

Latin Sources on Competing Catholic and Muslim Proselytizing Activity among the Golden Horde's Nomads in the First Half of the 14th Century

Roman Hautala

The paper examines the Papal messages to the Mongol rulers and missionary reports written in the Golden Horde that contain information on the development of the Catholic apostolate among the nomads of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the Latin sources provide information about the proselytizing activity of Islamic preachers in the Golden Horde, which is almost completely absent in the parallel Muslim sources. Up to the present time the study of the Khan Uzbek's religious reform was based on the Russian and Muslim sources that had a direct impact on the researchers' conclusions.

Contemporary scholars tend to emphasize the central role of Uzbek Khan in determining the religious orientation of the nomads. According to the conclusions of their studies, Uzbek Khan sought to instill high Islamic civilization in the Golden Horde in order to introduce a centralized government model.

In this view, Islam in the Golden Horde had an exclusively urban character. The Golden Horde's nomads were converted to Islam by force. Therefore, the nomads' conversion to Islam was superficial and insincere. Latin sources show the development of Sufi proselytism among the nomads attesting, thereby, that Islam was propagated among the nomads through preaching and not by force. The very evidence of the Catholic apostolate's development in the Golden Horde challenges the assertion of contemporary researchers about the forcible imposition of Islam among the nomads. The very fact that the Latin sources make no mention of the forced conversion of the nomads, argues against such an assertion.