

“The Russian Bookmen: A Story of Survival and Revival during the Mongol Occupation, 1237-1480.”



Luke Kessel

Adviser: Eren Tasar

Beginning in 1240, the Mongol Horde, the world’s largest ever land empire, invaded the disparate princely states of Rus’. The relationship becomes one of push and pull, according to the early Russian bookmen: monks and other “people of the Book” who wrote about these events in chronicles with religious undertones that, in fact, carried greater notions of political authority and legitimacy of “Russianness.” In response to the Mongols who ruled the lands of the Rus’ for two and a half centuries, bookmen developed a narrative of survival and revival and later advanced a post-Mongol vision of Moscow as the center of Russia. In this way, the bookmen were conveying a political message in religious terms as the articulators of early Russian ideology. As endlessly expansive vehicles for all types of writing and recorded local knowledge, these chronicles tell the story of the rise of the Russian state as bookmen tell it as a tale of trauma and conquest with the potential for renewal.