

The Mongols: An excerpt from the *Novgorod Chronicle*, 1315

The Novgorod Chronicle is one of the most vital documents from postclassical Russia - or what is more properly called Kievan Russia, the first development of a Russian civilization centered in what is now western Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Maintained by Orthodox monks and reflecting their fervent religion, the Chronicle detailed major events, without much interpretation, save that inspired by religious and local loyalties. Novgorod was a trading city of 250,000 people on the route between Scandinavia and Byzantium. As Kievan Rus fell apart in the twelfth century, Novgorod developed an increasingly independent regional government and army. During the mid-thirteenth century (from 1240 to 1263) the city was ruled by Prince Alexander Nevsky, who won important victories over Germans and Swedes but submitted to Mongol - called Tartar in the Chronicle - tax gatherers in order to buy his city's independence. Alexander also visited Mongol leaders to negotiate for his city. Mongol incursions occurred, but Novgorod remained the only Russian state to escape full Mongol (Tartar) control. Only in the late fourteenth century did the city begin to lose more of its independence to the expanding Russian government now based in Moscow.

*Source: Robert Mitchell and Nevill Forbes, eds., *The Chronicle of Novgorod (1076-1471)* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1914), pp. 186-88.*

A.D. 1224. The same year for our sins, unknown tribes came, whom no one exactly knows, who they are, nor whence they came out, nor what their language is, nor of what race they are, nor what their faith is; but they call them Tartars. God alone knows who they are and whence they came out. Very wise men know them exactly, who understand books; but we do not know who they are, but have written of them here for the sake of the memory of the Russian Princes and of the misfortune which came to them from them. For we have heard that they have captured many countries.

A.D. 1238. And the accursed ones having come thence took Moscow, Pereyaslavl, Yurev, Dmitrov, Volok, and Tver; there also they killed the son of [King] Yaroslav. And thence the lawless ones came and invested [the city of] Torzhok on the festival of the first Sunday in Lent. They fenced it all round with a fence as they had taken other towns, and here the accursed ones fought with battering rams for two weeks. And the people in the town were exhausted and from Novgorod there was no help for them; but already every man began to be in perplexity and terror. And so the pagans took the town, and slew all from the male sex even to the female, all the priests and the monks, and all stripped and reviled gave up their souls to the Lord in a bitter and a wretched death, on March 5, the day of the commemoration of the holy Martyr Nikon, on Wednesday in Easter week. And there, too, were killed Ivanko the Posadnik of Novi-torg, Yakin Vlunkovich, Gleb Borisovich and Mikhailo Moiseivich. And the accursed godless ones then pushed on from Torzhok by the road of Seregeri right up to Ignati's cross, cutting down everybody like grass, to within 100 versts of Novgorod. God, however, and the great and sacred apostolic cathedral Church of St. Sophia, and St. Kyuril, and the prayers of the holy and orthodox archbishop, of the faithful Princess, and of the very reverend monks finally ended the attack...

The same winter the accursed raw-eating Tartars, Berkai and Kasachik, came with their wives, and many others, and there was a great tumult in Novgorod, and they did much evil in the provinces, taking contribution for the accursed Tartars. And the accursed ones began to fear death; they said to [Prince] Alexander: "Give us guards, lest they kill us." And the Prince ordered... all the sons of the Boyars to protect them by night. The Tartars said: "Give us your numbers for tribute or we will run away." And the common people would not give their numbers for tribute but said: "Let us die honourably for St. Sophia and for the angelic houses." Then the people were divided: who was good stood by St. Sophia and by the True Faith; and they made opposition; the greater men bade the lesser, be counted for tribute. And the accursed ones wanted to escape, driven by the Holy Spirit, and they devised an evil counsel how to strike at the town at the other side, and the others at this side by the lake;

and Christ's power evidently forbade them, and they durst not. And becoming frightened they began to crowd to one point to St. Sophia, saying: "Let us lay our heads by St. Sophia." And it was on the morrow, the Prince rode down...and the accursed Tartars with him, and by the counsel of the evil they numbered themselves for tribute; for the Boyars thought it would be easy for themselves, but fall hard on the lesser men. And the accursed ones began to ride through the streets, writing down the Christian houses; because for our sins God has brought wild beasts out of the desert to eat the flesh of the strong, and to drink the blood of the Boyars. And having numbered them for tribute and taken it, the accursed ones went away, and Alexander followed them, having set his son Dmitri on the throne.

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Questions:

- 1) What examples within the excerpt support the Russian-give name to the Mongols of Tartars? Provide the examples and explanation in paragraph form.
- 2) What are AT LEAST TWO examples of bias that the author has embedded in the text? Provide the examples and explanation in paragraph form.
- 3) How did the descriptive details of the text assist in painting a horrific depiction of the Mongols? Provide the examples and explanation in paragraph form.