been limited to Mengu-Timur's iarlyk or iarlyki, the city latched on to this intervention, and utilized its authority to set a precedent it was still calling upon after the Golden Horde's suzerainty over the Grand Princes existed in name only.

Having seen the extent of Novgorod's trade with the Horde, and having seen that the Horde was by no means insensitive to Novgorod's commercial aspirations we are still left with the question: why was Novgorod's trade with the Horde so limited? Why did Novgorod, the giant of Russian commerce, the city whose reputation has grown through the ages as a bustling medieval commercial center not capitalize on its relationship with the Horde, and attempt to monopolize the export of Eastern goods to northern Europe? The proposed answer is multifaceted. Several reasons exist which diminished the city's capacity to pursue such an undertaking, and we shall now examine each in turn.

Distance itself was a primary concern. This distance was both geographical and political. Although Novgorod was a vassal state of the Horde, it was not a direct vassal. It was tied to the Horde through its prince, a person with whom its relations were often ambivalent, and sometimes hostile. Between the Horde and Novgorod lay several Russian principalities through which Novgorod's merchants would have had to pass if they wished to carry on direct trade. As there was certainly trade between Novgorod and the Horde it is of course more than probable that some of Novgorod's merchants did travel to the Horde themselves. Unfortunately, we do not have any direct evidence to back up this assumption.⁵⁷ One could, of course, seek out confirmation of this theory in the most tenuous of connections.⁵⁸ Barring such scrambling, there is not much concrete evidence one way or the other.

⁵⁷ Presniakov quotes the Novgorod Primary Chronicle, that the men of Ustiug robbed Novgorod's hunters (*promyshlenniki*) who were on their way to the Horde in 1324. This would indeed be a valuable piece of information, were it not to be put forth in error. The men in question were actually heading to the Iugra, and the date given by the chronicle for this event is 1323. (NPL, p.97; p. 329)

⁵⁸ For example in 1353, Novgorod sent Semen Sudokov as one of its envoys to the Horde. (NPL, p.363) However, while it is possible that he derived this name from his commercial relations with Sudak, this is somewhat unlikely. To begin with Sudak was known in Russian as Surozh, and the merchants that dealt with it as Surozhane. (Grekov, p. 292 See the discussion of the Surozhane in the army of Dmitry Donskoi during the Kulikovo Field battle). Second, while Novgorod eventually did have a trade quarter known as Surozh row, where eastern silks were sold, Tikhomirov states that its existence dates back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century. (*Drevniaia Moskva XII-XV vv.* and *Srednevekovaia Rossia na Mezhdunarodnykh Putiakh XIV-XV vv.* Moscow, 1999 (reprint) p.330) On the other hand, in possible

Did Eastern merchants travel to Novgorod? About the only supporting evidence one can find for this assertion, is the statement that Novgorod had in the thirteenth century a row known as the *Khopyl'skiy ryad* where products brought by merchants from *Khopyl'* were sold.⁵⁹ Who exactly these merchants were, and where they came from is still a subject of some controversy. The only extant mention of the merchants themselves is as part of the telling of the 1327 Tver' rebellion, when they were slaughtered en masse. Tikhomirov, championing the economic might of Rus' in the middle ages, and overestimating its commercial relations, considers the name *Khopyl'* to be a corruption of *Khabul*.⁶⁰ That is more than unlikely, however, for nowhere else is *Khabul* mentioned as a major trading partner of the Horde, and *Khabul* is simply too far from Tver' to have left no other signs of such far flung commercial ties anywhere in between. The British historian John Fennel, following the lead of several other scholars, considers the *Khopyl'* merchants to be most likely of Volga Bulgar origin.⁶¹

Whoever they were, and wherever they came from, they were merchants who came to Russia under the protection of the Horde, and the only Russian city where they were definitely known to have resided was Tver'. It is possible that following pre-Mongol patterns of trade, Novgorod largely obtained its eastern goods not directly from the Horde, but from its neighbors which lay closer to the Horde, the principalities of Tver', and later Moscow. Such a dependence upon a middleman could, in and of itself, go a long way to explain why the eastern items of Novgorod's trade were largely limited to luxury items and were not received in amounts fit for export.

Novgorod lay further from the Horde than any major Russian state. The principal route to the Horde at this time was the Volga river itself. Situated as it was on the upper reaches of that river, the principality of Tver controlled Novgorod's access to the Volga. It was this access that allowed Tver' to maintain a thriving economy until it fell out of favor with the Horde after its rebellion in 1327. Tver' and

support of this argument is the fact on that same page Tikhomirov mentions two merchants from Sudak who were each known in the Russian literature of the fourteenth century as "*Sugdayets*", i.e. the Sogdian after yet another name for that city.

⁵⁹ Fennel, John. *The Emergence of Moscow 1304-1359*, Berkley, 1968pp. 106-107

⁶⁰ Tikhomirov, *Srednevekovaia Rossia*, p. 354 on the authority of S. P. Tolstoi, although he does not give any supporting evidence simply stating that it is linguistic in nature and comprehensible for orientalists.

⁶¹ Fennel, p.107 He quotes Professor Pritsak of Harvard and Professor Karl Menges of Columbia University as his authorities to arrive at that conclusion.

Novgorod were often hostile to each other. This was also the case for Novgorod's relationship with Moscow. Tver' and Moscow were also hostile to each other. As during the fourteenth century the Grand Principality was often contested by both cities, Novgorod repeatedly found itself between opposing forces. As its seat usually went to the victor, Novgorod had a very big stake in this struggle. How did this affect Novgorod's commercial relations with the East?

Any time that hostilities broke out between Novgorod and its prince, the city's merchants were taken hostage, their goods were confiscated and the routes to Novgorod were blockaded. This explains why Novgorod was so insistent on calling upon the khan's iarlyk in just about every territorial agreement with its princes. Unfortunately the freedom to travel and conduct commerce was often a legal fiction, and in practice, the exception more often than the rule. Novgorod's merchants could only travel in times of peace, and as a journey to the Horde could last for some time, even if all appeared tranquil when they set out, they could never be certain if upon their return they would be traveling back through friendly, or hostile territory. Political uncertainty aside, the journey itself was dangerous. The Tatars demanded bribes at every step, and if these were not forthcoming a traveler could expect no assistance, and often harsh treatment. The possibility of out and out robbery in the Russian lands, or in the Horde, should also be taken into account.

The earliest account written by a Russian merchant of travels through the lands of the Horde dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, and illuminates the period after the disintegration of the Horde. It was written by a citizen of Tver', not Novgorod, but it is unique, and still sheds light on the dangers of such a trip. In 1466 Afanasiy Nikitin started a journey which eventually took him to India. On his way, he passed through the possessions of what remained of the Golden Horde. He relates how three Tatars, first misdirected him and his companions, then extorted "gifts" to get them safely through the Tatar holdings. Finally, these "guides" betrayed the party and informed the khan of their arrival. After this, Tatars fired upon the party, killed one of its men, captured the boat laden with merchandise, and looted it. The other merchants, now destitute, barely made it to the open sea in the second of two boats.⁶²

⁶² Vodovozov, N. ed. *Khozhdenie za Tri Moria Afanasiya Nikitina*, Moscow, 1950 pp. 26-27

We could write off the above incident as entirely indicative of a time of the Horde's decline, yet it would be a mistake to do so. Both Rubruck and Carpini complained incessantly about the Mongols' greed and extortionist tactics throughout their narratives some two hundred years before Nikitin. It was certainly possible to do business with the Tatars, but only if one had deep pockets to placate their greed, and if one was willing to risk life and limb. By the fourteenth century, Novgorod's merchants did not often fare abroad even into neighboring Gotland, and they probably lacked the taste for the repeated trips to the Horde necessary for establishing long term relations and a constant flow of goods.

Eventually, Novgorod's men sought out profit of another kind from the Horde. Large groups of young men often led by Novgorod's boyars, but without any formal approval from the city, would travel in flat bottomed boats called *ushkuyi* to engage in piracy. From such boats these men became known as *ushkuiniki*. They would attack any civilized outposts. In the early part of the fourteenth century they attacked Karelian, Swedish, and Norwegian villages and towns. By the 1360s, a time of trouble for the Horde, they had turned their attention to the Volga. These bands of pirates attacked not only Tatar but also Russian merchants. If they came out of such raids alive, the *ushkuiniki* then returned to Novgorod to sell their wares.⁶³ Such piracy is indicative that stable commercial relations were not well established at this time, as though Novgorod officially disavowed such practices, the city did nothing to stop them.

Having seen that distance and danger played a portion in deterring the Novgorod's merchants from large scale trade, one may still wonder if that was enough to stop such activity. Would not the payoff in such trade outweigh the risks? Could not Novgorod's merchants reap astronomical rewards by providing Europe with rare and expensive oriental goods? Indeed had Novgorod possessed a chance to establish a monopoly on such trade it might have been well worth the effort. Ultimately, it was the presence of Italian merchants in the Golden Horde that effectively undermined any such hope.

The Genoese, with the Venetians coming in a close second, effectively shut out Novgorod from a role as middlemen. Through their colonies such as Kaffa and Tana, the Italians provided a steady flow of oriental goods to Europe, and of western goods to the Horde. Novgorod simply could not compete with

⁶³ Kostomarov, vol. 2, pp. 119-120

them. The Italians had untrammelled access to the Horde, freedom to trade within Europe, and were not bound by the wishes of the Hanseatic League.

For all its glory within Russia, Novgorod was a trading center with limited influence. Its own European connection consisted by and large of the Hanseatic League. That connection linked Novgorod with the European trade network, but to the extent that the League desired. Had oriental goods not been obtainable to Novgorod save trade with the Horde, Novgorod would have probably tried harder to trade with the Horde. Had Europe not been able to obtain oriental goods through the Italians, Novgorod would have likely tried to supply them. Yet it must be remembered that even at a time when the Horde had disintegrated, and the Italians lost their control over the Black Sea, Novgorod was able to obtain pepper and spices from the Hanseatic League. As for cloth and other manufactured goods, Europe imported cloth of such quality into Novgorod, that Ivan III gave it to the khans of the Horde's descendant states as "gifts".⁶⁴

The most telling single piece of evidence for the actual commercial routes that existed in the fourteenth century, is strangely enough epidemiological in nature. While the black plague originated in the steppes of Mongolia, and then went west to the Golden Horde, it did not come up to Novgorod or even Moscow up the Volga! Instead, from "the Crimea, along the Asiatic shore of the Aegean, and the island of Cyprus, the disease reached Egypt and spread into Syria. Then by way of the Mediterranean it visited Western Europe, and heading east by the Baltic sea struck Novgorod and reached Moscow in 1353."⁶⁵

Thus the main flow of commerce, and the availability of oriental goods in Novgorod itself made it unnecessary for Novgorod's merchants to risk life and livelihood to attempt to travel to the Horde for large scale commerce. And yet, there is still one more reason which made an attempt to travel to the Horde impractical. Novgorod simply did not have enough to offer the Horde to maintain sustained high volume commercial relations with it. If we recall, Novgorod had only two main quantity exports of its own. It sold wax and furs. The wax came from the south, and as mentioned before, apiculture was well developed along the Volga itself. Grekov makes note of the fact that the Horde was not indifferent to the

⁶⁴ Khoroshkevich, p.179 (around 1504-1508)

⁶⁵ Vernadsky, HoR Vol. 3 p. 205

products of its neighboring people such as the Mordva among which were “grain, honey, wax, and ... furs.”⁶⁶

The Mordva were not the only people to supply the Horde with furs. Ibn Batuta described a trading route to obtain furs stretching northward from Great Bulgar. He states that the journey from Great Bulgar to the land of twilight took some forty days, and that one could only get there by dog sled. He then relates, that only the richest merchants went there, as one had to have more than a hundred sled teams to undertake the journey successfully. Upon arriving, merchants would place their goods in the snow overnight. The next morning they would find heaps of animal furs placed opposite their goods. If the merchants were satisfied, they would take the furs, if not, they would leave the goods and the furs alone to see if their partners deposited more furs the next morning. Ibn Batuta states “Those that come there to trade, do not know who buys from them and sells to them, be it men or djinns.”⁶⁷

This commerce, lucrative as it was for the merchants who undertook it, was not the only way the Horde obtained its furs. Some furs came from Russia, and some from Novgorod. The Horde did not need to buy Novgorod’s furs unless it wanted to however, as it taxed Novgorod’s *promyshlenniki* (trappers). As early as 1262 the Horde installed a baskak to collect taxes in Ustiug. Janet Martin, a historian who focused on the Mongol fur trade argues, this was profitable as “Ustiug was located to intercept Novgorodians traveling to and from their fur suppliers.”⁶⁸ Thus, when the Horde had taken stock of the capabilities of the Russian north, it often chose to extort maximum profit with a minimum of effort and expense.

Conclusion

⁶⁶ Grekov, p.102, quoting A. A. Krotkov’s article *K voprosu o severnykh ulusakh Zolotoordynskago khanstva* published as a separate edition in 1928 in Azerbaidjan.

⁶⁷ Tizengausen, vol. 1, p. 297

⁶⁸ Martin, Janet. “The Land of Darkness and the Golden Horde, The Fur Trade Under the Mongols, XIII-XIV Centuries” in Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique, Vol. XIX-4, October-December 1978, p. 406

It becomes apparent that although Novgorod did have some commercial relations with the Horde, sources do not point to Novgorod as a major commercial transit center between East and the West. Although the information we have is limited, there is certainly enough evidence to show that Novgorod was able to acquire some eastern goods for its own use and possibly for very limited export. The ceramic ware, the exports of silk, as well as the imports of the more utilitarian 'zyanden' all point to its Eastern trade.

Yet we have also seen, that while both the Horde and Novgorod had intersecting commercial networks, their interaction was limited. The Horde's network was undeniably larger and more far flung. While the Horde had most products of the medieval world come through its ports and cities; Novgorod's network was limited on one side by its relation with the Hanseatic League, and on the other by a reliance on raw materials for its export items. These raw materials were available to the Horde either through trade with other partners or which were the Horde's for the taking if it wished to exert tribute from Novgorod in kind.

Also, Novgorod did not have independent access to the Horde as it was hemmed in by often hostile principalities who not only prevented it from trading freely with the Horde, but also attempted to carry on such trade themselves, often with some degree of success. Finally any impetus for large scale trade was decreased by the dangers of a journey to the Horde, and that the relative availability of oriental goods in Europe. Taken together these reasons hopefully go some way toward explaining the limited nature of Novgorod's trade with the Horde.

Although the paucity of available evidence sometimes makes it impossible to leave the realm of speculation, this paucity also makes it all the more important that any conclusions drawn, be firmly based on a consideration of all available evidence. The author does not pretend that his examination of the evidence was by any means exhaustive. Therefore, the hypotheses presented here by their very nature remain open to reexamination. Despite this, it is safe to say that any examination of the past is not entirely useless so long as it spurs future research. This paper has hopefully accomplished at least that last goal, if only by acting as a target for criticism.

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