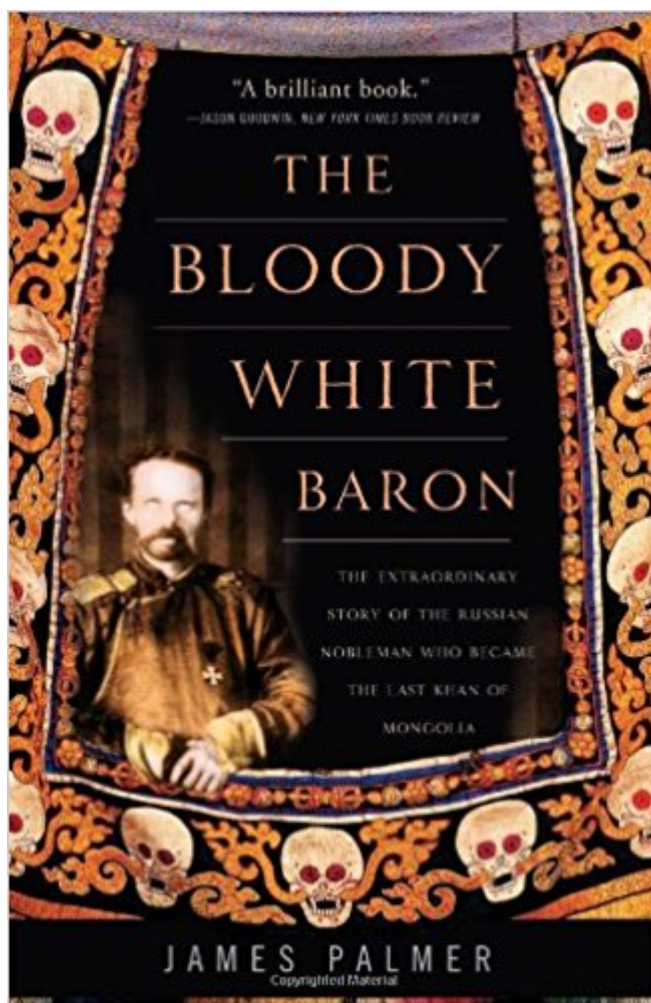


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The Bloody White Baron: The Extraordinary Story Of The Russian Nobleman Who Became The Last Khan Of Mongolia



Synopsis

In the history of the modern world, there have been few characters more sinister, sadistic, and deeply demented than Baron Ungern-Sternberg. An anti-Semitic fanatic whose penchant for Eastern mysticism and hatred of communists foreshadowed the Nazi scourge that would soon overtake Europe, Ungern-Sternberg conquered Mongolia in 1919 with a ragtag force of White Russians, Siberians, Japanese, and native Mongolians. In *The Bloody White Baron*, historian and travel writer James Palmer vividly re-creates Ungern-Sternberg's spiral into ever-darker obsessions, while also providing a rare look at the religion and culture of the unfortunate Mongolians he briefly ruled.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Ancient and modern savageries unite in the colorful antihero of this scintillating historical study. Baron Ungern-Sternberg (1886–1921) was a czarist officer who became a leader of anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia during the Russian civil war. He was a staunch monarchist and anti-Semite, whose sadism heightened the brutality of an already vicious conflict. He was pushed by the Red Army into Mongolia, where his reactionary impulses, accentuated by an attraction to esoteric Eastern religions, grew downright medieval. Hailed as a reincarnated god by locals who perhaps mistook him for a prophesied Buddhist messiah, Ungern-Sternberg dreamed of leading an Asian empire against the decadent West and instituted a fleeting dictatorship under which resisters were flogged to death, torn apart or burned alive. Journalist Palmer pens a vivid and slightly wry profile of this larger-than-life figure who rode into battle bare-chested and necklaced with

bones, and lucidly dissects Ungern-Sternberg's protofascist worldview, with its motifs of racism, feudal hierarchy, regenerative bloodshed and mystic communion with primitive virility. The result is a fascinating portrait of an appalling man -- and of the zeitgeist that shaped him. Maps. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Well traveled in Mongolia, one of the settings in this fine history of a bizarre episode from the Russian civil war, Palmer recounts the story of Baron Nikolai Maximilian von Ungern-Sternberg (1885--1921). A military leader on the White side of the conflict, Ungern-Sternberg was many things: an ethnic German, an imperial Russian army officer, an anti-Semitic psychopath, and, as ruler of Mongolia in early 1921, a god incarnate to some traditional Mongolians. Finding hints of an unhinged, violent personality in the baron's youth, Palmer recounts its gruesome manifestation in the methods he applied to his area of Siberian operations during the civil war. As the victorious Reds approached in late 1920, Ungern-Sternberg, with several thousand troops, decamped for Mongolia, routed a Chinese force, and proceeded to enact an apocalyptic pogrom. Taking no prisoners and killing Jews out of hand, Ungern-Sternberg was actuated, in addition to innate sadism, by his fascination with Buddhism and the occult; his eccentric beliefs, Palmer suggests, were precursors to Nazism. Soundly researched, Palmer's biography vividly reflects the pitiless extremism of the Russian civil war. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an interesting tale. The "Baron" was an ethnic German from Estonia who was an officer in the Russian Army. With revolution and civil war he aligns with the Whites. He is a White officer in the Far East and with the collapse of the White cause he enters Mongolia and for a time, more or less takes the place over. Unsurprisingly, it doesn't go well. The Baron was to put it politely, a nut. Sadistic, violent, anti-Semitic and all around immersed in fantasy. He really wasn't the last Khan of Mongolia. That subtitle is misleading. He was more its military dictator, briefly. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its take on Buddhism. The author clearly thinks those in the West have romanticized and aesthetized the religion. He points out that Westerners have a tendency to adopt a Buddhism that is atheistic and peaceful. He contrasts this to Mongolia in the early 20th Century. Mongolia was a deeply Buddhist country in the pre-Communist era and the Buddhism practiced was dramatically different from what most Westerners envision. Not remotely atheist, Mongolian Buddhism was a world of gods, spirits and demons. Further, they were to put it

mildly , not pacifistic.Lamas were sometimes drunks and pederasts.In other words Buddhism had not produced Shangri La. No surprise but a worth while point.

This is a very interesting book for a number of reasons. First, it tells the story of Baron Ungern, someone mostly lost in history, the son of an Austrian father and German mother reared in Estonia who was an absolute monarchist and committed to the restoration of the Romanov dynasty. In his younger years, he was a poor student given to severe intemperance, but he distinguished himself as a fierce fighter during World War I. After the fall of the Romanovs, Ungern relocated to the eastern Russian frontier and ultimately into Mongolia where he surrounded himself with a multi-ethnic army and envisioned himself as a latter day Gengis Khan, bent on retaking Russia.The second contribution of the book is its insights into the consolidation of the Soviet Union. It took a number of years for the Bolsheviks to gain control of the vast reaches of the Russian empire. While I was aware of White Russian opposition, I had not fully realized that that designation applied to a loose coalition of groups whose one common bond was opposition to the Bolsheviks. The book also revealed some of the less serene aspects of Buddhism, particularly as practiced in Mongolia.Finally, the book takes the reader on a tour of regions of the world little known to Westerners, and here is the book's minor flaw. A few maps would have been a great assistance, and I hope later additions will include them. Place names such as Transbaikalia, Dauria, Buriatia and Urga were virtually unknown to me, and I would have liked an easy reference map rather than having to turn to secondary sources that required me to interrupt my read.

Baron Roman Ungern Von Sternberg is one of those peripheral characters who always gets brought up in passing: he's too colorful to overlook, but arguably too minor to warrant extensive coverage. He was name-dropped in Robert Edgerton's *Warriors of the Rising Sun*, Peter Hopkirk's *Setting the East Ablaze*, David Mitchell's *1919: Red Mirage* and Richard Lockett's *The White Generals*, to name just a few of the books I'd encountered him in. The Mad Baron was overdue for a full-length biography, and James Palmer brings him to vivid and grisly life.The Bloody Baron was a nobleman of German descent, who early on revealed a predilection for violence and sadism - and an interest in Eastern mysticism. He had a fairly successful military career, decorated for service in the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, and found himself on the White side of the Russian Civil War, fighting for the restoration of the Tsar. Already showing a penchant for violence, he was dispatched to Mongolia in the waning days of the conflict, converting to Buddhism, raising a rag-tag multi-national army and conquering Mongolia amidst much bloodshed. His disastrous administration

and the encroachment of the Red Army only convinced Ungern to greater ambition - to try and recreate Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire and extirpate Jews and Bolsheviks. Palmer ably shows two salient points about Ungern: that he was very much a product of his time, and that he was a harbinger of things to come. As horrifying as Ungern's pogroms and atrocities were, in a sense, they were a logical (or illogical) extension of one of the cruellest wars in history. For all his appalling cruelty, Ungern was a piker compared to other leaders, Red and White, in more powerful positions. In fact, the Reds, in "liberating" Mongolia from Ungern, would commit far worse crimes than his short-lived regime. The primary appeal is not Ungern's atrocities, but his sheer weirdness: a demented Russian nobleman with a personal religion. He has few redeeming features as such, but remains a gruesomely compelling figure throughout. What made Ungern unique and dangerous, however, was his ideology: a curious blend of anti-Semitism, Nietzschean superman rhetoric, vaguely-defined occult mysticism and absurd megalomania, he was a clear precursor of the Nazis, who indeed venerated Ungern as a heroic precursor to Hitler. Palmer does make the point that Ungern had no deep understanding of Buddhism per se, but he had enough appeal to garner him thousands of devoted followers, and the love of a nation (apparently, he's still worshipped by some Mongolians). And just twenty years later, the world would be driven to the verge of destruction by a frighteningly similar ideology. Palmer does a fine job introducing the reader to Mongolia in general, and in particular a branch of Buddhism that endorses violence and mayhem. This is a fascinating topic, largely swept under the rug in the West, where Buddhism is seen as a benign force. Palmer shows this is an incredibly patronizing and limited view: Ungern's crimes were unique mostly for their being perpetrated by a European. He does a slightly-lesser job of depicting Tsarist and Revolutionary Russia, which is perhaps forgivable since it's not his area of expertise. As a writer, Palmer provides fine prose, with vivid descriptions of towns, set pieces and military campaigns. He has a fascinating subject matter and cuts through the veils of myth and distortion to make Ungern a credible (if still horrific) character. His biggest failing is his attempts at psychohistory, telling us to "imagine" certain key scenes in Ungern's life. That sort of "insight" should be saved for a novelist, or at least someone better-qualified than Palmer. Despite some flaws, *The Bloody White Baron* is a fascinating - and frightening - book. Monsters always make for fascinating history, and the Mad Baron provides a particularly interesting case of how vicious and depraved humans can be.

Holy Cow, was this guy, uh, different! In addition to concluding that it probably would be best not to have the Baron as a house guest for fear he would organize the neighborhood children into a death squad, one has to marvel at the research that went into this fascinating look at the exotic and

its a good book.

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