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THE ULUS OF JOCHI IN THE ERA OF THE BLACK DEATH

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article examines the Ulus of Jochi in the era of the Second Plague Pandemic, known as the Black Death, and reassesses its place in the history of epidemic processes in Eurasia. The study proceeds from the assumption that the Golden Horde should not be viewed only as a peripheral zone through which the disease passed on its way to Europe. *Goals and objectives.* The goal of the article is to analyze the Ulus of Jochi as an important space of plague transmission and impact. The objectives are to review the main historiographical approaches, identify the possible routes of the pandemic, characterize the natural and communication conditions of its spread, and assess its demographic, economic, political, and cultural consequences. *Results.* The article shows that the cities, caravan routes, river networks, Crimean ports, and connections of the Ulus of Jochi with Central Asia, Khwarazm, the Volga region, the Black Sea area, and the Rus' principalities turned this space into one of the key nodes in the movement of the Black Death. The spread of plague was shaped by natural reservoirs, climatic fluctuations, population mobility, trade networks, and the vulnerability of urban centers. *Conclusion.* The Black Death was not the sole cause of the crisis of the Ulus of Jochi. However, it intensified existing contradictions, weakened cities and trade, disrupted political stability, and deepened the processes associated with the Great Troubles and the subsequent restructuring of the Golden Horde space.

Keywords: Ulus of Jochi, Black Death, *Yersinia pestis*, Second Plague Pandemic, Golden Horde space

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«ҚАРА ӨЛІМ» ДӘУІРІНДЕГІ ЖОШЫ ҰЛЫСЫ

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* Мақалада «Қара өлім» деген атаумен белгілі Екінші оба пандемиясы кезеңіндегі Жошы Ұлысының орны қарастырылады және оның Еуразиядағы індеттік үдерістер тарихындағы маңызы қайта бағаланады. Зерттеуде Алтын Орда тек індеттің Еуропаға таралу жолындағы шеткі аймақ ретінде ғана қарастырылмауы тиіс деген тұжырым негізге алынады. *Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Мақаланың мақсаты – Жошы Ұлысын оба індетінің таралуы мен ықпалы тұрғысынан маңызды кеңістік ретінде талдау. Осы мақсатқа жету үшін негізгі тарихнамалық тұжырымдарды қарастыру, пандемияның ықтимал таралу бағыттарын анықтау, оның таралуына әсер еткен табиғи және коммуникациялық жағдайларды сипаттау, сондай-ақ індеттің демографиялық, экономикалық, саяси және мәдени салдарын бағалау міндеттері қойылады. *Нәтижелер.* Мақалада Жошы Ұлысының қалалары, керуен жолдары, өзендік қатынас жүйелері, Қырым порттары, сондай-ақ Орталық Азиямен, Хорезммен, Еділ бойымен, Қара теңіз аймағымен және орыс князьдіктерімен байланыстары бұл кеңістікті «Қара өлімнің» таралуындағы маңызды тораптардың біріне айналдырғаны көрсетіледі. Обаның таралуына табиғи ошақтар, климаттық ауытқулар, халықтың мобильділігі, сауда желілері және қалалық орталықтардың осалдығы ықпал еткені айқындалады. *Қорытынды.* «Қара өлім» Жошы Ұлысы дағдарысының жалғыз себебі болған жоқ. Алайда ол бұрыннан қалыптасқан қайшылықтарды күшейтіп, қалалар мен сауданың әлсіреуіне, саяси тұрақтылықтың бұзылуына, сондай-ақ «Ұлы дүрбелеңмен» және кейінгі алтынордалық кеңістіктің қайта құрылуымен байланысты үдерістердің тереңдеуіне ықпал етті.

Түйін сөздер: Жошы Ұлысы, Қара өлім, *Yersinia pestis*, Екінші оба пандемиясы, алтынордалық кеңістік.

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УЛУС ДЖУЧИ В ЭПОХУ «ЧЕРНОЙ СМЕРТИ»

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Аннотация. Введение. В статье рассматривается Улус Джучи в эпоху Второй пандемии чумы, известной как «Черная смерть», и переосмысливается его место в истории эпидемических процессов Евразии. Исследование исходит из того, что золотоордынское пространство не следует рассматривать только как периферийную зону, через которую болезнь распространялась в сторону Европы.

Цель и задачи исследования. Цель статьи состоит в анализе Улуса Джучи как важного пространства распространения и воздействия чумы. Для достижения этой цели рассматриваются основные историографические подходы, выявляются возможные маршруты движения пандемии, характеризуются природные и коммуникационные условия ее распространения, а также оцениваются демографические, экономические, политические и культурные последствия эпидемии. **Результаты.** В статье показано, что города, караванные пути, речные коммуникации, крымские порты и связи Улуса Джучи с Центральной Азией, Хорезмом, Поволжьем, Причерноморьем и русскими княжествами превращали это пространство в один из важных узлов движения «Черной смерти». Распространение чумы определялось сочетанием природных очагов, климатических колебаний, мобильности населения, торговых сетей и уязвимости городских центров. **Выводы.** «Черная смерть» не была единственной причиной кризиса Улуса Джучи. Однако она усилила уже существовавшие противоречия, способствовала ослаблению городов и торговли, нарушению политической стабильности и углублению процессов, связанных с «Великой замятней» и последующей перестройкой золотоордынского пространства.

Ключевые слова: Улус Джучи, Черная смерть, Yersinia pestis, Вторая пандемия чумы, золотоордынское пространство

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Introduction

It is the political dimension of the development of the Ulus of Jochi in the 14th century that has been traditionally considered in studies of the history of this state: increase of the khan's authority under Uzbek Khan and Janibeg, development of cities and international trade, subsequent dynastic crisis after Berdi Beg's death, the Great troubles, conflicts among regional elites, increasing independence of particular regions of the Golden Horde. It is the internal strife among the Chinggisids, a decrease in central authority, military conflicts and changes in the balance of power among the khan, emir nobility and regional elites which are used to explain the crisis of the Golden Horde statehood. However, this explanatory model does not always explain processes developing in the mid- and second half of the 14th century, when an increase of instability was accompanied with

a population decline, disruption of trade routes, collapse of many cities, a changing power structure of the western part of Eurasia.

In this respect, the study of the Ulus of Jochi in relation to the second plague pandemic called the Black Death is very significant. This was not only an epidemic in the biological sense, but a component of vast natural, communicational, socio-economic, and political processes encompassing large parts of Eurasia. The issue is especially significant for the Golden Horde: Central Eurasia, Khwarazm, Volga Region, Crimea and the Black Sea region were crossed by major trade, riverine, caravan, and sea routes connecting East and West, so that the Ulus of Jochi must be considered not as a fringe, but as a specific space affected by the disease.

The importance of the topic under discussion can be explained by several factors. In the first place, historians in recent decades have shown significantly increasing interest in disease as a factor in historical development. Epidemics, along with demography, economy, migrations, political power and social institutions, have increasingly been interpreted as factors of historical change and not only in the context of medical history. Secondly, new archaeogenetic findings have made it possible to reconsider the origin of the disease and the initial spreading pathways of the Black Death; the article by M. A. Spyrou and co-authors demonstrated that materials from the Kara-Djigach and Burana cemeteries in the Chy Valley of 1338–1339 provided evidence of ancient *Yersinia pestis* DNA, and are linked to an initial period of the Second Plague Pandemic. Thirdly, the context of the Golden Horde provides an opportunity to combine written sources, archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, historical demography and paleogenetics, thereby opening the way to a comprehensive analysis of the Ulus of Jochi in the era of the Black Death.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Ulus of Jochi in the epoch of the Black Death from the perspective of the pandemic's diffusion, the natural and communicational conditions under which this diffusion proceeded, and its effects on Golden Horde space. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal it is necessary to review the literature on this topic, define the most important concepts related to the study of the pandemic, identify possible routes by which the plague spread, characterize the natural and communicational factors influencing the vulnerability of the Ulus of Jochi, describe how the epidemic crisis affected demography, towns and cities, trade routes and the stability of the Golden Horde political system.

Materials and Methods

The study's evidence base is composed of written, archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeogenetic data. The written evidence includes both Rus' accounts of «pestilences» recorded in chronicles, and Arab-Muslim, Persian and Latin eyewitness accounts of plague propagation throughout Eurasia. Archaeological and epigraphic sources make it possible to define more precisely the area and time of occurrence of epidemics, and to clarify these processes in Central Eurasia and the Volga region in particular. The economic impacts of the crisis are traced based on the numismatic evidence. The problem of the earliest stages of the Second Plague Pandemic is addressed based on the published archaeogenetic data from the ancient *Yersinia pestis* DNA. Archaeogenetic data are regarded in this study not as individual laboratory findings collected for this specific investigation, but as published scientific sources, the interpretation of which is correlated with written data and historical-geographical material.

In terms of methodology, the analysis has been conducted using source-critical, comparative-historical and historical-geographical perspectives. The source-critical approach is needed to analyze the written accounts of 'pestilences', their terminology, origin, and credibility. The comparative-historical approach is used to compare accounts about Jochi's Ulus, Russian principalities, Central Asia, Crimea, Middle East and Europe. The historical-geographical approach is applied to outline the possible pathways of the disease's spread through trade, riverine, caravan and maritime routes. Combined, these methods make it possible to investigate the Black Death as one of the factors influencing the demographic, urban and political conditions within the Golden Horde in the fourteenth century. An essential methodological point in this analysis is the rejection of a linear causal explanation of the Ulus of Jochi's crisis with an epidemic alone. It assumes that the Black Death was

not the single cause of the Great Troubles and the subsequent weakening of the Golden Horde, but rather one of the systemic factors intensifying pre-existing political, economic, and social contradictions. This methodology ensures that biological determinism can be avoided, at the same time confirming that the epidemic cannot be omitted when exploring the fourteenth-century crisis of the Golden Horde.

Discussion

Research into the Black Death within the context of the history of the Ulus of Jochi emerged at the juncture of several research fields: the history of epidemics, source studies, historical demography, epidemiology, climatology, archaeology, and paleogenetics. Initially, historiography was dominated by the classic model of a pandemic spreading from the natural plague foci of eastern Eurasia, through Caffa, to the Mediterranean. Subsequent textual, epigraphic, archeological and archaeogenetic evidence has now modified this model, by suggesting pre-existing episodes within Central Eurasia and in the space of the Golden Horde.

The initial period of plague research is characterized by medical and chronicle-based historical descriptions of epidemics. Following the Moscow plague of 1770–1772 the first scientific studies were produced that interpreted epidemics within the then prevailing theories, including miasmatic theory. N. M. Karamzin, using sources derived from Rus' chronicles, synthesized material concerning 'pestilences' in the Rus' principalities and the Horde lands. Through this analysis, epidemics were integrated into a wider framework of historical study (Karamzin, 1988).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the problem gained an archeological and epigraphic dimension. D. A. Chwolson, analyzing Nestorian tombstones dating to 1338–1339 and located near Lake Issyk-Kul (Chwolson, 1897), referred to a «pestilential disease». The evidence thus provided forms one of the cornerstones of the Central Asian thesis. Simultaneously N. K. Shchepot'ev argued for the existence of a natural plague focus in the lower reaches of the Volga, which played an exceptionally important role in the study of the space of the Golden Horde. (Shchepot'ev, 1897).

The study of the plague in the Soviet era was mainly performed in the context of the history of medicine and epidemiology. The studies of D. K. Zabolotnyi on natural plague foci are very significant: the theory suggested that the causative agent could "live" in the natural environment for a long time among rodents and their parasites, and then infect humans during specific changes in ecological and anthropogenic conditions (Zabolotnyi, 1922). This point of view is important for the history of the Ulus of Jochi as the steppe, Caspian and Volga-Ural regions were among the areas of potential natural plague foci for *Yersinia pestis*. The issues of mortality levels were posed by demographic studies (e. g. Uralnis, 2007), it is acknowledged that in some parts of Europe and the Golden Horde it could be very large.

In Western historiography there was long a Eurocentric perspective; research concentrated on Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East and the Golden Horde was perceived in relation to the siege of Caffa and the spread to Europe. However, the importance of trade connections and the multistep character of the epidemic spread was later identified in the research of O. J. Benedictow, who did not attribute the infection of Europe solely to the siege of Caffa. (Benedictow, 2006).

U. Schamiloglu's work is given considerable attention in the historiography of the Golden Horde, where disease is viewed as a significant element influencing the history of the Ulus of Jochi. The author relates plague epidemics to de-population, de-urbanisation, reduction in craft production and trade, increased political disorder, heightened religious feelings and cultural transformation. The Great Troubles (1359–1380) can be therefore considered, in this view, not just a dynastic crisis, but a crisis, the rise of which against the backdrop of serious socio-economic changes was caused by a series of epidemic waves (Schamiloglu, 1993).

One of the most thorough works in this field is that of T. F. Khaidarov who collected Arab-Muslim, Persian, Latin, Rus', Lithuanian, and Byzantine source material and was the first to establish that in the space of the Golden Horde the plague epidemic occurred in several waves and protracted duration. Khaidarov considers the most important centers to be the Lower Volga region, Crimea, the

Caucasus, Shirvan, as well as the basins of the Volga and the Dnieper, while insisting on the precise use of chronicle lexicon since terms such as 'hunger', 'plague' and 'plague among people and horses' could not only mean epidemics but also famine, epizootics, or even the coming of a series of calamities (Khaidarov, 2018).

The current stage of the research on the Black Death relates to paleogenetics and the study of ancient DNA. The research by M. A. Spyrou et al., based on data from Kara-Djigach and Burana cemeteries, reveals that a combination of archaeological, epigraphic, and genetic material can contribute to the reevaluation of the question of the Second Plague Pandemic's origin. This has strengthened the Central Eurasian direction in historiography and pointed to the necessity of further investigation of epidemics within the territory related to the Jochid Ulus (Spyrou et al., 2022).

Results

The movement of the Black Death in the 14th century cannot be considered outside the communication network of Eurasia. The Ulus of Jochi held a key intermediate position between Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, Crimea, and the Mediterranean. Its cities and stopping points served as junctions between the steppe routes, the route along the Volga, Khwarazm direction, Crimean ports and Italian settlements. As a result, the Golden Horde became not only a political space but also a zone of highly intensive movement of people, goods, animals, and information. During the period of the pandemic, this movement had two different roles: on the one hand, it was profitable, and on the other hand, it facilitated the spread of infections (Spyrou et al., 2022: 719).

In traditional historiography, the transmission route of the Black Death to Europe has usually been associated with transmission from the natural foci of *Yersinia pestis* in eastern Eurasia, through Crimean Caffa to Sicilian Messina. This model originated from the descriptions by medieval writers of the onset of the disease in the Mediterranean especially those of Michele da Piazza. Ibn Battuta's notes on the Plague are another important source of information for its broad geographical extension: he wrote about the presence of plague cases in India about 1345, and in early summer 1348 he documented the effects of the plague disease in the Middle East especially in Gaza, Homs, and Damascus (Ibn Battuta, 1996). But this context must be complemented.

Before spreading to Europe, the epidemic was likely circulating throughout Central Eurasia and the Ulus of Jochi. Based on archaeological evidence, mass burials of Christians have been found in Semirechye, which is situated on the caravan routes of the silk and spice trades; their dating falls within the period around 1340; plague is even documented on the tombstones of the interred as the cause of death. Plague is also reported in Astrakhan and Sarai in 1346, which were crucial caravan points linking the Golden Horde to Rus' lands. Therefore it is possible to view the Ulus of Jochi not only as a bridging region between the East and Europe, but also as one of the foci of the early epidemic spread.

Of the many pathways by which the pandemic moved, the following were of greatest importance to the Ulus of Jochi: The first may be designated the Central Asian-Khwarazmian pathway. The Central Asian-Khwarazmian pathway linked the regions of Eastern Turkestan, Semirechye, Transoxiana and Khwarazm with the lower Volga and with steppe zones. In the fourteenth century, Khwarazm still retained its position as one of the major economic and cultural centres of the Golden Horde world. It was a hub of routes, a hub for major trade and caravan routes, linking Central Asia with the Volga basin and the area around the Black Sea. The spread of plague westward to Khwarazm, if early accounts of infection in the Issyk-Kul area in 1338–1339 can be corroborated, was entirely plausible from a geographical and historical perspective. The second route was the Volga region, particularly the lower Volga cities of the Golden Horde. Sarai, Sarai al-Jadid, Astrakhan, Bolgar, and others functioned not only as centers of government and craft production, but were points where riverine and steppe flows of goods converged. U. Schamiloglu points out that sources from Rus' indicate the spread of infection to Golden Horde cities, including Sarai and Astrakhan, before spreading westward to Crimea in 1346. This is of interest not only in charting the pathway of the plague, but it may also contribute to explaining the apparent vulnerability of the urban

system of the Golden Horde. The cities were sites combining dense populations, trade warehouses, markets, craft production, caravanserais, and visiting merchants (Schamiloglu, 2017: 329).

The third focus is related to Crimea and the Black Sea region. Crimean ports, notably Caffa, Soldaia and Tana/Azaq were well integrated into a network of international trade with Genoa, Venice, Constantinople, Egypt and various parts of the Mediterranean. It was via Crimea that the Black Death emerged as a historically significant catastrophe for European and Mediterranean history in 1347–1353. However, for the history of the Ulus of Jochi, what must be stressed is that Crimea was not simply «where the pandemic exited into Europe» but part of the political and economic network of the Golden Horde. The events in Caffa and Tana must therefore be discussed within the context of relations among khanly authority, Italian trading colonies, cities in Crimea and the steppe hinterland.

The event involving the siege of Caffa by the forces of Janibeg and the famous description by Gabriele de' Mussi regarding the alleged catapulting of plague-ridden bodies into the city, occupied a privileged position in historical narratives (Wheelis, 2002: 973).

It has already become the object of scholarly interest and is often discussed as an early form of biological warfare. For the purpose of the present research, the key issue is not so much the historicity of the particular event as the broader significance of the fact that, by the mid-1340s, Crimea had become a nexus for war, trade, and the spread of epidemics. Whether or not the chronicle of de' Mussi is hyperbolic, it demonstrates a popular conception of war, trade, movement of people and mortality by the time it was written.

The fourth direction also ran through the Rus' principalities and northwestern routes. We have records of plague, «pestilences», reaching the Rus' principalities from the Horde space, and subsequent outbreaks of epidemics in the second half of the 14th century. As T. F. Khaidarov proves, the Rus chroniclers developed a tradition of mentioning the origin of the Black Death as spreading from the territory of the Golden Horde from 1346 onward (Khaidarov, 2018: 9, 121).

Meanwhile the transmission of infection did not occur all at once or along a single, unidirectional route. It was composed of several waves, different directions and a combination of several epidemic factors. Thus, it would be better to speak not of a single «plague route» but of a network of directions which coincided with the trade, riverine, steppe, and political communications of the Ulus of Jochi.

The spread of the Black Death within the Ulus of Jochi should not be explained solely as the export of infection from Central Asia or the eastern regions. The space of the Golden Horde itself was a part of a much larger natural-epidemiological space of Eurasia, in which conditions for circulation of plague infection existed. There might have been constant natural foci of *Yersinia pestis* in steppe, semi-desert, Caspian and Volga-Ural areas. Therefore the Ulus of Jochi is to be interpreted not only as a passageway between East and West but also as a space where natural, climatic and anthropogenic factors strongly intersected.

The concept of the natural focality of infectious vector-borne diseases is rather important for explaining of these processes. According to this concept, plague could be present for long periods of time in natural reservoirs—in the wild rodents and their ectoparasites (especially in fleas), without human participation. T. F. Khaidarov points out that animal migrations, changes in boundaries of natural foci, alteration of climatic regime, increase of human activity, and transgressions of Caspian Sea could alter the activity of steppe rodents and favor the transfer of infection from animal reservoirs (Khaidarov, 2018: 65).

Significantly, both the Caspian and Volga-Ural regions formed an intersection of nomadic routes, river transport lines, caravans, and cities. Normally, natural plague circulation in this area was confined to animal populations, but climatic and physical changes, droughts, changes in humidity, food supplies, and animal migrations could affect this balance and increase the probability that the epidemic would affect the human population. The Ulus of Jochi was not only a natural-climatic but also a socio-economic space. A well-developed network of towns, caravan trade, river routes, international markets and constant contacts between nomadic and sedentary populations contributed to rapid transmission of infection. The Golden Horde's state structure ensured not only long-term

maintenance of the pathogen but also made it possible for a local outbreak to develop into an epidemic wave.

Reconstructions based on numismatic material show that many medieval towns in the territory of modern Kazakhstan disappeared. One of them is the medieval town of Almatu mentioned on coins of 1285–1287 and in hoards of the 1330s, after the plague, it never recovered.

Among the populations of the Golden Horde, the urban population was affected most; nomads, unlike sedentary people, were dispersed. The loss of sedentary population led to a weakening of state power, a reduction in trade volume on the northern section of the Great Silk Road that had passed along the territory of the Ulus of Jochi. Moreover, reduction of urban population caused negative consequences on the material condition of the ruling elite. All these facts contributed to intensification of «nomadic factor» in the system of political structure of the Ulus of Jochi and negatively affected the political situation.

Thus the factors of plague spread in the Ulus of Jochi were natural (presence of natural foci of *Yersinia pestis* in steppe, semi-desert, Caspian and Volga-Ural ecosystems), climatic (changes in temperature and humidity regimes, changes in food supply and rodent behavior) and anthropogenic (high population mobility, caravan trade, military campaigns, presence of cities and contacts between nomads and the sedentary population). These factors together make it possible to define the Ulus of Jochi as one of the key natural-anthropogenic nodes of the second plague pandemic.

The plague pandemic was one of the key reasons for the great transformation of the Ulus of Jochi in the second half of the 14th century. This epidemic should not be considered the sole reason for the political crisis and subsequent destruction of the Golden Horde system. However, the number of deaths, disruption of trade relations, urban decline, disintegration of the elite enhanced pre-existing contradictions and created the conditions for long-term destabilization.

The clearest result of the plague pandemic was the disruption of the political balance in the western part of the Ulus of Jochi. In the first half of the 14th century, especially under Uzbek Khan and Janibeg Khan, the khan's power embraced all major regions and provided a system of relations between the khan and tribal aristocracy. After the death of Berdi Beg in 1359 the political crisis escalated rapidly. In written sources this era is described as the era of the Great Troubles. In that era, khans changed frequently, emirs grew stronger, and the administrative order of the Golden Horde disintegrated.

U. Schamiloglu does not connect the crisis merely to the dynastic struggle but also to the outcome of several waves of plagues. In his opinion, the political structure of the Golden Horde depended not only on the Chinggisid dynasty but also on the stability of the tribal elite which participated in the acceptance and support of khans (Schamiloglu, 2023: 502). If the epidemic influenced both the rulers and representatives of the leading clans, then the entire mechanism of an ordered succession was broken. In this case, the plague has not weakened any individual ruler as much as it weakened the institutional foundations of Khanate authority.

This view enables a more profound reinterpretation of the years 1359–1380. Frequent overthrows of rulers were not new in the history of the Golden Horde. However, the second half of the fourteenth century witnessed a series of rulers that marked a sustained period of political chaos. The frequent enthronement of khans, Mamai's consolidation of power, the strengthening of autonomy in separate regions and the intervention of eastern Jochids show that the epidemic influenced not only the top strata of the dynasty but also the entire system of political management.

Differences between western and eastern regions of Jochi's ulus may also be attributed to the uneven influence of the pandemic. U. Schamiloglu points out that the eastern regions may have suffered to a lesser extent due to the larger proportion of nomads, and perhaps due to different conditions for the development of epidemics. This is why eastern forces, such as those of Urus Khan and later Tokhtamysh, were able to enter the struggle for power in the western ulus of the Golden Horde. In the late 14th century, with Tokhtamysh, not only the aforementioned three groups but also the Shirin, Baryn, Argyn, and Kipchak tribes traveled west which were later incorporated into the political systems of the khanates that followed the Golden Horde. The migrations of eastern peoples

in the later 14th century can be seen as a consequence of both demographic and political reshaping of the former Golden Horde space (Schamiloglu, 2023: 502–503).

Demographic implications of epidemics constitute one of the most important reasons behind the crisis. According to calculations by D. M. Iskhakov and I. L. Izmailov, the 1346–1350 epidemic reduced the population of the Golden Horde by an average of one quarter. High population density in cities, frequent trade contacts, and a constant influx of travelers led to high numbers of victims. Some urban centers were affected much more severely than others and all of this affected craft, trade, taxes and, of course, the central authority's control over the territories (Iskhakov, Izmailov, 2007: 84).

Economic implications of the plague were first and foremost seen in worsening conditions in cities and disruptions in trade. The Ulus of Jochi had international trade routes including caravan, river and maritime routes connecting Asia with the Middle East and Crimea, Khwarezm with the Volga region, etc. Such links guaranteed the Golden Horde's prosperity, but during the epidemic they were the primary means for the propagation of infection. Decreasing number of people, including merchants and artisans, instability of trade routes, and absence of protection of traders, threatened transit trade, and weakened the authority's revenue sources.

We can determine the economic impacts of the epidemic using numismatic sources. Using the hoard of silver coins from the fortified settlement of Selitrennoe, S. Yu. Skisov confirmed that in the Ulus of Jochi, during 1348–1350, there was a significant decrease in coinage. The most significant decline was in 1349–1350 when, according to his calculation, production volume dropped to between 10–12 times compared with the period before the plague which indicates a decrease in trade, the inflow of silver to the market and disruption of monetary circulation. Growing hoard accumulation during the 14th century also reflected not only political disorganization, but also deepening economic crisis starting in the plague period (Skisov, 2016: 70–71).

The epidemic also had an impact on the cultural life of the time. Historiography mentions the decline of cities and decline in craft production as well as of the written-language tradition. Epidemics cannot solely explain the entire process of changes in the cultural context, but they accelerated it, having caused the population decline, urban depopulation, and decay of the urban centers.

Religious life was also influenced by the epidemic crisis. A large number of victims and a state of constant chaos triggered widespread eschatological expectations and heightened the role of religion. In circumstances of weakened political mechanisms, shaykhs and ulama came to occupy a greater role in the legitimization of political rule, which, in the not-too-distant future, led not to the substitution of Chinggisid principles of power, but to their complementation with spiritual components.

Conclusion

It is, therefore, clear that during the period of the Black Death, the Ulus of Jochi was not an outer region of the pandemic, but one of the important locations where it spread and took its toll. Its cities, markets, trade routes, river channels, Crimean ports, diplomatic relations provided the Golden Horde with economic and political power, but in the context of plague, the same infrastructure served as a means for the dissemination of the disease. The chronological record of the plague suggests that the devastation caused to the Golden Horde territory was not confined to a single outbreak during 1346–1347. In fact, the initial wave from the late 1330s to the early 1350s can be attributed to the earliest spread of the pandemic from Central Asia through Semirechye, Khwarezm, the Volga region, Crimea and the Black Sea area. The later waves in the second half of the 14th century were contemporary to the Great Troubles and amplified the political system's chaos. In the first half of the 15th century, epidemic waves continued to spread through the altered, post-Horde area. There were several factors contributing to the outbreak of the Black Death in the Ulus of Jochi. These factors can be enumerated as follows: natural, climatic and anthropogenic conditions. These factors include natural foci of the disease, transformation of the ecological environment, high population mobility, a developed urban network, and developed commercial relations; together, they made the area highly susceptible to epidemic waves. It is important to note that the Black Death was not the only reason behind the crisis of the Ulus of Jochi. However, it enhanced already existing contradictions of the

political, demographic and economic nature of the Ulus. The effects of the Black Death on the Ulus were manifested in the decline of cities, disruption of trade routes, population decline, weakening of the political authority of the rulers and intensification of regional autonomization. From this perspective, the plague was indeed one of the causes of the gradual transformation of the Ulus of Jochi.

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