

The Dangers of Diplomacy: The Case of Toqtamish khan at the End of the Fourteenth Century

Marie Favereau (Oxford University)

The reign of Toqtamish, khan of the Horde between c.1377 and 1399, is well known for being groundbreaking. He had the ambition to reshape the empire of his predecessor Janibek who had conquered Baghdad and Tabriz. In the Islamic sources, he is portrayed as a unifying khan who claimed the leadership of the Blue Horde (*kök orda*) and the White Horde (*ak orda*), the two wings of the Jöchids' empire. In fact, he was more the champion of an invented tradition than a conservative ruler. He minted coins under his name in places that he did not control for more than a few years. His generous grants of lands and agreements reveal the fragility of his power. His attempt to rule the Horde, without the consent of the powerful Manghits, led to a political dead-end.

In my paper, I will show how Toqtamish's rule was a turning point by looking at how he used diplomacy. He conducted a very active 'foreign policy' and concluded agreements with Timur, the Mamluks, Poland-Lithuania, the Rus' and the Italians. Significantly, he shifted the traditional alliance with the Venetians to a new one with the Genoese. He signed his first agreement in 1381, granting the Genoese eighteen places and villages in the southern Crimea "Lord Cherkess, the bey of Solkhat [the khan's deputy], has given them to the Genoese and has sworn that he will not go back on these words".

The khan never succeeded to renegotiate the alliance with the Genoese. I argue further that it had a severe impact on his relationship with the Mamluks. The end of the fourteenth century witnessed the last intensive diplomatic exchanges between the Horde and the Mamluk sultanate. Twice the khan launched military expeditions in the Caucasus to access the Syro-Lebanese coast and to open a new trade avenue between the Horde and the Mamluk sultanate. Toqtamish needed to keep the commercial exchanges with the Mamluk world fluid to fight both the Genoese and Timur. I will demonstrate that the agreements Toqtamish concluded in the first years of his rule had more lasting consequences on the nomads' economic power than the heavy military defeats the Horde suffered against Timur at the end of the fourteenth century.