Marie Favereau
The Horde:
How the Mongols Changed the World

Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2021, 384 p., ISBN : 970674244214

Mots-clés : Mongols, Horde d'Or, idéologie, histoire, Eurasie

Keywords: Mongols, Golden Horde, ideology, history, Eurasia

The Jochid Ulus (1241-1556), popularly known as the Golden Horde, encompassed the territory and people between the Irtysh and Danube rivers and was one of the most durable and influential offshoots from the United Mongol Empire (r. 1206-1260). Its commercial, diplomatic, and political ties to the Byzantines, the Papacy, the Sultanate of Delhi, and the Mamluk Empire, not to mention its role in the rise of Muscovy, the Kazakh hordes, the Uzbeks and the Crimean khanate, make it a central, albeit mercurial player during the Global Middle Ages. Yet the lack of any textual sources written inside the Jochid court has made it a difficult topic for researchers, who have relied upon the accounts of neighbours or conquered vassals to reconstruct elements of its political, social and economic history. This dependence on outside perspectives has resulted in the Jochids assuming a somewhat marginal position in their own history, which Marie Faverau has sought to rectify in *The Horde*. This ambitious monograph seeks to "examine the Horde on its own terms," by combining a "bird's-eye view with a microhistory perspective of Mongol Eurasia" (p. 8). By taking the stories of prominent individuals who lived in the Jochid Ulus and situating them within a broader discussion about nomadic state-formation, long-distance trade, and nomadic lifeways, she creates a history that transcends national and regional historical narratives. The result is a thought-provoking conceptual project that will no doubt stimulate debate among experts and students of Eurasian history.

The Jochid "Horde" (*ordu*), the transhumant court of the khan, is the centrepiece of Favereau's book. She uses the term to refer to the uniquely versatile form of nomadic state, which is able to adapt or reinvent itself to accommodate social, economic, political and environmental shifts. The versatility of the Horde is spawned from the migratory lifestyle of the nomads, which Favereau argues is characterised by flexibility, tolerance, and consensus as well as a political economy based on the redistribution of wealth generated through trade. The book's chapters are, therefore, constructed around important moments of friction, conflict, and change, which allow Favereau to highlight how the Horde evolved to meet new exigencies. The first chapter, following the introduction, addresses the question of state formation, touching on the role of kinship, imperial ideology, conquest, and resource allocation in the rise of the Mongol Ulus (1125-1206). The focus of the study shifts in the second chapter, which looks more closely at the conquest of "the West," including the remnants of the Khwarazmshah Empire, the Qipchaqs, the Rus', and eastern Europe, which would go on to be included in the Jochid Ulus. The third chapter explores how the Jochid Ulus took shape under Chinggis Khan's descendants, Orda, Batu, and Nogay. Faverau shows that their largely autonomous hordes were built upon a thorough knowledge of the movement and interaction of animals, people, and the natural environment, allowing the Mongols to "colonise" the major river systems of the Qipchaq Steppe, situated upon natural migration and trade routes. The further adaptation of the Jochids to this new environment, complete with the rise of new sacred sites, identification with local religions, and even conflict with other Mongol successor states, is the topic of chapter 4. The following two chapters pivot to look at the role of the Horde in larger systems of trade that linked and transcended the Mongol empire and how these systems underpinned the balance of power within the Horde itself. Favereau suggests that these networks were undermined in the fourteenth century, when weak leadership and instability gave rise to a more coercive, centralised form of government under Toqto'a (r. 1291-1312) and Özbek Khan (r. 1313-1341). Both of these rulers violently purged their rivals after coming to the throne, thereby weakening the power of the Jochid ruling dynasty, before the plague and the resulting economic decline caused further turmoil between 1360 and 1381 (chapter 7). Yet Favereau eschews the lineal historical paradigm of rise-stagnation-fall and instead argues that the Horde simply reinvented itself, this time under the leadership of the begs, non-Chinggisid military commanders, who dominated the Kazakh, Uzbek, Nogay, Crimean, Kazan, Ibir-Sibir, and Astrakhan khanates (chapter 8). The clear implication is that the nomadic Horde continued to reconstitute itself until the rise of European colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed the commercial and social foundation upon which it was built.

Favereau's book expands upon existing research into the social, economic, and political history of the Mongol Empire to address the question of why nomadic states were formed and what role they played in world history. Her characterisation of the Horde as a political, social, economic, and even sacral community, demonstrates that nomadic states served a variety of roles and that they emerged independently from their sedentary neighbours. These observations lead Favereau to convincingly challenge many of the more popularly held stereotypes about nomadic empires; namely, that they were ephemeral associations built upon plunder and reliant upon the expertise of conquered bureaucrats. On the contrary, chapter 1 of her book characterises the unification of the Mongols under Chinggis Khan (1206) as a political, rather than a military victory, achieved through a mix of earlier steppe institutions (e.g. the royal bodyguard, the mandate of heaven, royal banquets) and pragmatic innovations (e.g. marriage alliances, the allocation of patrimonies, and tax exemptions). Far from oppressive and violent, Favereau explains that the Mongols deliberated carefully on how to best rule their subjects. The Jochids in particular were eager to harness the wealth and skills of the people whom they conquered, contributing immensely to the transfer of goods, people, and ideas, across Eurasia, which she refers to as the "Mongol exchange" (an adaptation of Timothy May's "Chinggis exchange"). Indeed, Favereau contends that the Jochids ruled by trade, not by the sword, and that they used the allure of commercial networks to attract vassals, like the Bulgarians, Russians, and Lithuanians (chapters 5 & 6). The importance the Mongols attributed to trade, combined with the innate versatility of the nomadic state, meant that the Horde was very careful not to ride roughshod over the existing institutions and conventions of their subjects. Favereau proffers the example of the Rus', whose agricultural population were less productive and urbanised than other centres in China or the Middle East, leading the Mongols to take advantage of existing institutions, like the church and local princes (*kniazia*), rather than ruling directly through garrison armies (p. 179). This did not mean that the Horde was incapable of using coercion when incentives failed to bring about the desired results. Rather, a mix of threats and blandishments were employed to harness the resources and manpower of their vassals.

The Horde introduces a novel approach to the study of one of the less well-documented Mongolian successor states. Its focus upon social, economic, cultural, and environmental trends certainly helps to overcome the otherwise disjointed and incomplete dynastic history of the Jochids, which may have discouraged other authors from writing on the topic earlier. We may assume that the same methodology would yield similarly fruitful results for other periods and regions. There are, of course, still limitations on what can be achieved with meagre primary source material. The Qipchaqs, for example, were arguably the most important population in the Jochid Ulus (also known as the Qipchaq Khanate in some Persian texts), but are not widely commented upon after chapter two. This omission is, perhaps, to be expected given the lack of any contemporary Qipchaq literature, but the rapid spread of Qipchaq Turkic dialects throughout the Volga River basin and the Pontic Steppe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggests that the population increase described in chapter 3 was in large part thanks to them. Some of Favereau's arguments pertaining to the Russian city states are also difficult to either prove or disprove. Her contention that the Mongols preferred to maintain prior power structures and rulers wherever possible is undoubtedly correct based upon numerous other examples outside the Jochid Ulus. Yet to what extent the Mongols consciously tailored their administration to suite the unique economic and demographic circumstances of the Rus', as mentioned above, is less clear. The author herself notes that the Russian grand princes were placed under huge strain to meet Mongol demands for tax, suggesting a far less accommodating and flexible approach than indicated in the book. (p. 229) Indeed, although placing the Mongols at the centre of the Jochid Ulus is a desirable and necessary goal, it is unclear whether the qualities attributed to the Horde (i.e. versatility, cosmopolitanism, and networks of patronage) were distinctly nomadic or common to most large empires. None of these comments necessarily detract from Favereau's work or methodology. Rather, they highlight the fact that there are still some topics that would benefit from a reappraisal of the available information. Favereau is certainly one of many scholars using creative approaches to extract more information from a limited pool of sources.

Another clear strength of Favereau's methodology is that it allows her to assimilate and combine different lines of inquiry, both in the history of the Mongol Empire and Central Asia more broadly. For example, her analysis of how macro level shifts in weather patterns, seasonal migration routes, and commerce determined the trajectory of local conflicts and diplomacy permits her to provide a superb assessment of the conflict between the Jochids and the Ilkhanate, especially during the reign of Hülegü and Berke (1261-65). Building upon earlier research

by Ciocîltan, Amitai, Broadbridge and Jackson, among others, Favereau argues that the Ilkhanate placed the Jochids under an economic embargo, which could only be resolved through recourse to trade through Byzantium, the Bujak Steppe, and finally Poland-Lithuania (p. 158). In other words, her perspective of the Horde's position in much larger Eurasian systems gives her the scope to draw connections between war in the Transcaucasus and diplomatic and commercial behaviour in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Favereau eloquently synthesises complex information into digestible portions, simplifying otherwise complicated details on genealogies and coinage to provide newcomers to the field with a very good introduction to the topic. This does occasionally result in otherwise important points being overlooked or over-simplified - the commercial and political influence of the Jochids in Seljuq Anatolia being one example. Again, this need not be taken as a shortcoming of Favereau's approach, but rather a productive area for further research.

The Horde is, therefore, a highly engaging and stimulating study of the Jochid Ulus, which demythologises much of its history and renders it far less alien and mysterious to readers in the twenty-first century. The book provides a much-needed update to the scholarship on the Eurasian steppe and a call to historians of Central Asia, especially the Mongol Empire, to be more inclusive, not only in terms of the spatial and chronological scope of their research, but also in the type of source material they use, thereby overcoming the often-artificial barriers between political, social, economic, and material history.

Michael Hope
Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea