



**GREAT EMPIRES  
OF THE PAST**

EMPIRE OF THE  
**MONGOLS**

Revised Edition

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MICHAEL BURGAN





GREAT EMPIRES OF THE PAST

# EMPIRE OF THE MONGOLS

REVISED EDITION



## GREAT EMPIRES OF THE PAST

Empire of Alexander the Great

Empire of Ancient Egypt

Empire of Ancient Greece

Empire of Ancient Rome

Empire of the Aztecs

Empire of the Incas

Empire of the Islamic World

Empire of the Mongols

Empires of Ancient Mesopotamia

Empires of Ancient Persia

Empires of Medieval West Africa

Empires of the Maya



GREAT EMPIRES OF THE PAST

# EMPIRE OF THE MONGOLS

REVISED EDITION

MICHAEL BURGAN

CHRISTOPHER P. ATWOOD, HISTORICAL CONSULTANT

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## **Great Empires of the Past: Empire of the Mongols**

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# INTRODUCTION

FOR SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS, WARRIORS ON HORSEBACK rode across central Asia, conquering nearby towns and cities. These horsemen lived on the steppes, which is a flat, grassy region that extends from Asia into central Europe. The riders were nomads—people with no permanent home. They moved from one grazing spot to another with their herds of horses, sheep, camels, goats, and cattle. Over the centuries, these nomads battled such people as the ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Chinese, and the Arabs.

Of all the nomadic warriors of central Asia, the fiercest were the Mongols. In the 13th century, starting in their homeland of Mongolia, just north of China, the Mongols spread out to the south and west. Under the leadership of Chinggis Khan (ca. 1162–1227) and his descendants, the Mongols quickly built an empire that stretched from Korea to eastern Europe—the largest continuous area of land ever controlled by one ruling family.

This empire soon split into four mini-empires. The last major rulers who had ties to the old Mongol empire were the Mughals of northern India. They first governed in the 16th century. They traced family ties to Chinggis Khan and the later Turkic-Mongol ruler Timur (1336–1405), who was more commonly known in English as Tamerlane.

By the time of the Mughals, the old Mongol culture had just about disappeared in most of the lands that once formed their empire. The Mongols had adopted the ways of the people they conquered and blended into their societies. Only in their homeland of Mongolia and a few other pockets of the eastern steppes did the traditional ways endure.

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## OPPOSITE

Chinggis Khan was the first great leader of the Mongols. Under him and his descendants, the Mongols created the largest empire ever controlled by one family. This 16th-century Persian miniature, painted 300 years after his death, shows his lasting influence.

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## CONNECTIONS

### What Are Connections?

Throughout this book, and all the books in the Great Empires of the Past series, there are Connections boxes. They point out ideas, inventions, art, food, customs, and more from this empire that are still part of the world today. Nations and cultures in remote history can seem far away from the present day, but these connections demonstrate how our everyday lives have been shaped by the peoples of the past.

This willingness to learn from conquered people and take on their culture was one of the Mongols' greatest strengths. They borrowed the best of what their former enemies had to offer in politics, art, and social structure. The Mongols' other major strength was their military might. They had great skills on horseback and showed tremendous discipline on the battlefield. As they conquered

each land, they recruited new soldiers, then moved their ever-increasing army to new territories.

### THE WORLD OF THE 12TH CENTURY

For several centuries before the rise of Chinggis Khan, the Mongols were just one of many nomadic tribes that lived on the Central Asian steppes. Different Turkic peoples ruled the steppes for a time, and the Chinese also influenced the region. The tribes of Mongolia blended with the Turks, creating what is sometimes called a Turko-Mongol culture. By the 12th century, the tribes of Mongolia included the Tatars, the Mongols, the Kereyids, the Naimans, and the Merkits.

These Mongolian tribal peoples lived on the land mass called Eurasia. This continuous stretch of land includes most of Europe and Asia. At its height in the second century, the Roman Empire dominated the western half of Eurasia. At about the same time, the Han dynasty of China was the major power in the east. By the 12th century, both these empires were long gone, and a number of smaller empires and kingdoms competed for influence in the region.

The Roman Empire had split in two even before its fall in the fifth century. Western Europe then broke into many different kingdoms and principalities (small states ruled by princes). The Byzantine Empire, which traced its political roots to the Romans, ruled parts of Eastern Europe.

In the Middle East, a single great Islamic Empire had arisen in the seventh century. It then broke up into smaller empires. In South Asia, India had developed a great culture that was more than 3,000 years old. But by the 12th century, native Indian rulers were losing power to outsiders. The northern part of the country eventually came under the control of Turks, who had become Muslims.

Farther east in Eurasia, the powerful Han dynasty ruled China. When it fell, the Song and Jin dynasties competed for power. (A dynasty is a family that keeps control of a government over many generations, with rule often passed from a parent to a child.) A number of smaller empires, some Turkic, also competed for influence on the edges of China.

Throughout the world at this time, religion played a greater role in politics and daily life than it usually does today. Religion inspired great art. It could also be the cause of bloody wars. Eastern and Western Europe were divided by their religion, as each claimed that its type of Christianity was the true faith. Islam was dominant in the Arab world and in Persia. The Islamic influence spread into Central Asia, where Turkic tribes lived.

In India, Hinduism and Buddhism (both native to India) were the main religions until the Muslim conquests began. In China, Buddhism competed with Daoism (a native Chinese religion) as the main faith. The Mongols had their own religion, but they often accepted the beliefs of the people they conquered.

The empires that dominated Eurasia in the 12th century were mostly sedentary—they were built around permanent towns and cities that focused on farming and trade. They had great wealth compared to the Mongols. But in most cases they could not match the military skill of the nomadic warriors. They also had political and religious differences that kept them from working together to fight the Mongols. Those differences made it easier for the Mongols to expand their empire.

## THE CONQUESTS BEGIN

The first Mongol khan (supreme ruler) emerged toward the end of the 11th century. A little later, the Mongols battled the Tatars. The Mongol chieftain Yesugei (d. ca. 1175), a relative of the first khan, killed a Tatar leader named Temüjin (d. ca. 1167). Yesugei then named his newborn son after the fallen Tatar, which was a common practice of the day.

### Turks and Mongols

Throughout this book, *Mongol* is used to describe the people of Mongolia during the time of the Mongol Empire. *Mongolian*, when it is used, refers to the modern-day people of Mongolia. In a similar way, *Turkic* or *Turk* or *Turko* refers to past peoples, not the current inhabitants of modern Turkey.

## Names of a Conqueror

The historians of the Mongols' day wrote in a variety of languages, including Persian, Chinese, Arabic, and Turkic. Modern European historians using these Asian sources translate some of the Mongol names in different ways. Chinggis Khan, for example, also appears as Jingiz, Chingiz, Cinggis, and Genghis. His grandson Khubilai Khan (1215–1294) also turns up as Kubilai, Qubilai, and Kubla, and Khan is sometimes written Qa'an or Qan.

The same problem emerges with geographic names. The Mongol capital of Karakorum, for example, is also spelled Qaraqorum. Sometimes, it can make for confusing history.

Temüjin became one of the greatest generals and leaders the world has ever known—Chinggis Khan.

As nomads, the Mongols and their neighbors often raided sedentary communities. The tribes of Mongolia also raided one another. An individual warrior in one tribe often used his family connections and a strong personality to convince other warriors to join his raiding party.

Temüjin followed this path to power, and his growing army fought and defeated larger tribes. By 1206, Temüjin had united almost all the Turko-Mongol tribes of Mongolia,

and he received the title of Chinggis Khan. There is some debate about what this title really means. Some scholars say it means “hard or tough ruler,” others believe it means “oceanic (universal) ruler,” and there are even more theories. In English, Chinggis Khan, and each of the rulers who came after him at the head of the Mongol Empire, was sometimes called the Great Khan.

The Mongols under Chinggis had one of the most powerful armies in central Asia. As the “universal” ruler, he brought the rest of the tribes under his control. Then he began to look beyond Mongolia's borders. This time, however, the plan was not just to raid the sedentary civilizations that surrounded them. Chinggis wanted to conquer and dominate all the nations around him. Almost constant attacks prevented other nations from gaining enough strength to threaten the Mongols. These wars also brought great riches to Chinggis and his family.

### AFTER CHINGGIS

In 1223 Chinggis returned to Mongolia, and he died there in 1227. As Chinggis wanted, control of the empire passed to Ögedei (1186–1241),

his third son. By Mongol tradition, Chinggis's empire was divided among his four sons, though the other brothers recognized Ögedei as the Great Khan of the empire.

Ögedei set up his capital at Karakorum, north of today's Arvayheer in Mongolia, and focused his military attention on the Jin in northern China. The ultimate Mongol victory in 1234 meant that half of East Asia's greatest civilization was under the control of these nomads. A few years later, Korea and Tibet were added to the Mongol Empire. Ögedei also launched the first Mongol attacks on the territory controlled by the Song dynasty in southern China.

Ögedei also turned his sights to the west. His generals conquered what is today Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, then forced the rulers in what is today Turkey and Iraq to pay tribute (riches paid to a foreign ruler to prevent an invasion or show obedience to them).

Eventually, Mongol forces took control of the western steppes that stretched beyond Russia's Volga River into Hungary. The Mongols were prepared to stay in Hungary and make it a base for further expansion into Europe. But the death of Ögedei late in 1241 changed their plans. Just as suddenly as the Mongols had swept into Europe, they left, although a large force remained in Russia. The Russians later called the Mongols' mini-empire the Golden Horde.

## THE RISE OF KHUBILAI KHAN

After Ögedei's death, three of Chinggis's grandsons ruled, one after the other, as the Great Khan. The second of these rulers, Möngke (d. 1259), strengthened Mongol rule in southwest Asia, in what is now Iran and Iraq. Möngke also prepared for a major war with the Song in China, and he sent his brother Khubilai (ca. 1215–1294) to fight in lands bordering Song dynasty territory.



## CONNECTIONS

### An Enduring Title

The Turkic title *khan* (or variations of the word) means “prince” or “king.” It was used throughout Central Asia for centuries. It is commonly used today in English when talking about the great Mongol rulers Chinggis and Khubilai.

But one modern ruler also uses the name. The Aga Khan (b. 1936) is the religious leader of the Shia Imami Ismaili branch of Islam. The current Aga Khan is the 49th leader with that title. A charitable organization called the Aga Khan Development Network operates in many countries with large Islamic populations, and Pakistan is the home of Aga Khan University. Khan has also become a common surname in Pakistan and India.



## CONNECTIONS

### From Ordu to Horde

The English word *horde* refers to a group of Central Asian nomads. It can also mean a large crowd, particularly a potentially dangerous one. *Horde* comes from the Turko-Mongol word *ordu*, which means “palace tent,” where a nomadic ruler lived. The ruler was surrounded by his guard, often 10,000 men.

After Möngke died in 1259, Khubilai was chosen the next Great Khan.

While Möngke and Khubilai focused their attention on China, their relatives fought in western Asia. Möngke’s brother Hülegü (ca. 1217–1265) led an army into the Middle East, pushing the boundaries of the Mongol Empire into what

is now Syria and Israel. Hülegü had his eye on Egypt as well, but before he could invade, Möngke died. He had to pull back most of his troops into Persia and then return to Mongolia to help choose the next Great Khan. Just as in Eastern Europe, political changes in the empire had ended a Mongol advance, and the Mongols never again reached that far into the Middle East.

Under Khubilai, the Mongol Empire reached its largest size. The Mongols finally defeated the Song in 1279, giving Khubilai complete control of China and uniting it under one ruler for the first time in several hundred years.

Khubilai’s title of Great Khan meant he ruled over the entire empire, just as Chinggis and the other Great Khans had. However, Khubilai had direct control only over China and the surrounding lands in East Asia. Other relatives of Chinggis ruled the western regions.

In China, Khubilai founded what came to be known as the Yuan dynasty. His family ruled China until 1368. With the great wealth he gathered through conquest, Khubilai built a splendid capital city called Khan-baliq—today’s Beijing, the capital of China. One famous visitor to the city was the Italian merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324).

## THE FOUR EMPIRES

While Khubilai ruled from Khan-baliq, his relatives strengthened their rule in the three other mini-empires that had developed after Chinggis’s death. These mini-empires were called khanates. West of China was the Chaghatai Khanate, which was named for Chinggis’s son Chaghatai (ca. 1185–1242). The Mongols who ruled there are

sometimes called the Chaghataiyids. This khanate included Transoxiana, which lay west and north of the Oxus River in the heart of Central Asia.

North of the Chaghatai Khanate was the land of the Golden Horde. On the east, this empire bordered Khubilai's China. It stretched across central Russia and included the cities of Moscow and Kiev. The descendants of Batu (d. 1255) who governed this land lived on the steppes, collecting tribute from the Russian princes who lived in the cities.

The last of the four mini-empires was the Ilkhanate, centered in Persia and founded by Hülegü. The title *Ilkhan* means "lesser prince," reflecting the idea that the Great Khan was still in charge of the whole empire. The Mongols who ruled the Ilkhanate were sometimes called the Ilkhanids. Their first capital was Tabriz, in what is now Iran.

Öljeitü (ca. 1280–1316), a descendant of Hülegü, later moved the capital nearby Sultaniyya.

## DECLINE IN THE EAST, NEW EMPIRE IN THE WEST

During the mid to late 1300s, the Mongol empire saw many changes. Khubilai's grandson Temür Öljeitü (ca. 1276–1307) was the last of the Great Khans who had authority over all the Mongol lands. The smaller khanates became more independent. Only the Ilkhanate recognized

## Marco Polo

Other Europeans reached Mongol lands before Marco Polo did and wrote about their adventures. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, however, is the most famous account of 13th-century Asia that is still widely read in the Western world. Polo, along with his father and uncle, left Venice in 1271 to visit China. He spent more than 20 years traveling through and living in the great Mongol Empire. For a time he even worked in Khubilai Khan's government. Polo's description of his experience was read across Europe. Many people doubted his story, and some of his details about Chinese culture and warfare are not accurate.

A few modern historians claim that Polo never visited China at all. They say he could have gathered his facts about Khubilai and China from Arab and Persian traders. Most scholars, however, accept that Polo did travel through China. And whether he did or not, his book certainly inspired other Europeans to travel to China and other parts of East Asia. Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), for one, owned a copy of Polo's book. When he left on his famous voyage in 1492, Columbus hoped to reach East Asia, just as Polo had.



This picture shows a European vision of Khubilai Khan on his royal throne. The Mongol Empire reached its largest size under Khubilai.

the authority of Khubilai and his son. By the 1340s, the descendants of Khubilai were out of power, and their lands were ruled by a series of local leaders—Arabs, Turks, Persians, and Mongols. Parts of the Chaghatai Khanate also came under local control. The Golden Horde fell into chaos in 1360, and a Russian military victory at Kulikovo Pole in 1380 showed that the Russians were gaining strength.

Out of the Chaghatai Khanate, a new empire rose during the late 14th century. The driving force behind it was Timur, a Muslim Mongol from the Barulas tribe who spoke Turkish. Timur married a princess descended from Chinggis Khan and used this relationship to suggest he was a worthy successor of the first Great Khan. Like Chinggis, Timur was a brave warrior who convinced others to join his army. Timur never took the title of khan, but he tried to duplicate Chinggis's military success and build his own "Mongol" Empire.

From his base in Transoxiana, Timur spread his rule over most of the former Ilkhanate and the western half of the Chaghatai Khanate. His lands included modern-day Iran, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and parts of Afghanistan. His troops battled the Golden Horde, Indian

forces, and Ottomans—Turks who lived in what is now Turkey. Timur founded a dynasty, the Timurids, that lasted until 1507.

Timurid influence extended into northern India, where the Mughal Empire arose. The Indians believed the Mughals were descendants of Chaghatai (*Mughal* is the Persian word for *Mongol*). In reality, the founder of their dynasty, Zahiruddin Babur (1483–1530), was mostly Turkic, although he had family ties to Chinggis. Later Mughal rulers came from different ethnic groups, including Persian and Indian. Still, even if the Mughals did not follow traditional Mongol culture, they were influenced by it, and the people they ruled remembered the dominance of Timur and the earlier Mongol khans. The Mughals ruled in northern India until the early 19th century.

## THE IMPACT OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE

The rise of the Mongols marked the last major clash between nomadic and sedentary cultures. The Mongols won swift victories, but over time the nomadic peoples could not compete with the wealth and knowledge created in sedentary societies. New methods of warfare gave sedentary armies a way to defeat archers on horseback. In many parts of their empire, the people the Mongols defeated eventually had the strength to rise up against them. And quarrels among Mongol rulers led to divisions and lack of cooperation, which eventually stopped their expansion.

Still, the Mongols built a vast world empire faster than any people before or after them. They united Eurasia in a truly international trading system and encouraged new forms of communication. They demonstrated the value of religious tolerance at a time when religious differences often led to wars. The Mongols brought culture and knowledge learned from conquered peoples to all parts of their empire. They helped introduce cultures to one another in a large part of the world.

People living in the Western world today might not see the Mongol influence on history. The Mongols did not shape the modern Western world's language and literature, the way the Greeks and Romans did. They did not create a culture that still thrives in a large part of the world, the way the Arabs did. Yet, as this book will show, the Mongols do have many connections to the modern world. For one thing, Mongol rule helped unify both Russia and China—two of today's most powerful nations. No one can deny the role that one ruler—Chinggis Khan—and his family had on shaping world history.





# PART • I

# HISTORY

THE RISE OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE

COMPLETING THE MONGOL EMPIRE

FINAL YEARS OF THE KHANATES



بدر سپهر بد و گسترد	سیلای یکبار اینه را	دشمنه تراز با ذرینم	جستند بر پستان سرب	شازداهم شران مرغی	نوی ماه کرده کجی کرد جنگ
دور مرد خبان ب ز سار	بمشیر و نیزه چه دیدی	تا نازد بر انداختن سکی	نکسا کنگه از دستان پاکر	دید کرد مردی تاشایم	شهنشاه را زدم کرده کشت
برگوشه گمشدا را ناله	گمشده و پشه و کوه	ندیدند کرد پی بار کس	شنیدند و از رفتن زبا	نه از تیس کا بدیاری بی	بهری زدا و را گوه و بد



# CHAPTER 1

## THE RISE OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE

THE TRADITIONAL HOMELAND OF THE MONGOLS IS ON THE eastern end of the central Asian steppes. To the west are the Altai and Tian Shan Mountains, with the forests of Siberia to the north. The Gobi Desert lies to the south, and to the east is the forested Greater Kuinggan Range. A few rivers cut through Mongolia, but it has no direct access to major waterways or the ocean.

The steppe here is about a mile above sea level, and the climate can be harsh, with short summers and extremely cold winters. The 13th century Italian priest Giovanni DiPlano Carpini (ca. 1180–ca. 1252), author of *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call Tartars*, described the conditions he faced on his journey from 1245 to 1247 to meet the Great Khan Guyuk (d. 1248). He wrote, “We had to throw ourselves flat to the ground because of the force of the wind, and there was so much dust we could hardly see.” Hail and severe thunderstorms were common.

The climate, sandy soil, and lack of a steady water supply made farming difficult for the people of the steppes. They relied on their herd animals for basic supplies, such as food and clothing. The Mongols and their nomadic neighbors moved with their flocks between summer and winter grazing areas. When they could not meet their needs through herding and hunting, they traded with the city dwellers of China and Central Asia who lived just beyond the steppes.

### EARLY STEPPE EMPIRES

Before the rise of the Mongols, other steppe peoples created their own empires in central Asia. The Turks controlled a large part of the region

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#### OPPOSITE

This 1397 illustration from a Persian poem about Chinggis Khan shows him (right middle) fighting the Chinese. China was united under Mongol rule in 1279.

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The wide, vast steppes of Mongolia are still home to nomadic people, centuries after the rule of the khans.



in the sixth and seventh centuries. The Turks called their ruler *kaghan*, which later became *khan*.

According to historian J. J. Saunders, author of *The History of the Mongol Conquests*, the Turks were notable for being the first “barbarian” nomads to create a unified empire in the steppes. Barbarians were people from another race that was considered uncivilized or uncultured. To the sedentary people of the world, the nomads seemed to be

barbarians because they lacked education, formal governments, and fine arts.

The Turks were also “the first barbarians to create a kingdom so extensive as to touch at different points the four great civilized societies of the day: China, India, Persia, and Byzantium,” according to Saunders. (Byzantium was the remains of the eastern half of the earlier Roman Empire.) The Mongols would later repeat that feat, with the borders of their empire stretching far beyond the first great Turkic state.

After the Turkic empire collapsed during the middle of the eighth century, a Turkic people called the Uighurs emerged as the main power. Their capital was near the site of the future Mongol capital of Karakorum. The Uighurs later shaped Mongol culture: Their alphabet was used to write Mongolian, and the Uighurs developed political structures that the Mongols copied.

The tribes of Mongolia next came under the control of the Khitans, who rose to power during the early 10th century. The Khitans were nomads and spoke a language that was related to Mongolian. Coming from the north, the Khitans also took over part of China, and they introduced some elements of Chinese culture to the Mongols.

In 1115, a tribe called the Jürchen rebelled against the Khitans. The Jürchen lived in northeastern China and were a branch of the Manchu people. They were farmers like the Chinese, but rode horses and raised livestock like the Mongols. Their language was much influenced by the Mongols, as well. The rebellion went on for several years, and around 1120, the Khitans were defeated by the Jürchen. As the new rulers of northern China, the Jürchen founded the Jin dynasty. When the Jürchen overthrew the Khitan rulers, the Mongols broke away from the Jürchen. They still recognized the Jürchen as their ultimate rulers, but independent chieftains arose within Mongolia.

## THE MONGOLS BEFORE CHINGGIS KHAN

Through centuries of war in Central Asia, the people of Mongolia mostly kept to themselves, living as herders. The Mongols were just one of the tribes there, along with other peoples of Mongolian and Turkic ethnic backgrounds. The various tribes often married women from other tribes. This interaction created the Turko-Mongolian culture. The tribes were also influenced by the outsiders who sometimes ruled the region.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Tall, Strong, and Cruel**

The 13th-century Persian historian Juzjani (1193–1265) described Chinggis's appearance and attitude. The Great Khan was:

*[A] man of tall stature, of vigorous build, robust in body, the hair on his face scanty and turned white, with cat's eyes, possessed of great energy, discernment, genius and understanding, awe-inspiring, a butcher, just, resolute, an overthrower of enemies, intrepid . . . and cruel.*

(Source: Saunders, J. J. *The History of the Mongol Conquests*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.)

The Mongols may have first come to Mongolia from the forests of Siberia. By the 12th century, the different Mongol clans (groups of close-knit families) had formed tribes, each led by a great warrior. Members of a tribe were often related, but just as important was a bond called an *anda*. In this relationship, two unrelated men promised their loyalty to one another and acted as if they were related. Men also chose to serve under certain leaders, giving up their ties to their family in the process. A man who made this

commitment to a leader was called a *nökör*.

A tribe called the Tatars was probably the most influential one in Mongolia, since they were allied with the Jin dynasty leaders in China. The Tatars were also traditional enemies of the Mongols, and the two tribes often clashed. *The Secret History of the Mongols* is the only known Mongolian source for the history of this era (its author is unknown). It describes how “13 times they [the Mongols] joined battle with . . . the Tatar.” During one of these battles, a Mongol chieftain named Yesugei killed a Tatar named Temüjin. Yesugei then named his newborn son after his dead enemy—a common practice at the time.

Yesugei and his son Temüjin were related to Mongol nobles, yet by the time Yesugei was born, his family did not have much power. When Temüjin was nine years old, his father died, making Temüjin the leader of his tribe. The men who had served under Yesugei did not want to follow a boy, so they deserted him.

Temüjin and his family spent several years on their own, barely able to survive. Finally, when Temüjin was about 16 years old, he made several important alliances. First he recruited other warriors to serve him as *nökörs*. Temüjin then united with Toghrlil (d. 1203), the leader of the Kereyid tribe of Mongolia. Toghrlil and Temüjin's father had once been *anda* to each other. Meanwhile, the Tatars has lost the favor of the Jin in China. The Mongols and the Kereyids defeated the Tatars.

Temüjin's troops eventually defeated the other tribes of Mongolia, as well. In 1206 the chieftains held a meeting called a *quriltai*. The Mongol leaders made Temüjin their supreme leader and gave him the title Chinggis Khan.

Chinggis's election was a turning point for the Mongol Empire. The Great Khan had both a personality and physical appearance that inspired awe in his followers. Chinggis placed a great deal of importance on loyalty among companions and obedience from his soldiers. However, he also accepted suggestions and criticism from his closest advisers. This powerful combination helps explain how Chinggis Khan led his empire to become one of the greatest in the world.

## CHINGGIS'S FIRST CONQUESTS

Chinggis was determined to use his military strength to conquer neighboring lands. He believed he had been chosen by the Mongolian god, Eternal Heaven (Teb Tenggeri in Mongolian), to rule the world. The Mongols believed in many spirits that ruled their herds, the success of the hunt, and almost all other aspects of their lives. But the right to rule was granted by Eternal Heaven only. They believed there was just one ruler in heaven, and just one on earth—Chinggis Khan.

There were also political reasons for Chinggis's military actions. He insisted neighboring rulers hand over all refugees fleeing from Mongol rule. If they protected these refugees, they were considered hostile nations. He also needed to conquer his neighbors to increase his wealth and power. Without it, he could lose the loyalty of the Mongol tribes who supported him.

## The Roots of a Tribal Feud

The troubles between the Mongols and the Tatars increased at a time when Ambaghai (12th century) ruled as khan of the Mongols. Ambaghai hoped to improve relations with the Tatars by marrying one of his daughters to a Tatar leader. Another Tatar clan, however, kidnapped Ambaghai while he and his daughter traveled to the wedding.

The Tatars took their captive to the Jin rulers, who killed him. According to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Ambaghai sent his people a message before he died: "Till the nails of your five fingers disappear through wear; till your ten fingers are worn away through rubbing, strive to avenge me."

Chinggis's first attack came in 1209. The Mongols invaded Xixia, in what is now northwest China, south of the Gobi Desert. The Tanguts, most likely from Tibet, ruled this empire, which had once been part of China. Rather than face a superior military force, the Tangut rulers quickly agreed to pay tribute to Chinggis and accept his rule. With Xixia now united with Mongolia, Chinggis controlled a key section of the Silk Road, which was a major trade route across Asia. He also had a western route for his troops when they attacked the Mongols' major enemy in the east, the Jin.

The invasion of northern China began in 1211. At first the Mongols were content merely to loot (steal all the valuable goods) Jin cities and then return home. But eventually they took control of their enemies' lands. In 1215 the Mongols captured the Jin's northern capital, Yanjing (the site of modern-day Beijing), forcing the Jin rulers to flee south. Despite that loss, the Jin continued to fight. The war with the Mongols dragged on for another 19 years.

On the open plains of the steppes, the Mongols were nearly unbeatable. They could ride their horses for days and shoot arrows as they rode. They relied on their speed and discipline to catch their enemies off guard.

Their army was split into divisions of 10,000 soldiers, called *tümens*, which were further broken down into 10 *mighans* of 1,000 soldiers each.

Each *mighans* had 10 squadrons, called *ja'uns*, with 100 men. Chinggis often had *tümens* travel separately, then skillfully brought them together at the right time and place for battle.

The Mongols were also very clever fighters. They sometimes faked attacking from one direction while their main force prepared to attack from another direction. Chinggis would also have his men pretend to retreat, so their enemy would follow

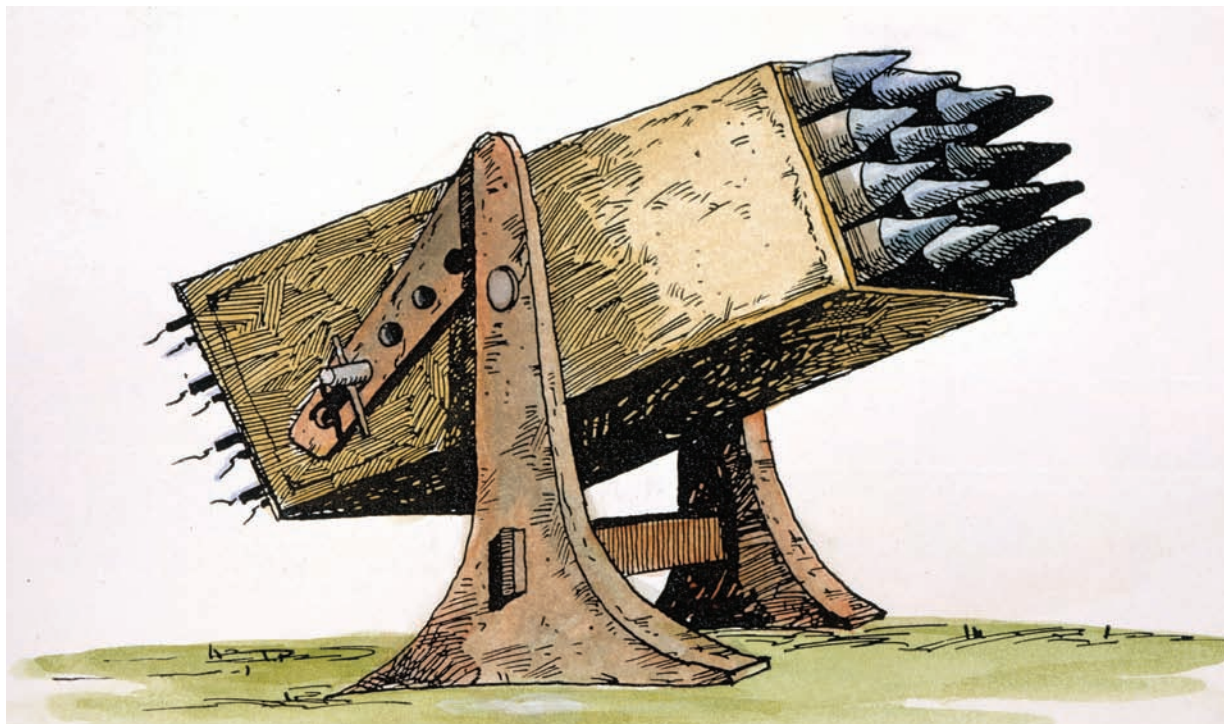


## CONNECTIONS

### Outflanking the Enemy

A key part of Mongol military strategy was flanking, or coming at an enemy from the side instead of head on. The Mongols' ability to move quickly on their horses and to trick their enemies made this strategy work. The different army units used flags and torches to communicate with each other as they moved into a flanking position.

Right into modern times, generals around the world have studied and copied the tactics of Chinggis and the other great Mongol generals. Modern generals have replaced horses with tanks and other gasoline-powered vehicles.



them. Then the retreating forces would lead the enemy into a position where hidden Mongols could easily defeat them.

The Mongols' usual cavalry (soldiers on horseback) tactics, however, did not work well in crowded cities. So in China they had to adopt new methods of making war. They learned the art of siege warfare. Siege warfare means cutting off a city from the outside world so it cannot receive supplies of food or fresh troops.

Using the skills of captured Chinese engineers, the Mongols built siege engines—large machines that are designed to break or get over city walls and other fortifications. These included different kinds of catapults, which are big machines that can throw rocks and flaming or explosive objects over high walls.

The Mongols tried to force the city dwellers to surrender, while using the siege engines to wear down their defenses. For decades to come, the Mongols combined their cavalry attacks with siege warfare. The adoption of siege warfare was what made the Mongols different from other nomadic empires, and is an important reason they grew so powerful.

Using captured Chinese technology, Mongol warriors built war machines like this early rocket launcher.

### Transoxiana

During the Mongol era, the region of Transoxiana was the site of many battles. The name of the region comes from the Oxus River. Transoxiana means “beyond the Oxus.” The Oxus starts in the Hindu Kush mountains in a region bordered by modern China, India, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Transoxiana included land west and north of the river in the heart of Central Asia. The region’s many rivers enabled farmers to bring water to their crops and led to the development of several key cities, such as Samarkand and Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan.

## FIGHTING IN THE WEST

In 1218, Chinggis turned his attention to Kara-Khitay, west of the Altai Mountains. A defeated tribal chieftain named Kūchūlüg (d. 1218) had fled there from Mongolia after Chinggis rose to power. Kūchūlüg managed to take control of Kara-Khitay, and Chinggis feared he might put together an army that could threaten the Mongols.

A Mongol force of about 20,000 men invaded Kara-Khitay. The people welcomed them, since Kūchūlüg had killed a local prince and limited the practice of Islam, the major faith in that area. Kara-Khitay quickly fell to the Mongols.

The growing Mongol Empire now bordered Khwarazm, a Muslim empire that stretched from the Caspian Sea to Transoxiana and south into what is now Afghanistan. Its ruler was Sultan Muhammad, who was also called Khwarazm-shah (d. 1220). In 1218, he refused to punish a Khwarazmian governor who had killed hundreds of Mongol merchants. The governor believed the merchants’ trading expedition contained spies. This was most likely true, because Chinggis wanted to know the military strengths and weaknesses of his neighbors. One Mongol survived the attack and reported back to Chinggis.

The angry Great Khan then sent three ambassadors to Sultan Muhammad, demanding that he punish the governor who ordered the massacre. The Khwarazmian ruler refused and then murdered one of the ambassadors. Chinggis said, “The Khwarazm-shah is no king, he is a bandit”—an outlaw (quoted by Paul Ratchnevsky in *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*). The Great Khan then prepared his troops for their first major war in the west.

By the spring of 1219, Chinggis had assembled an army of about 200,000 soldiers. His forces included Uighurs and Karluks, an ethnic group from Kara-Khitay. The army was split into three main sections.

The Khwarazmians had a larger army composed of Muslim Turks and Persians. Sultan Muhammad, however, did not want to meet the Mongols on the open battlefield, because he was not sure how to confront this triple threat. The Khwarazmian ruler also doubted the loyalty of his troops. Most of them were hired soldiers, called mercenaries, and the Turks and Persians in the army did not work well together. Sultan Muhammad did not trust many of his forces to obey his orders.

To avoid open battle, the sultan kept his forces in the various cities of the empire. They became easy targets for the Mongols. Chinggis and

his youngest son, Tolui (1193–1233), led the attack on the major city of Bukhara before heading to the capital of Samarkand.

In perhaps one of the deadliest wars in history, the Mongols slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Khwarazm soldiers and civilians. Historians of the day put the death toll in the millions. The Arab historian Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233) wrote (as quoted by David Morgan in *The Mongols*), “a tremendous disaster such as [this] had never happened before. . . . It may well be that the world from now until its end . . . will not experience the like of it again.”

Most modern historians doubt the high death count reported in the traditional sources. Still, no one doubts that the conquest of Khwarazm was brutal. In each city, the Mongols took all the valuable items they could find, destroyed the protective walls, and slaughtered thousands of Khwarazmian soldiers. In Bukhara, Chinggis told the people (as noted by James Chambers in *The Devil's Horsemen*), “It is your leaders who have committed these crimes, and I am the punishment of God.”

In 1221 two Mongol generals, Jebe (d. ca. 1225) and Subedei (1176–1248), pursued Sultan Muhammad’s son as he fled from the advancing enemy. The generals did not catch him, but they did explore part of the Russian steppes. The Mongols moved northward through Georgia into Russia, passing by the Sea of Azov and then along the Volga River. Jebe and Subedei eventually met up with the main Mongol army along the Jaxartes River, on the eastern edge of Khwarazm. By this time, in 1223, Chinggis had defeated the Khwarazmians and was slowly making his way back to Mongolia.

## THE SECOND GREAT KHAN

In 1226, Chinggis Khan led a second attack against the Tanguts of Xixia, because they were resisting Mongol rule. Although the campaign was successful, Chinggis died in 1227. He was buried in a secret location near Mongolia’s Onon and Kerulen Rivers.

Two years later, the Mongol chieftains elected Chinggis’s third son, Ögedei, the new Great Khan. Ögedei’s brothers and nephews (the sons of his dead brother Jochi) received territory, called *ulus*, that they controlled. Tolui received the traditional Mongol homelands. Chaghatai controlled Transoxiana and nearby lands in Central Asia. Jochi’s sons, Orda and Batu, received the steppes of what is now

### Sneaky Tactics

As he took prisoners, Chinggis dressed some of them as Mongols and had them march under Mongol banners ahead of the real Mongols during the next battle. This strategy made the Mongol army look bigger than it was. Enemy troops were tricked into wasting time and energy fighting the prisoners, rather than the Mongols themselves. The Mongols, however, did not use all prisoners this way. Some were allowed to buy their freedom, while skilled craftspeople were always kept alive to work for the army or were sent back to Mongolia.

### A Royal Honor

To honor Chinggis Khan after his death, the Mongols killed 40 slave girls and 40 horses and buried them near his grave. Mongol warriors were often buried with their horses, showing how important the animals were to them. Chinggis had ordered that his burial place be kept secret. A legend says that all the people who saw the funeral were killed, so they could never reveal the site of the Great Khan's grave.

southern Russia, even though the western end of this area was not yet under Mongol control. In Chinggis's mind, Eternal Heaven had given him and his family all the world to control. It was only a matter of time before they ruled it.

Ögedei also had his own *ulus*, composed of parts of Russia and China, as well as his authority as Great Khan over the rest of the empire. Chinggis's brothers also received small *ulus* in the northeast corner of the empire.

A *quriltai* in 1229 confirmed Ögedei as the second Great Khan. Within two years, he focused the Mongols' military might on the Jin in China. According to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the Mongols "assault[ed] their towns and cities in every quarter," and looted the Jin's "gold and silver, satins having gold and having patterns, possessions, *alajas* [horses] and little slaves. . . ." By 1234, the land once controlled by the Jin dynasty was completely under Mongol rule.

## EXPANDING THE EMPIRE

In 1235, Ögedei called a meeting of his relatives and *nökörs* at the new Mongol capital of Karakorum. The Mongols were preparing to fight on several fronts. In the southwest, Chaghatai wanted to strengthen Mongol control over the lands Chinggis had conquered almost 15 years before. In the east, Ögedei sought to extend the empire into the territory controlled by the Song dynasty in China. And the general Subedei supported Batu's call for a new campaign in Russia, which could eventually take the Mongols into Europe.

The advance into the Russian steppes was the Mongols' next major military action. Batu and Subedei led the campaign, with Subedei providing most of the strategy. Starting in the spring of 1236, Batu began assembling his army, with Ögedei's help. The commanders included several of Chinggis's grandsons, including Batu's brother Berke (d. 1266), Ögedei's son Guyuk (ca. 1206–1248), and Tolui's son Möngke. The army eventually had about 150,000 soldiers, which included Mongols, Turks, and other residents of the empire. Chinese and Persian engineers built siege engines and other weapons of war.

The Mongols' first targets were the peoples who lived along the Volga River. Subedei's forces destroyed the Bulgars, while Möngke

attacked the Kipchak nomads, a Turkic people who lived on the steppes from Kazakhstan to Romania. When the Mongols captured the Kipchak ruler, he refused to bow down to Möngke. The Mongol prince then ordered that the ruler's body be split in two.

The lands controlled by Batu and his Golden Horde were sometimes called the Kipchak Khanate. (The Golden Horde is a Russian term for the Mongol khanate established in the western part of the Mongol Empire after the Mongol invasion of Russia.) Batu centered his forces in the Kipchaks' former homeland. There, he founded his capital of Saray, near present-day Leninsk in Russia.

In Russia, the Mongols challenged a series of small states ruled by princes. The first principality to fall was Riazan. Inside the city, the Mongols showed particular cruelty. They cut off all the limbs of one prince and speared some residents with large wooden stakes, leaving them to die. In *The History of the Mongol Conquests*, J. J. Saunders quotes a Russian writer who described similar brutality in nearby Kolomna, where "no eye remained open to weep for the dead." The Mongols hoped tales of their violence would spread to the other Russian principalities, so that they would surrender without a fight.

Some of the princes, however, were willing to fight the Mongols. Key cities such as Suzdal, Vladimir, and Kiev resisted, but the Mongols swept through them on their march west. As the Mongols advanced, drummers on camels beat a rhythm, and the sounds of marching animals and shouting soldiers filled the air. A large problem was that the Russian princes were not willing to unite against the superior army of their common enemy. The ruling princes had often argued with one another and competed for power. The threat of defeat did not end these quarrels. As a result, the Mongols controlled the Russian cities by the winter of 1240.

In some places, the Mongols completely destroyed Russian cities and the people who lived there. Carpini, in his account of the Mongols, noted that when he traveled through Kiev several years after the Mongol invasion, it was "reduced to almost nothing." The priest also described seeing "countless human skulls and bones from the dead scattered over the field." Some modern historians, however, say that some Russian cities escaped the Mongol assault or managed to rebuild soon after the Mongols moved on.

## THE MONGOL ARMY

The Mongols' military success reflected a combination of several factors. The generals continued to use the tactics Chinggis had developed during his conquests, including the use of both cavalry and siege warfare. They kept the army large by forcing defeated peoples to provide soldiers. The Mongols also had a culture that greatly valued horseback riding and archery (using a bow and arrow)—skills that translated well from the hunting ground to the battlefield.

Almost as soon as they could walk, Mongol boys learned how to ride a horse. After the age of 20, they were expected to fight whenever the khan ordered. By then, they had learned how to shoot while on horseback. A Mongol soldier carried two bows: a larger one for long-range shooting and a smaller one for short distances. He also had at least 60 arrows. With his larger bow, a warrior could shoot an arrow more than 350 yards.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## Army Discipline

Discipline—following orders—is important in any successful army. Chinggis and his sons called for strict punishments for soldiers who tried to avoid their duties. *The Secret History of the Mongols* records this order from Ögedei.

*If a man of the guard, at the moment when one entereth [into his] turn [of service], neglect [this service], let one . . . instruct [him by] three strokes of the rod. If the same man of the guard again, a second time, neglect [his] turn [of service], let one instruct [him by] seven strokes of the rod. If again the same man, without sickness or reason and without consultation [beforetime] with the elder of the company, a third time, neglect [his] turn*

*[of service], [it is a sign that] he looketh upon his service at [the side of] Us as [too] difficult. Having instructed [him by] 37 strokes of the rod, [We] shall send [him] out of sight unto a distant place.*

In this passage, the translator, Francis Cleaves, adds words in brackets to clarify the original Mongol meaning. He also used a type of old-fashioned English for some of the words. But what is clear is that the Mongols beat and then sent away soldiers who repeatedly disobeyed orders.

(Source: Cleaves, Francis Woodman, Editor and Translator. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Volume 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.)



Spears, swords, bows and arrows, and lightweight metal mail, a type of armor, were all part of a Mongol warrior's battle gear. This is a Chinese woodcut illustration.



## CONNECTIONS

### Przhevalsky's Horse

The horses the Mongols rode may be distant ancestors of the only true wild horses known today—Przhevalsky's horses. (The wild horses living in the American West are actually descendants of domesticated horses brought to the Americas by the Spanish.) Their name comes from the 19th-century Russian explorer Nikolai Przhevalsky, who found a herd of them near modern Mongolia.

These wild horses are smaller than today's domestic horses. They once roamed the steppes near the Altai Mountains. By the 20th century, the only known Przhevalsky's horses left on Earth were in captivity. In recent years, however, Mongolian scientists have been releasing some into the wild in two of Mongolia's national parks.

The Mongols used a variety of arrows, including some that carried tiny grenades. Although they preferred the bow and arrow, the Mongols also sometimes fought with swords and lances (weapons with a hard point mounted on a wooden pole).

The Mongols used both light and heavy cavalry. The light cavalry wore lighter armor—usually made of leather—or none at all. The heavy cavalry wore leather and mail, which is a protective suit made of metal. The soldiers also wore helmets made of leather for the light

cavalry and iron for the heavy cavalry. All soldiers carried a shield made of wicker and leather. They also carried essential supplies in their saddlebags, including food, extra clothing, and tools to repair their weapons.

The Mongol soldier's constant companion was his horse. Long before the Mongols arrived in Central Asia, the people of the steppes had domesticated wild horses, then selectively bred them so they would be strong enough to carry a rider. The Chinese invented the stirrup (rings attached to a saddle in which a rider puts his feet) around 400 C.E., and it quickly spread to the Asian steppe dwellers. With that simple innovation, riders could stay on their horses without using their hands, making it easier to use horses during a battle.

The Mongols perfected cavalry warfare, and their culture highly valued the horse. Each soldier had several horses, rotating them so they always had a fresh horse on the long rides across the steppes. The Mongols usually rode geldings—castrated male horses. Riding a mare (a female horse) was viewed as unmanly. During desperate times, a soldier would nick his horse's skin while riding and drink some of its blood. This way, the Mongols nourished themselves without losing any time.

## FARTHER INTO EUROPE

Geographers (people who study the physical features of the earth) usually mark the dividing line between Asia and Europe as the Ural Mountains. That means with their Russian invasion, the Mongols had extended their empire into the continent of Europe. But the push westward was not over. By the end of 1240, the Mongols were ready to cross the Carpathian Mountains and enter Hungary. Batu and Subedei led this advance. Meanwhile Baidar (dates unknown) and Kadan (dates unknown), two grandsons of Chinggis Khan, moved into Poland with a smaller force.

Early in 1241, the northern Mongol army crossed the frozen Vistula River and began attacking Polish cities. This army was trying to draw European forces out of Hungary, to smooth the way for Subedei's attack. Baidar swept through Krakow, which was then the Polish capital. The residents had already fled, and the Mongols burned the city. The Mongols continued through Poland, crossing the Oder River and reaching as far as Liegnitz. At the battle outside that city, the Mongols cut off the ears of their defeated enemy, taking enough to fill nine bags. Baidar and Kadan then turned south to join the main Mongol army in Hungary.

In April 1241, the Mongols launched their attack from four directions, surrounding the Hungarian forces. They soon reached the towns of Buda and Pest. (Today those towns are united in one city along the Danube River, Budapest, and serve as Hungary's capital.) The Mongols then sent an advance party ahead into Austria and one *tümen* prepared to go to Zagreb, the capital of modern Croatia.

Rulers even farther west in Europe feared they might be the Mongols' next victims. By the end of 1241, Europeans

## The Great Hunt

Chinggis Khan continued the nomad tradition of training his troops based on hunting techniques. During these "great hunts," thousands of soldiers rode through an area, driving the animals out of their hiding places. Some of the troops would ride ahead until they reached a line that had been marked out in advance. They would then ride back toward the main army and the animals, creating a circle that eventually tightened around the animals.

The hunted animals included wolves, wild boars, and tigers. Once the soldiers had completely surrounded the animals, they killed them, providing food for an army on the march.



## CONNECTIONS

### The Invasion of Krakow

According to Polish tradition, on March 24, 1241, a Mongol arrow killed a Polish lookout in the tower of the Krakow town hall just as he was blowing an alarm on his trumpet to warn of the Mongol advance.

Today Krakow still honors that event. Every hour, a trumpeter stands in the highest tower at the Church of Saint Mary and plays the simple melody that was used in medieval times as a warning call. He plays it four times, facing north, south, east, and west. Each time, the tune ends abruptly, just as it did for that watchman on March 24. Since 1927, this trumpet call has been broadcast on Polish radio every day at noon.

had heard the reports of the Mongols' extreme violence. The reports were exaggerated and included things that were not true—that the Mongol soldiers ate the flesh of their dead enemies, for example—but the truth was bad enough.

However, the Mongols never pushed farther into Europe. Early in 1242, Batu learned that Ögedei had died. The khan's relatives and other important leaders had to return to Karakorum to choose the next Great Khan. Batu gathered his troops in Hungary and began the long

ride back to Mongolia, to attend the *quriltai* that would choose the next Great Khan.

The Mongols also had other reasons to retreat when they did. Central Europe lacked the pastures they needed to feed their horses, and at times, the descendants of Chinggis were arguing with each other. They did not have a united purpose. Already, one of their main goals had been met. The king of Hungary, Bela (1206–1270), had angered the Mongols by protecting the Cumans, whom the Mongols had defeated during the 1220s. With Bela's defeat, the Mongol mission in Europe was over.

Whatever the reason, the Europeans were just glad to see the Mongols leave. The Mongol threat to Eastern and Central Europe was largely over, and they never again launched a major invasion there.

### UNREST IN THE ROYAL FAMILY

Chinggis's descendants took four years to choose their next leader. During that time, Ögedei's wife, Toregene (d. ca. 1246), served as regent, or temporary ruler, which is an old Mongol custom. Ögedei had wanted his grandson Shiremün (d. ca. 1251) to become the next Great Khan. But his wife favored their son Guyuk. Toregene managed to get her son

elected despite opposition from Batu, who had quarreled with Guyuk during the Russian campaign.

Carpini arrived at Karakorum in 1246, just as Guyuk was elected Great Khan. The Italian priest noted how Mongol princes and ambassadors from other nations were there to honor Guyuk, bringing him fabulous gifts. Carpini wrote, “[T]here was a particular provincial governor who gave many camels to him . . . and many armored horses and mules . . . More than 50 wagons were placed beyond a hill . . . and they were all filled with gold and silver and silk clothing which were divided between the emperor and his nobles.”

After the festivities of that day, the tension between the cousins Guyuk and Batu continued. In 1247 the Great Khan prepared to attack Batu’s forces. Tolui’s wife, Sorkhagtani Beki (d. 1252), warned Batu about Guyuk’s advance, but the civil war never took place. Before he could launch his assault on Batu, Guyuk died in 1248.

For three years, Guyuk’s wife, Oghul Qaimish, served as regent. During this time, Sorkhagtani wanted one of her sons to take control. She joined forces with Batu, who did not want to become Great Khan. Together, they convinced the Mongol princes in 1251 to choose her son Möngke as the next Mongol leader. For the next century, all the Great Khans came from Tolui’s branch of Chinggis’s family.

The family turmoil, however, was not over. Möngke was elected at a *quriltai* held outside of Mongolia. Ögedei’s and Chaghatai’s families said the election was not valid, since it had not occurred in the traditional homelands. These relatives then battled Möngke and his supporters for control of the empire. Möngke won this struggle for power, and he executed many of the commanders who had helped the families of Ögedei and Chaghatai. Ögedei’s grandson Shiremün was also executed for his role in the revolt. Tensions between the various branches of Chinggis’s family lasted for decades.

## BACK TO PERSIA

Möngke’s first goal was to strengthen and expand Mongol control in the Islamic lands of southwest Asia. His brother Hülegü took command of a major army. As usual, the army included foreigners, such as Chinese engineers and weapons specialists who used crude flamethrowers. These weapons fired a chemical called naphtha that was lit and then burned anything it touched. By this time, the Mongols

were also using gunpowder to fire some arrows out of tubes. This was another technique they learned from the Chinese, and was a first crude step on the road to modern rockets.

Hülegü's army crossed the Oxus River in 1256. Its first targets were the castles of the Ismailis, in parts of what are now Iran and Afghanistan. The Ismailis were extreme Shiites. Shiite is one of the two major groups in Islam; the other is Sunni. The Ismailis followed their own Shiite beliefs. The Sunnis considered them to be so far outside the mainstream religion that they sentenced the Ismailis to death. The Ismailis believed assassination was a legitimate way to defend themselves against this ruling.

As a result, other Muslims feared the Ismailis. One source suggests a Muslim religious leader actually asked the Mongols to attack the Ismailis. William of Rubruck (ca. 1210–ca. 1270), a Christian priest who visited Mongol lands, claimed Hülegü's attack in 1256 came after a failed Ismaili plot to kill the Great Khan.

The grand master, or leader, of the Ismailis was a young man named Rukn-ad-Din (d. ca. 1257). He was afraid of the Mongols' might, and surrendered to Hülegü after a short siege. He also convinced other Ismailis to give up without a fight. Rukn-ad-Din begged Hülegü to spare his life and let him meet Möngke. The Mongol general agreed. But the Great Khan refused to meet Rukn-ad-Din, and his Mongol guards killed Rukn-ad-Din and his family.

## THE DRIVE WEST

Hülegü's army then continued west, heading for Baghdad. For centuries, this city in what is now Iraq had been a center of Islamic culture and politics. Its ruler was called a caliph. A caliph was both a political and a religious leader, and he had great authority. The Abbasid caliphate, or kingdom, was based in Baghdad. It had been founded in 750, and at its peak the Abbasid dynasty controlled an empire that stretched from North Africa to Afghanistan.

In 1257, the caliph was Mustasim (d. 1258), whom historian J. J. Saunders, in *The History of the Mongol Conquests*, calls "weak, vain, incompetent and cowardly." Hülegü advised Mustasim to avoid a slaughter and accept Mongol rule. The caliph refused, insulted the Mongol commander, and told him to leave. Instead, Hülegü launched a typical Mongol attack from several directions, with the aid of troops

from the Golden Horde. Early in 1258, Mustasim surrendered and the Mongols looted Baghdad. Hülegü later wrote that his forces killed 200,000 Muslims during the battle.

Hülegü remained in Baghdad for about one year, then prepared to move west again. His ultimate goal this time was Egypt, then ruled by the Mamluks—Turkic warriors who had seized power from the local caliph. By now, some Christian rulers who had been fighting the Muslims in the Middle East welcomed the Mongols. A few decades earlier, the Mongols had been their enemies when they invaded Europe. But now, the Christian rulers of Europe were waging a series of wars called the Crusades. They were trying to push the Muslims out of the Holy Land (the region where Jesus Christ lived and died) in what is today the Middle East.

By the time the Mongols reached the region, only a few Christian forces remained. Some of those troops united with the Mongols against the Muslims of Syria. Others refused to join the Mongols, even against their most bitter enemy, because the Mongols were not Christians.

The Mongols conquered the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Damascus, and they seemed prepared to establish permanent rule throughout Syria. But in September 1260, the Mamluks attacked. They won a victory at Ayn Jalut, in modern-day Israel.

By this time, the Mongol army was not at full strength. Hülegü had pulled some of his forces back into Persia when he learned that Möngke had died in 1259. Hülegü would have to return to Karakorum for the *quriltai* that would choose the next Great Khan.

The situation was similar to the events of 1241, when the death of Ögedei had ended the Mongol push into Europe. Hülegü also realized that keeping a Mongol presence in the Middle East would be hard, since the region lacked grazing lands for their horses. Still, the Mongols would try to retake Syria several more times in the decades to come.

### A Royal Execution

When the Mongols killed Mustasim, the caliph of Baghdad, they first rolled him up in a carpet, then trampled him with their horses. This, and other similar forms of execution, was commonly used for royalty. The Mongols believed the blood of important people should not touch the ground.



## CHAPTER 2

# COMPLETING THE MONGOL EMPIRE

WHILE HÜLEGÜ BATTLED IN THE WEST, MÖNGKE FOCUSED on extending Mongol rule over the Song dynasty territory in southern China. He sent his brother Khubilai (ca. 1215–1294) to fight in lands bordering Song dynasty territory. Khubilai’s military campaign began in 1252, and he and Möngke led the Mongol armies that invaded southern China in 1258.

By this time, his brother Khubilai had emerged as the major Mongol ruler in China, and Möngke let him rule part of that country. Khubilai built a capital in Kaiping, which was later renamed Shangdu—Chinese for “upper capital.” The city was about 125 miles northwest of Beijing in what is now Inner Mongolia.

Möngke died after a battle in 1259 from a fever caused by disease. After Möngke’s death, Khubilai and another brother, Ariq Böke (d. 1266), competed for the title of Great Khan. Ariq Böke had remained in the traditional Mongol homelands, and he had the support of Mongol princes. These princes distrusted the fact that Chinese culture had a big influence on Khubilai. Berke, the new leader of the Golden Horde, favored Ariq Böke for Great Khan. So did many of Chaghatai’s and Ögedei’s descendants.

Khubilai’s main supporters were his brother Hülegü and the Mongol princes in China. Those princes voted for Khubilai at a *quriltai* held at Shangdu in May 1260. Ariq Böke and his supporters protested the election because it was not held in the Mongolian homelands. In June, Ariq Böke claimed the title of Great Khan for himself, setting the stage for another civil war.

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#### OPPOSITE

Khubilai Khan, shown here in a Yuan dynasty Chinese painting, founded that dynasty and eventually adopted many Chinese customs and beliefs.

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## CONNECTIONS

### From Shangdu to Xanadu

In 1816 the English writer Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) published “Kubla Khan,” a poem about Khubilai. The poem described the Great Khan’s palace at Shangdu, which Coleridge called Xanadu. It begins:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.*

Since then, *Xanadu* has been used to suggest any place that is magical or filled with riches. It was the title of a 1980 film and a 2007 Broadway musical.

Ariq Böke selected generals to raise troops north and south of the Gobi Desert. These forces headed for Shangdu, while Khubilai was fighting the Song in Ezhou (modern Wuhan), along the Yangtze River. The approaching army of Ariq Böke forced Khubilai to withdraw from Ezhou and return to Shangdu to defend his capital.

Ariq Böke tried to trick his older brother by promising Khubilai that he would not attack. But at the same time he made this promise, Ariq Böke was increasing his military strength. Thanks to help from a cousin, Khubilai

was able to cut off Ariq Böke’s forces from their supply route. Without supplies, their ability to fight was limited. Still, Ariq Böke was determined to confront Khubilai. The armies of the two brothers met at the end of 1261, along the Chinese-Mongol border. Neither side could claim a clear victory.

Ariq Böke then headed into Central Asia seeking allies. This allowed Khubilai to take complete control of Mongolia. Although Ariq Böke won some battles, ultimately he could not compete with Khubilai’s better-equipped army. In 1264, Ariq Böke finally accepted his brother’s rule as Great Khan. Khubilai then killed some of the Mongols who had supported Ariq Böke, though he did not execute his brother. Instead, in 1265, Khubilai called a *quriltai* to decide how Ariq Böke should be punished for his civil war. Before the Mongols could meet, however, Ariq Böke died in 1266. Some historians believe he may have been poisoned, but the record is not clear.

From then on, Khubilai was unchallenged as the Great Khan. Despite his title, though, Khubilai had direct control only over China, Tibet, and Korea. He also had the loyalty of the Mongol rulers in Persia.

The rulers of the regional khanates became more and more independent in the years to come.

## KHUBILAI KHAN IN CHINA

Now that Ariq Böke was defeated, Khubilai Khan focused on conquering the Song and uniting China under his rule. Khubilai needed to improve his image among relatives and princes, who still doubted he was the true Great Khan. He also had to convince his Chinese subjects that he was worthy to rule their great civilization.

Khubilai's advance into Song territory had two goals. First, the southern region had better farmland than the north, so it could provide the empire with food. Second, it had sea ports that could help boost foreign trade. Khubilai also feared that if he did not unify China under his rule, the Song would eventually raise an army and try to overthrow their foreign rulers.

Fighting in the south presented problems the Mongol army had not faced before. The climate was hot and wet, covered in jungles, forests, and farmlands. They had been fighting in northern China and the steppes, which were cold, dry, and open. The south had few open fields where the Mongols' horses could graze. The Song also had a powerful navy. To defeat them, the Mongols had to build their own ships, with help from the Chinese already under their rule.

At first, Khubilai sent diplomats to ask the Song emperor to recognize his authority, surrender, and avoid a war. The Song emperor refused. In the early 1260s, small battles broke out along the border between the Song and Mongol China. The first major battle



## CONNECTIONS

### A New Capital

Soon after Khubilai Khan defeated Ariq Böke, he moved the Mongol capital from Karakorum to Zhongdu. Zhongdu had been the capital of the Jin dynasty in northern China. Khubilai renamed it Daidu, which means "great capital" in Chinese.

The Turks called the city Khan-baliq, or "the khan's city." When Marco Polo traveled through China, he heard this Turkish name as Cambaluc. And that is how Europeans referred to the city for centuries. In his *Travels*, Polo described Cambaluc: ". . . up and down the city there are beautiful palaces, and many great and fine [inns], and fine houses in great numbers." Today, Khubilai's capital is the Chinese capital of Beijing, and one shrine and the series of artificial lakes he built there remain.

took place in 1265, in the province of Sichuan, and the Mongols won. Still, the Song were determined to keep their independence, and the war dragged on for more than a decade.

The Mongols staged sieges at several cities. At Xianyang, the Mongols used thousands of boats to fight on the Yellow River. The siege of Xianyang lasted two years. In 1276, the Mongols took over the Song capital of Hangzhou. Within three years they established complete control over southern China.

During these years of war, Khubilai officially proclaimed himself emperor of China. He gave his dynasty a Chinese name—something most foreign rulers of China did to seem less foreign. Khubilai's dynasty was called Yuan, meaning “the origin.” His government included a mixture of Chinese, Mongol, and foreign advisors. Khubilai ruled over about 65 million Chinese people, while the Mongol population was only a few million. As a Mongol, Khubilai was considered a barbarian. He tried to soften that image by adopting Chinese habits and customs.

Khubilai Khan respected the ideas of Confucius but did not trust his followers. This is a Confucius temple in Beijing.



The Great Khan made a major change in the Chinese government. In the past, most government jobs were handled by civil servants. These government workers got their jobs by passing an exam. This system was designed to make sure that the most talented people served in the government, no matter who was ruling.

The civil service exam mainly tested one's knowledge of the ideas of Confucius (ca. 551–479 B.C.E.), one of China's greatest thinkers. The Great Khan, however, did not trust the followers of Confucius who dominated Chinese politics. He was more interested in selecting government workers who were loyal to him. Khubilai offered many of the top positions to foreigners, while the Chinese held lower positions in the government.

## OTHER EAST ASIAN BATTLES

Even before he had complete control of China, Khubilai looked to further conquests in East Asia. His first concern was Korea, which Chinggis had invaded in 1218. Chinggis forced the Koreans to pay tribute to him, but they stopped making this payment a few years later. The Mongols invaded Korea again in 1231, but the country did not come under firm Mongol control until the end of Möngke's reign, in 1258.

Khubilai formed good relations with the Korean king, Wonjong (r. 1259–1274), who ruled with the Mongols' permission. So when several Korean military leaders rebelled in 1269, Khubilai sent troops to aid the king. By the following year, Korea was completely under the control of the Yuan dynasty. Wonjong remained on the throne, though, and his son married one of Khubilai's daughters.

In 1273, as the war with the Song went on, Khubilai ordered some of his forces to Japan. For years, he had been sending ambassadors there. He demanded that the Japanese pay him tribute as both the emperor of China and the Great Khan of the Mongols. The Japanese, however, always refused.

In 1274 a Mongol fleet of about 800 boats sailed for Japan, carrying an invasion force of more than 30,000 Mongol, Chinese, and Korean soldiers and sailors. In the first battle on the island of Kyushu, the Mongols won a decisive victory. But a severe storm forced their soldiers to return to their ships. The navy then sailed into open seas to escape damage from the fierce winds. That turned out to be a bad decision.

### Fish Fit for a King

As part of their tribute to Khubilai Khan, the Koreans sent fish. The Great Khan did not eat them. Instead, he used their skin to make his shoes. (Most Mongols wore shoes made of pressed felt.) The Mongols believed animal skins and organs could cure illnesses, especially if they were fresh.



Khubilai Khan sent ships to attack Japan, but bad weather and fierce opposition stopped the Mongol invasions.

The storm badly damaged the ships at sea, resulting in heavy Mongol losses. The surviving forces returned to China.

Khubilai was not ready to forget the Japanese, though. He sent an even larger army to Japan in 1281. This time, the Japanese fought well and another damaging storm forced the Mongols to retreat. After this second attempt, Japan never faced another Mongol threat.

Khubilai and his forces were more successful in Southeast Asia. In 1277, a Mongol army invaded the kingdom of Pagan, in what is now Myanmar (formerly called Burma). The Pagans rode elephants into battle. The Mongol general ordered his archers to shoot at the animals, not the riders. Marco Polo, an Italian explorer, described the scene in *The Description of the World*, writing that the elephants “were wounded on every side of the body . . . and were frightened by the great noise of the shouting.” The terrified animals ran toward the Burmese troops, “putting the army of the king . . . into the greatest confusion.” Although the Mongols won, their victory led to only limited control over Pagan. Khubilai sent more troops there during the 1280s, forcing the kingdom to pay tribute.

Mongol influence also reached into what is now Vietnam and part of Indonesia. The Mongol army fought a series of battles with two Vietnamese kingdoms, Annam and Champa. For a time, the kings of the two Vietnamese kingdoms paid tribute, but Khubilai never had direct

control over their lands. The Mongols also invaded the Indonesian island of Java in 1292. The invasion, like the earlier attacks on Japan, ended in failure.

## CONFLICTS IN THE WEST

Khubilai focused most of his attention and military might on East Asia, but he did not overlook the western part of his empire. There, rebellion and outside threats troubled his rule. The region of Tibet, which includes modern Tibet and parts of Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces in China, had been under Mongol influence since the late 1240s. During the 1280s, a group of Tibetans rebelled against the leader Khubilai had chosen for them. The Great Khan sent in soldiers, who killed about 10,000 Tibetans while squashing the rebellion.

One of Khubilai's concerns about the Tibetan rebels was their tie to an old enemy—his cousin Khaidu (1236–1301). Khaidu was a grandson of the Great Khan Ögedei. He made his base in the region around Lake Balkhash, east of Transoxiana, in part of the Chaghatai Khanate. Khaidu eventually made a deal with the Mongols of the Golden Horde and with Barak (d. 1271). Barak was a great-grandson of Chaghatai who ruled the family's *ulus*. The arrangement between Khaidu and Barak gave Khaidu control of large parts of the Chaghatai *ulus*. Eventually, Khaidu was powerful enough to choose the khan who ruled that *ulus*. With his growing power, Khaidu repeatedly challenged Khubilai in the western part of his khanate.

For several years, Khaidu let Chaghatai princes under his control do most of the fighting. These Central Asian Mongols fought small battles against troops led by Nomukhan (d. ca. 1292), Khubilai's son. In 1276, some of the commanders under Nomukhan plotted against him. They kidnapped the Mongol prince, his brother, and cousin, bringing Nomukhan and his brother to the khan of the Golden Horde and their cousin to Khaidu. Although he welcomed the action, Khaidu did not take an active part in the plot.

The kidnapping added to Khubilai's troubles in the region. Rebels in Mongolia perceived him as being weak in the western part of his empire. In 1277, the rebels looted Karakorum, the old Mongol capital. Khubilai had to send troops to end the rebellion. Some of the escaping rebels later joined forces with Khaidu.

The major conflict between Khaidu and Khubilai began in 1286. Khaidu seized the city of Besh-baliq, south of the Altai Mountains. The next year, a Mongol prince named Nayan (d. 1287) led a rebellion in Manchuria, a region in northern China. He and Khaidu were working together, and Khaidu took advantage of the revolt to invade western Mongolia.

Khubilai personally led the campaign against Nayan, which ended with the rebel's capture and execution. Marco Polo observed the battle and wrote in *The Travels of Marco Polo* that "from this and from that such cries arose from the crowds of the wounded and the dying that had God thundered, you would not have heard Him!"

Nayan's death did not end Khaidu's fight against Khubilai. Khaidu continued advancing into Mongolia for several years, until his death in 1301. By that time, Khubilai was already dead and the title of Great Khan had passed on to his grandson, Temür Öljeitü. For a time under Temür Öljeitü's rule, the conflicts between the various khanates ended and Mongol China began a peaceful period that lasted several decades.

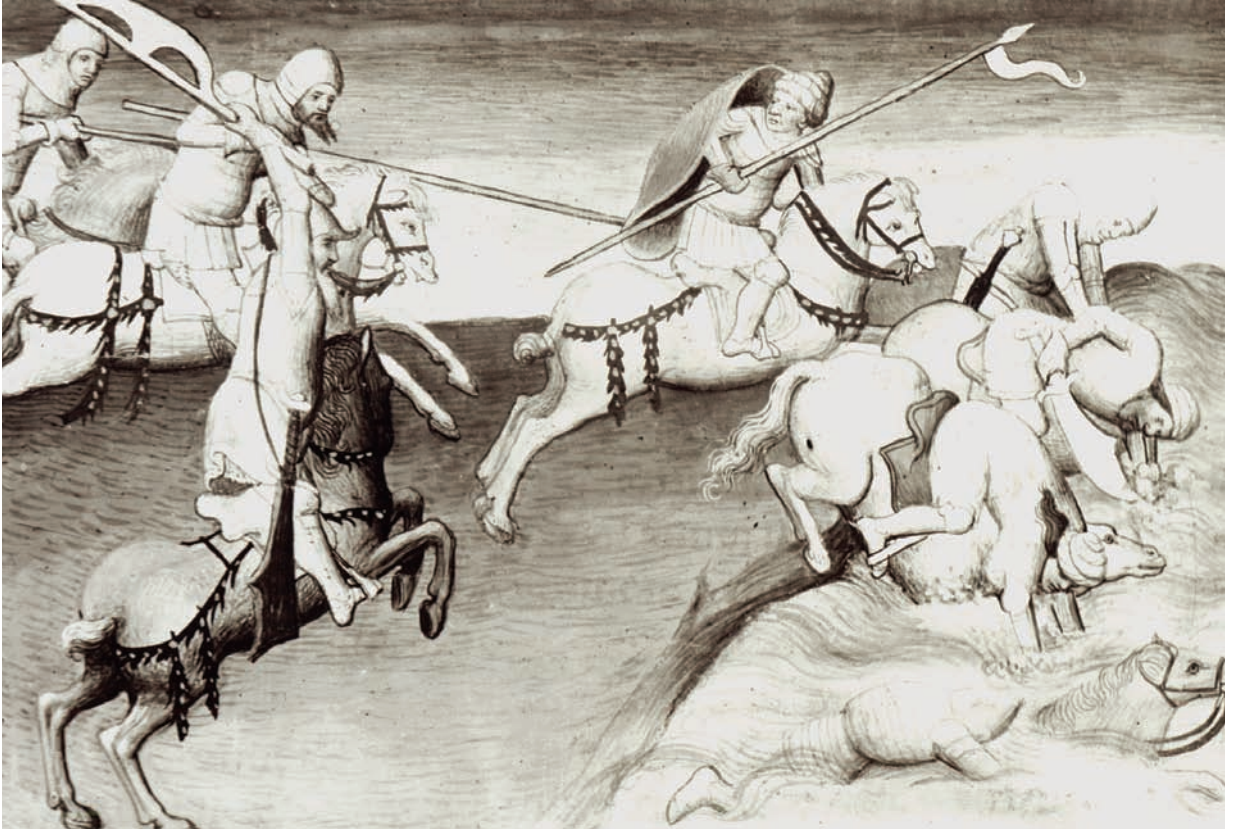
## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ILKHANATE

Until the 1250s, Mongol control in eastern Persia and surrounding lands was not complete, because some local rulers still held power. Chinggis had won important victories in Khwarazm and Khurasan, a region in Iran. But it was Hülegü's campaign in 1256 that truly brought the region into the Mongol Empire.

Hülegü was the first khan of what was eventually called the Ilkhanate. *Il* is a Mongol word meaning "controlled" or "not rebellious." The name reflected the fact that Hülegü accepted Khubilai as the Great Khan and would not challenge his authority.

Hülegü's khanate stretched from the Oxus River and the Hindu Kush to Anatolia, which is now the major part of modern Turkey. The Ilkhanate's southern border was the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. On the north was the *ulus* of the Golden Horde. Some of the modern nations within the Ilkhanate's borders are Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, and parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan.

While ruling the Ilkhanate, Hülegü faced problems on several sides. One of his enemies was his cousin Berke, third khan of the Golden Horde. Berke did not support Khubilai's election as the Great Khan. This placed him and Hülegü on opposite sides of the Chinggis



family. The two cousins also had a border dispute over Azerbaijan. Finally, Berke converted to Islam, and he disliked the fact that Hülegü was tolerant toward Christians and other people who did not practice Islam. Berke joined the Mamluks of Egypt in an alliance against the Ilkhanate.

In 1262, Berke and the Mamluks attacked Hülegü on two sides. The Mamluk leader Baybars (1233–1277) fought Christians in Syria and Armenia who were allied with Hülegü. Berke's forces invaded Hülegü's lands in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The two sides also fought in southern Russia.

In 1263, the Golden Horde won a major victory at the Terek River. Retreating forces from the Ilkhanate drowned when the ice on the river gave way. The loss, however, made Hülegü decide to launch a major attack the following year. A rebellion in his empire delayed the attack, though, and Hülegü died in 1265 before he could lead the army against his cousin.

This 15th-century painting shows a battle scene from the Mongol civil war, as Hülegü (left) chases Berke (center) of the Golden Horde (right).

## Seeking a Western Alliance

In 1262, Hülegü tried to make contact with leaders in Western Europe. He was looking for allies against the Mamluks and the Golden Horde. A letter that he wrote to King Louis IX of France survives. Hülegü also sent diplomats to Italy.

Abagha (d. 1282), Hülegü's son and the second Ilkhan, continued these efforts to find allies in the West. Letters from him

reached Pope Urban IV, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and King Edward I of England. Abagha also signed a trade treaty with Venice, whose merchants sold goods at trading posts along the Black Sea. Politically, however, the Mongol effort to win Western allies failed. No European leaders sent troops to help Abagha fight the Mamluks.

Hülegü's son Abagha then took command, and two major Mongol armies prepared to go to war. The war never fully developed, though. Berke died in 1266. The next khan of the Golden Horde, Möngke Temür (d. 1280), decided not to continue the struggle with the Ilkhanate.

Soon after one struggle with a relative ended, Abagha faced a new threat from another family member. Barak, from the Chaghatai *ulus*, attacked the eastern borders of the Ilkhanate. In 1269, he took over part of Khurasan. Abagha eventually pushed the invaders out of his realm and carried the counterattack into Transoxiana.

Around the same time, Baybars attacked Antioch in Syria and invaded Armenia. In 1277, he fought Mongol forces in Anatolia and Lesser Armenia, a Christian kingdom allied with the Ilkhanate. (Today this area is part of Turkey.) Abagha launched a successful counterattack, but the Mamluks continued to threaten the western edges of his lands.

In 1281, Abagha led a major invasion of Syria. He hoped to defeat the Mamluks and extend Mongol rule as far west as Egypt—something his father never achieved. Once again, however, the Mamluks pushed back the Mongols.

## UNREST IN THE ILKHANATE

Abagha died after the failed invasion of Syria. In 1282, his brother Teguder (d. 1284) emerged as the next Ilkhan. Abagha had wanted his son Arghun (ca. 1258–1291) to take over, but Teguder prevented that.

Teguder converted to Islam. Then he tried to establish an alliance with the Muslims of Egypt. But before he could make the Ilkhanate an Islamic state, Teguder was assassinated by Arghun and some Mongol princes loyal to him. Historian Paul D. Buell, in his *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire*, writes that Arghun's rule "began with a bloodbath." The new Ilkhan and his supporters killed the officials who had supported Teguder.

For most of Arghun's reign, his empire was at peace. But, like his father and grandfather before him, he was determined to capture Syria and destroy the Mamluks. And like them, he reached out to the West, hoping to unite Mongol and Christian armies against the Muslims. He wrote letters and sent diplomats, and at one point promised to provide 30,000 horses for Christian soldiers to use in Syria. In a letter to Pope Honorius IV (ca. 1201–1287), the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Ilkhan wrote (as quoted by J. A. Boyle in *The Cambridge History of Iran*), "[W]e from this side and you from your side shall crush [Egypt] between us with good men."

Although a wartime alliance never developed, Arghun did strengthen his business ties with West. In 1288, he signed a contract with merchants from Genoa, Italy, similar to the one his father had signed with Venice.

Arghun died in 1291, and the Ilkhanate entered an unstable period. The Ilkhan had not named his successor, so the next year his brother Geikhatu (ca. 1271–1295) took power. He spent money lavishly and soon ran into financial trouble.

## The Ilkhan's Capital

Abagha set up his capital at Tabriz, a city in what is now northwest Iran. Abagha relied on Persian officials to run his government from there. It served as the capital of the Ilkhanate until Sultaniyya was built early in the 14th century. However, the Mongol rulers continued to lead a nomadic life, and capitals were more for the locals than the Mongols.

Tabriz was a center of art and commerce as well as the capital. Today, Tabriz is one of the largest cities in modern Iran. Remains of a Mongol fortress still stand in the city.

### Chinese Adventurer

One of the diplomats Arghun sent to the West was Rabban Sauma (ca. 1230–1293), a Christian priest from China who was an ethnic Turk. Khubilai Khan had sent Sauma to the Ilkhanate as his official representative. Arghun then sent him to Europe, hoping he could win support from Christian leaders for his attack on Syria. Sauma traveled in reverse almost the same route Marco Polo took on his trip to Khubilai's court. Sauma was the first Chinese traveler to reach Paris and other cities of Western Europe. He visited them between 1275 and 1280.

Within four years, rebels led by Baidu (d. 1295), a grandson of Hülegü, strangled Geikhatu. Baidu then claimed the title of Ilkhan. Almost immediately, Arghun's son Ghazan (1271–1304) challenged Baidu's authority. Although once a Buddhist, Ghazan followed the advice of one of his generals and converted to Islam. This made him popular with many of the local people. By the end of 1295, Ghazan had won enough support to force out Baidu and become the next Ilkhan.

### A WELCOME REIGN

Under Ghazan, the Ilkhanate reached its cultural and economic peak. J. A. Boyle, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, calls him “without question the greatest of the Ilkhans, a remarkably gifted man by the standards of any age.” Ghazan promoted the arts and education, and built many grand public buildings. He also continued reforms begun under Arghun to create a centralized tax system. Historians are not sure how many of these reforms actually took place, but he was doing his best to improve the government.

Through his actions, Ghazan showed two sides. He tried to make life easier and fairer for the common people. He forbade Mongol officials to beat and kill the peasant wives and children, which had been tactics Mongols used to convince citizens to pay taxes. Yet at times Ghazan could be cruel as he enforced the laws of his land. Official records show that in just one month, he executed 43 high-ranking officials, including some Mongol princes.

During Ghazan's reign, more Mongols began to convert to Islam. Ghazan's reign began with a wave of persecution against Christians and Buddhists, but he later stopped forcing people to convert to Islam. Some Mongols also gave up their nomadic lifestyle and began marrying local peoples, especially the Turks. The distinct Mongol culture began to blend with the native Turkic and Persian cultures. This process continued for decades.

Ghazan, however, always remained proud of his Mongol heritage and his family ties to Chinggis Khan. He studied the history of his family and their rule, and he continued to respect the authority of Temür, Khubilai Khan's successor in China.

Following Mongol tradition, Ghazan looked beyond his borders for lands to conquer. First on the list was Mamluk Syria. The

Ilkhanate managed to take over the city of Aleppo in 1299. A second invasion in 1303 ended horribly for the Mongols. After their defeat, Mongol prisoners were forced to march through Cairo. Around their necks they carried the heads of other Mongols which the Mamluks had chopped off.

Ghazan died the following year. He never fulfilled the Mongol dream of spreading the empire to Egypt. The end of his rule also marked the end of a strong Mongol presence in the Ilkhanate. The region would take on greater Persian and Muslim influence in the years to come.

## THE GOLDEN HORDE

Of the three khanates beyond the Mongols' homeland in East Asia, the Golden Horde had the least contact with the Great Khan. They were the farthest away, and Möngke and Khubilai were more focused on China than on other parts of the realm. The Mongols called it the Kipchak Khanate. It had fewer Mongols than the other *ulus*. It also had fewer officials who reported to the Great Khan, giving the local khans greater independence.

The Golden Horde's capital was Saray, along the Volga River and not far from the Caspian Sea. The Mongols had direct control over most of the region near the Volga, the southern steppes of Russia, and lands north of the Caucasus Mountains, which run between the Black and Caspian Seas. The *ulus* also spread into parts of Siberia and what is now Kazakhstan. The khans of the Golden Horde also had indirect control over northwest Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe.

The first Kipchak khan, Batu, used his power to convince some Russian princes to surrender without a fight. He sent Prince Alexander Nevsky (1220–1263) this message (as quoted by John Lawrence in *A History of Russia*): “God has subdued many nations to me; dost thou alone refuse to submit to my power? But if thou wishest to keep thy lands, come to me. . . .” To keep their local authority, Nevsky and the other Russian princes sent the Mongols tribute.

Some of the Golden Horde's conflicts with the rest of the Mongol Empire arose over the selection of new Great Khans. Batu accepted Möngke as the Great Khan, but his brother Berke refused to back Khubilai's election in 1260. Berke also fought with the Ilkhanate, his neighbor to the southwest.

### Alexander Nevsky

Alexander Nevsky, who controlled the northern Russian city of Novgorod in the 13th century, worked with the Mongols because he thought his true enemies were Westerners—Germans, Lithuanians, and Swedes. Nevsky also seems to have helped himself and his family financially through his relations with the Mongols. A film dramatizing his battles with the Germans was released in 1938. Given the context of World War II, during which the Soviet Union was fighting Germany, many Russians saw Nevsky as a national hero. The film *Alexander Nevsky* is considered a classic and is still shown today.

Berke and his successors' wars with the Ilkhans led them to become allies of the Mamluks of Egypt, the major enemy of the Ilkhanate. That friendship made the Golden Horde and the Mamluks trading partners as well as military allies. Contact with the Turkic rulers of Egypt also strengthened Turkic culture among the elite in the Golden Horde.

The Mongols in Russia did not absorb local culture, as the Mongols did in Persia and China. They chose to isolate themselves on the steppes and follow the traditional nomadic culture as much as possible.

### THE RISE OF NOGHAI

Starting in the 1260s, a Mongol prince named Noghai (d. 1299) gained considerable power within the Golden Horde. He was the nephew of Berke, and in 1259 he led a Mongol army into Poland. The advance was a brief detour from a campaign against rebels on the western edge of the khanate.

Six years later, Noghai led a larger force into Bulgaria, a country

north of modern Greece and Turkey. Berke was responding to a plea for help from the Bulgarians. They faced an invasion from the Byzantine Empire in the south, which was based in Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in what is now Turkey. The Byzantine Empire had once been a major force in Eastern Europe and parts of the Middle East, although its power was declining by this time. The Mongols of Russia sometimes came into conflict with the Byzantine Empire as they competed with it for influence over smaller countries in

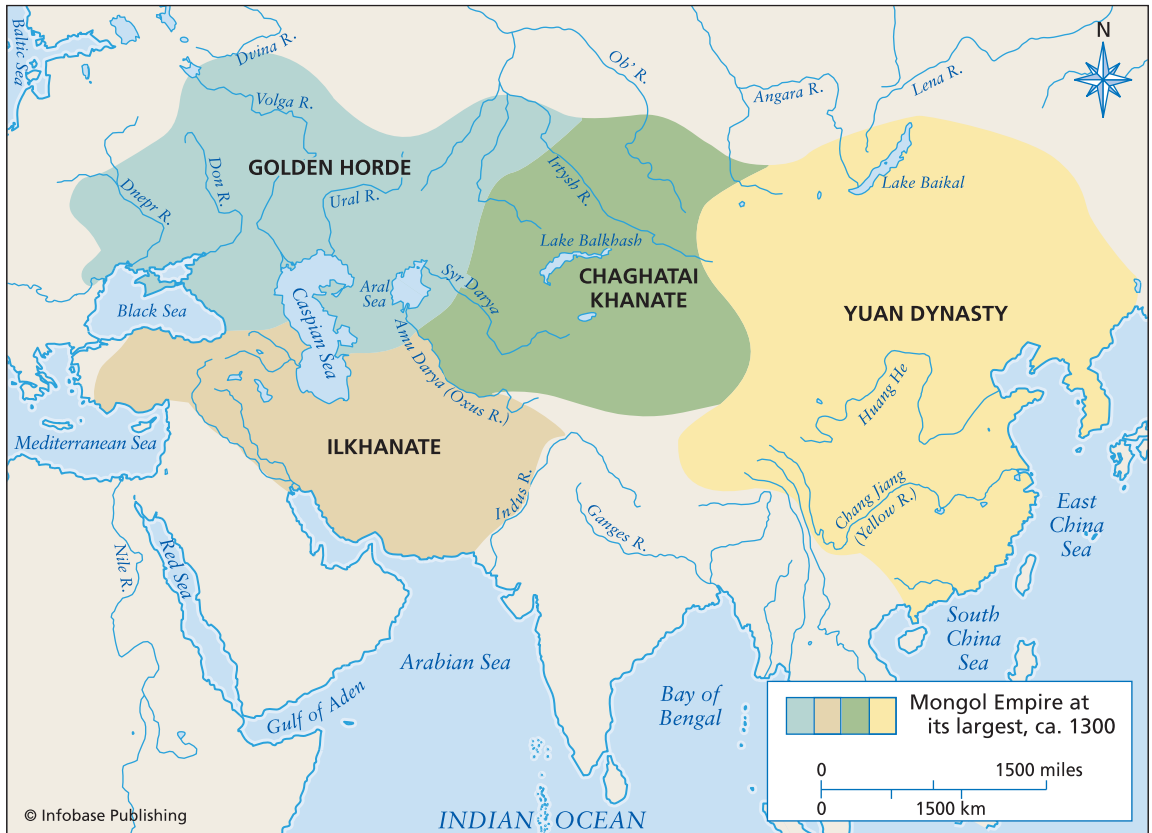


## CONNECTIONS

### Noghai and Uzbek's People

Noghai's lands near the Carpathians were sometimes called the Noghai Horde, and the tribes there were later known as the Noghai. The people included various Turkic ethnic groups. Descendants of these former citizens of the Mongol Empire are still called the Noghai. Some live in a region of Russia called Daghestan, north of the Caucasus Mountains. Other Noghai live in parts of Romania.

In some sources, Uzbek's name is written as Uzbek. That name was carried into Central Asia when invaders from part of the old Golden Horde crossed into Transoxiana. These invaders were called Uzbeks, and their name is at the root of the name Uzbekistan, a region that was once part of the Soviet Union. In 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence.



the region. Because of this animosity, the Mongols agreed to help the Bulgarians.

Noghai forced the Byzantine troops out of Bulgaria. He eventually married a member of the Byzantine royal family—a sign that the Byzantines wanted an alliance with the Mongols rather than continued fighting. Noghai eventually became a so-called kingmaker: He never ruled as khan of the Golden Horde, but he chose who held that title and influenced key government decisions.

In 1265, Noghai and Berke launched an attack on Ilkhanate territory, hoping to win control of Azerbaijan and Georgia. During one battle in 1266, the khan was killed and Noghai lost an eye.

The new khan was Möngke Temür, who was either the son or grandson of Batu (the records are not clear). The new leader of the Golden Horde ended the war with the Ilkhanate. He also continued to maintain the Golden Horde's independence from Khubilai Khan by

The Mongol Empire, ca. 1300, was divided into four mini-empires, each ruled by a descendant of Chinggis Khan.

supporting the Great Khan's enemy, Khaidu, in Central Asia. In another small but symbolic move, Möngke Temür removed any mention of Khubilai from his kingdom's coins.

## RETURN TO EUROPE

Although Möngke Temür was not a Muslim, he maintained the Golden Horde's strong relations with Mamluk Egypt. He also sought good terms with the Byzantine Empire, since it controlled the sea routes that linked Mongol Russia with the Middle East. Under Möngke Temür, the Golden Horde was largely at peace, and it continued to collect taxes from its Russian subjects.

Möngke Temür died in 1280 and was replaced by his brother Tode Möngke (d. 1287). After Tode Möngke converted to Islam, he focused on religion more than politics, so Noghai practically ruled the khanate for him. Noghai controlled a part of the khanate that bordered the Black Sea and Eastern Europe.

In 1285, Noghai led Mongol forces into Europe, at the request of the Hungarian king Ladislas IV (1262–1290), who was not a Christian and was battling Hungary's Christian barons for power.

During this invasion of Europe, Noghai occupied Transylvania in what is now Romania. Another Mongol force, led by Tode Möngke's nephew Telebogha (d. 1291), tried to enter Hungary through the Carpathian Mountains. Snow stopped the Mongols' advance. The frustrated troops then looted and destroyed the nearby towns.

In 1286, Noghai and a second Mongol force combined for an invasion of Poland. But this time the Poles held off the Mongols. After this largely unsuccessful campaign, the Mongols never again attacked Poland or Hungary. Noghai, however, continued to have influence in Bulgaria and other parts of southeastern Europe.

Telebogha soon took over as the next khan of the Golden Horde. He and Noghai competed for power within Russia. When a group of Mongol princes wanted to replace Telebogha with his son Tokto'a (d. 1312), Noghai joined the plot to kill the khan. Beginning in 1291, Noghai acted as the khan of the Golden Horde, although he did not hold the title.

However, Tokto'a was eager to assert his rule. He and Noghai quarreled over how the Golden Horde should conduct its trade and diplomacy. The Italian city of Genoa dominated trade in the Crimean,

a peninsula on the Black Sea. Genoese merchants there asked Tokto'a to protect them from Noghai, who was trying to end their control of the Crimean trade. Tokto'a went to war, and his forces killed Noghai in 1299.

By this time, problems were developing in Russia. Local residents began attacking *basqaqs*, Mongol tax collectors.

Tokto'a had to rely more and more heavily on the local princes to collect taxes, which gave them more influence. He traveled north from Saray to meet with them, making him the first khan since Batu to leave the steppe and enter the forests of Russia. But Tokto'a never completed his journey. He died along the way.

Tokto'a's nephew Ozbek (d. 1341) became the next khan of the Golden Horde. In Russia, he made a major political move in 1327 when he named Ivan I (d. 1341; also called Ivan Kalita) of Moscow the grand prince of Russia. Ivan had helped the Mongols end a revolt in the city of Tver, north of Moscow. After this, the political and economic power among the Russians shifted to Moscow. The Russians were still not strong enough to challenge Mongol rule, though.

Under Ozbek, Islam became the official religion of the khanate. Yet he also tried to keep good relations with Christian lands. He still fought with the Ilkhanate, trying to gain land at his Mongol cousins' expense. But, like the Golden Horde rulers before him, he failed. By the 1320s, the Mamluks and the Ilkhanate had made peace, so the Egyptian Turks had even less reason to help Ozbek.

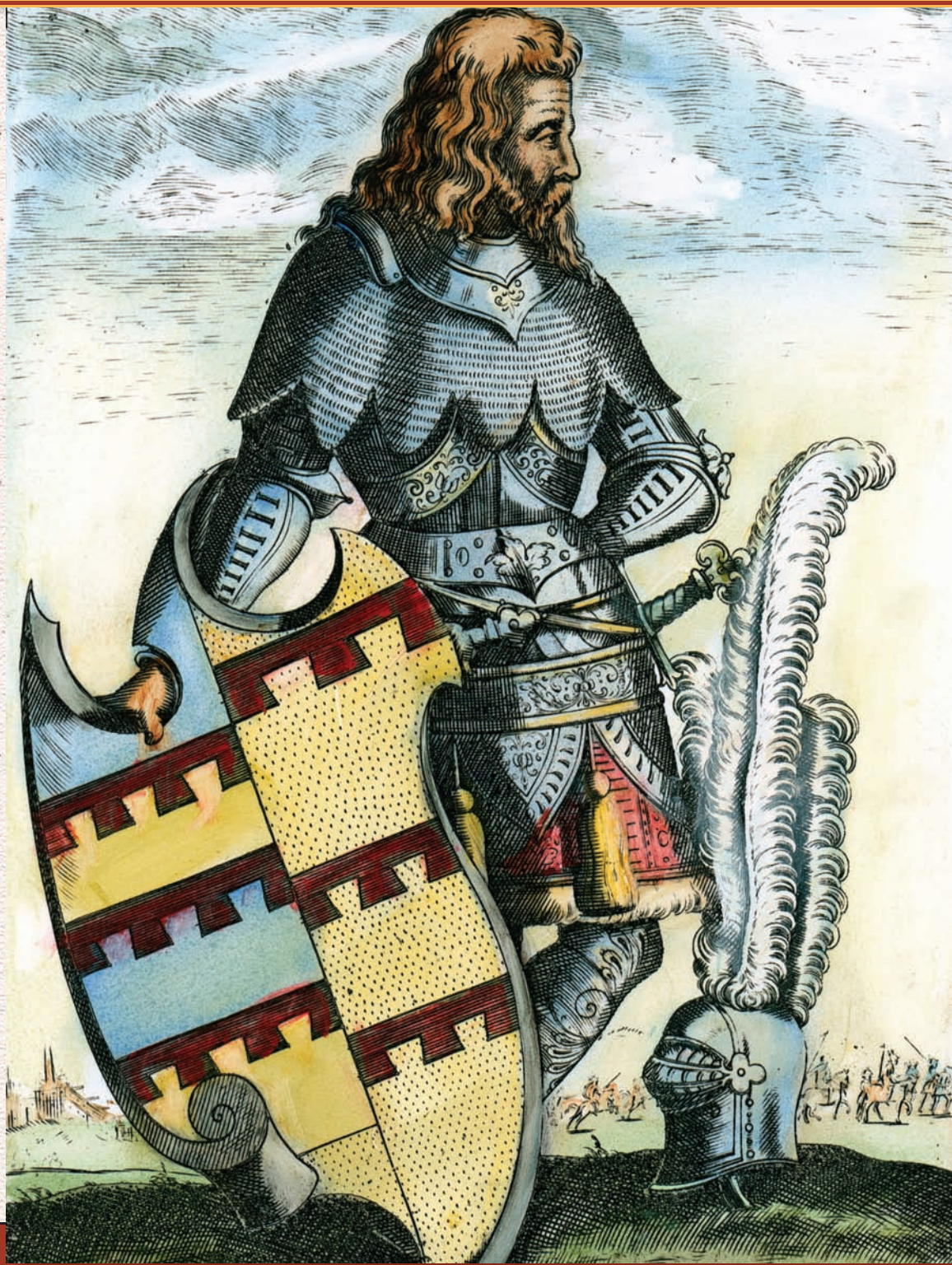
Although the Golden Horde had not lost territory, its power had reached its peak and other peoples in the region were growing stronger. Throughout the empire that was once ruled by the Great Khans, the period of military conquest was largely over. Over the next decades, outside threats and internal changes weakened the Mongols' rule in all the khanates.



## CONNECTIONS

### Royal Title

The Russians gave all the khans of the Golden Horde the title of *tsar* or *czar*, which means "caesar." It was a reference to Julius Caesar and the later Roman emperors of the Byzantine Empire. Russian rulers, who copied many Mongol methods of governing, also used this title. It was in use until the Russians overthrew their royal family in 1917.



# CHAPTER 3

## FINAL YEARS OF THE KHANATES

MONGOL INFLUENCE ACROSS EURASIA REACHED ITS PEAK IN the early years of the 14th century. Throughout that century, the four khanates went through many changes. By 1400, the situation in the lands the Mongols had conquered was very different in each place. In some places, Mongol influence had almost disappeared. In others, it took on new forms or passed on to rulers with few or no direct ties to the great Chinggis Khan.

### CHINA AFTER KHUBILAI KHAN

With the death of Khubilai Khan in 1294, Mongol rule in China passed to his grandson Tēmür Öljeitü (d. 1307). Mostly, Tēmür Öljeitü carried out Khubilai's policies, although he ended plans for another attack on Japan and Vietnam. The Chinese Mongol emperors ruled only China and the Mongol homeland.

Tēmür Öljeitü had several successors in just a short period. They all faced a familiar problem. They had to balance the interests of Mongol princes who wanted to follow traditional Mongolian customs with the interests of the pro-Chinese Mongols and the Chinese themselves.

One positive change came for the Chinese who followed the ideas of Confucius. The emperor Ayurbarwada (d. 1320) brought back the old civil service exam system, in which people got government jobs based on how well they did on a test about Confucius. Of all the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty, Ayurbarwada was one of the most comfortable with Chinese culture. In fact, he was able to speak and read Chinese.

### OPPOSITE

This European illustration shows Timur, the last of the great Mongol rulers. He inspired awe and fear among Europeans for centuries after his death in 1405.

Shidebala, Ayurbarwada's son, was assassinated in 1322, and unrest followed. Various members of the Mongol royal family and their Chinese supporters competed for power. More than 10 years of civil war followed. Finally, in 1333, the last Mongol ruler in China emerged. Toghan Temür (d. 1368) was 13 years old when he took the throne. He reigned for 35 years—the longest since Khubilai—but faced many problems.

China was hit with serious floods and epidemics of disease during Toghan Temür's reign. Some of his other problems stemmed from Mongol rule and the Chinese reaction to it. Many people in southern China had never truly accepted the Mongols. They also resented the growing power of the local officials, who taxed them and basically ran their lives.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## The Moon Festival Rebellion

The Chinese rebellion against their Mongol rulers became the subject of several legends. Here is one version of the story, still told and read in modern China:

*[T]hey contacted their fellow Chinese and all agreed to raise the well-lit flower lantern on the night of the fifteenth of the eighth month as a signal of rebellion. Meanwhile, all began making moon cakes for their needs. In every cake, they inserted a message in the filling as a reminder: Kill the Tartars (i.e., the Mongols) on New Year's Eve! As the . . . barbarians [Mongols] did not read Chinese, they were . . . kept completely in the dark, and after four months of planning, the scheme matured. Thus, on New Year's Eve, the plotters offered wine and food to the Tartars for celebration. As the latter became intoxicated, they were massacred, and so the Yuan Dynasty became extinct. As a result,*

*eating moon cake during the Mid-Autumn Festival became a popular custom in the entire country.*

*Intoxicated* means drunk. The 15th of the eighth month was celebrated as the Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Moon Festival. It marked the full moon during harvest time. Eating small, round cakes during this festival was a long tradition in China. But the role of the cakes in supposedly spreading the message of rebellion against the Mongols gave them new importance. The Mid-Autumn Festival is still celebrated, and people still eat moon cakes, but historians doubt they actually played a part in the rebellion.

(Source: Chan, Hok-Lam, *China and the Mongols: History and Legend under the Yüan*. Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, 1999.)

In 1325, peasants in the south revolted. By the 1340s, groups of armed bandits were taking control of southern towns, sometimes working with local governments. The power of the central government in the south weakened, and regional governments with their own informal armies gained strength. Going into the 1350s, the emperor and his supporters controlled the region around Khan-baliq, but not much else.

Toghan Temür and his generals had trouble controlling the growing threat to their rule. Earlier wars and the need for Mongol soldiers in other parts of the empire had caused the native Mongol population to drop. This meant they could not recruit more soldiers from the Mongol homeland. Toghan Temür added to his problems by relying on warlords (regional military commanders) to defend his empire. These generals were more concerned with winning power from one another than they were with maintaining the empire.

The rebels also sometimes fought among themselves, slowing their efforts to drive out the Mongols. By 1356, however, a Chinese peasant soldier named Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398) emerged as the leader of a unified rebel army. As a boy, Zhu studied Buddhism and learned to read and write, giving him more education than the average peasant. He first led a small band of rebels, then defeated competing rebel bands to gain power. He eventually became the founder of the next Chinese dynasty, the Ming.

Zhu established his own government in Nanjing, in southeastern China. Then he slowly moved his forces northward. During this time, the Mongol warlords continued to fight with one another, which kept them from launching an effective counterattack in the south.

In 1368, as Zhu's armies neared Khan-baliq, Toghan Temür escaped north to Shangdu and then fled toward Mongolia. Legend says six *tümens*—60,000 Mongols—joined him, but this is difficult to confirm. Others stayed in China for several more years, trying to hold off the rebels. By 1382, the Chinese regained complete control of their country. Some Mongols remained in China and were absorbed into the population.

Although he was defeated, Toghan Temür did not give up his claim to be the emperor of China. After his death in 1370, his son and grandson tried to reclaim Mongol authority from a base in northern China. The Chinese, however, forced the Mongols to retreat to their homeland. Another battle in 1387 led to a devastating Mongol defeat. The Chinese eventually destroyed the old Mongol capital of Karakorum.

In 1399, the last of Khubilai's descendants who claimed the authority to rule China was assassinated. Other Mongol leaders began competing for power in and around Mongolia. In the west of Mongolia, a group of Mongols called the Oirat began to establish a mini-empire. Mongols who still claimed family ties to Chinggis rose to power in the east. As the two groups struggled for power, the Chinese tried to take advantage, launching an attack in the early 1400s.

The Chinese won a major battle in 1410. But within 15 years, the eastern Mongols were raiding China. This led to a huge Chinese counterattack on Mongolia. The invasion did not destroy the eastern Mongols, though.

With the eastern Mongols weakened, the Oirat tried to build a united Mongol state. Their relations with China wavered. At times the Ming emperors seemed friendly, but ultimately the Chinese did not want a strong Mongol presence on their border. In 1439, the Oirat leader Esen (d. 1455) came to power. He married into Chinggis's family to claim some ties to the former Great Khan. Then he gained control over the other Mongol tribes.

In 1449, Esen led an invasion of China. His troops captured the Ming emperor Zhu Zhizhen (r. 1436–1449). The modern historians Woodbridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Fred Ilké, in *A History of Asia*, say the captured Ming emperor “sat serenely, showing no emotions

whatsoever among 100,000 Chinese corpses and his slaughtered bodyguard.” The Chinese decided not to try to get their kidnapped emperor back. Instead, they named a new emperor and continued to fight the Mongols.

But Esen's war in China stirred up trouble within his own empire. The eastern Mongolians preferred not to fight the Chinese, fearing the costs were too high when victory was unlikely. Esen's assassination in 1455 sparked a civil war. Finally, an eastern



## CONNECTIONS

### More Bricks in the Wall

In 1470, Ming dynasty emperors began rebuilding the Great Wall, an unconnected series of low defensive earth walls running across northern China. New sections were added, old sections were made stronger, and isolated sections were connected. They hoped the rebuilt and strengthened wall would hold back the Mongols and other raiders from the steppes.

The Great Wall that still exists in China dates from this period. Today the Great Wall stretches for more than 4,200 miles as it zigzags across northern China from Gansu Province in the west to Bohai Bay in the east.



## CONNECTIONS

### Two “Universal” Leaders

The Mongol title *dalai* was first given to a Tibetan lama by Altan Khan. *Lama* is a title given to a Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader. *Dalai* is a Mongolian word meaning “vast sea” or “great ocean.” It is similar to Chinggis’s title, which means “oceanic” (universal), so the Dalai Lama was also considered a “universal” leader.

The Tibetans believe that each Dalai Lama is the reincarnation (a reborn soul) of the first Dalai Lama proclaimed by the Mongol khan. Today, the head of Tibetan Buddhism is the 14th Dalai Lama. Reflecting the close cultural link between the Mongols and the Tibetans, Tibetan Buddhism (sometimes called Lamaism) is still the major religion in Mongolia.



**The 14th Dalai Lama is the head of Tibetan Buddhism.**

Mongol named Dayan Khan (d. ca. 1517), a descendant of the family of Khubilai Khan, came to power around 1480. Under him and his grandson Altan Khan (1507–1583), the eastern Mongols took back much of the traditional Mongol homeland from China. Altan Khan also made Tibetan Buddhism the nation’s official religion.

### STRUGGLES IN PERSIA

In the Ilkhanate, the peak of Mongol rule came under Ghazan. With his death in 1304, the Ilkhanate entered an unstable period. Princes in the royal family fought for control. Ghazan had picked his brother Kharbanda (ca. 1280–1316) as his successor, and Kharbanda killed several relatives he considered rivals. He then took power and changed his name to Öljeitü, which means “fortunate.”

Around this time, the four branches of the Mongol empire entered a brief period of cooperation. As Öljeitü noted in a letter to the king

of France (cited by J. A. Boyle in *The Cambridge History of Iran*), “. . . protected by Heaven, all of us, elder and younger brothers, reached a mutual agreement. . .” This relationship, however, did not mean the Great Khan was once again ruling over a united empire. In practice, the four khanates continued to go their separate ways, struggle with their own problems, and sometimes compete for land and power.

Öljeitü hoped to continue fighting the Mamluks of Egypt. He also hoped to receive help from the Christian rulers of Europe. But his more immediate problem was in Gilan, an area near the Caspian Sea. During fierce fighting there, the Mongols won several battles and then the local residents won a major victory. Eventually, Gilan was conquered, but at a very high cost.

By 1308, Öljeitü learned that the European kings were not eager to help him battle the Mamluks. In 1312, he launched his only attack against the Ilkhanate’s long-time enemy. A month-long siege in the Mamluks’ Syrian lands failed, and Öljeitü retreated. The Mongols would never again invade Mamluk territory.

## THE CRUMBLING ILKHANATE

Two major decisions during Öljeitü’s rule affected life within the khanate. The first was that Öljeitü converted to the Shiite branch of Islam. The second is that he appointed Rashid al-Din to run the southern half of the realm and Ali Shah (d. 1324) to run the north. (This system of splitting the daily operations of the government between two advisors existed with all the Ilkhans.) Both decisions led to problems.

Sunni Muslims disliked the Shiites and the official recognition that came when the Ilkhan became a Shiite. This led to conflict between members of the two branches of Islam within the government. To make things worse, the two advisors battled for control. Öljeitü died in 1316, and Ali Shah’s allies accused Rashid al-Din of poisoning him. The charge was false, but that did not stop Mongol officials from executing Rashid by cutting his body in half.

After Rashid’s death, Öljeitü’s son Abu Said (ca. 1304–1335) became Ilkhan. Abu Said was only 12 years old, so a general named Choban (d. 1327) served as his chief advisor.

Around 1320, when Abu Said was 16, he and Choban led a military force in Azerbaijan that fought off an attack from the Mongols of the Golden Horde. Another Mongol, a Chaghatai prince, led a rebellion in

### Man of Many Faiths

Öljeitü provides an example of the influence different religions had across the Mongol Empire. He was baptized a Christian as a child, but later in life he converted to Buddhism and then Sunni Islam, before ending up a Shiite Muslim.

1319 in Khorasan, in what is now northeast Iran. The Ilkhanate was also able to end this threat.

Abu Said ruled well over the Ilkhanate until his death in 1335. He signed a peace treaty with the Mamluks, and he kept the government together as different groups within it competed for power. With his death, however, Ilkhanate politics became chaotic.

Abu Said was the last descendant of the great Mongol conqueror Hülegü to rule. He did not have a son nor any male relative to take his place. Mongol princes with distant ties to Chinggis began fighting for control. These civil wars gave other ethnic groups—Persians, Arabs, Turks—a chance to drive the Mongols out of power. Most historians say 1353 is the year the Ilkhanate ended.

## CONFLICT AND CHANGE IN THE GOLDEN HORDE

The peak of the Golden Horde's power in Russia came at the beginning of the 14th century. This period of relative peace and prosperity ended after the reign of Ozbek, who died in 1341. The Golden Horde had a series of khans after this. As different leaders competed for power, sometimes they fought one another.

The Golden Horde also faced a threat from the east. Lithuania was becoming a military and economic power and challenging Mongol influence in the Russian cities. This threat was difficult to deal with because by now the Mongols in Russia had broken into many smaller groups.

By the 1370s, and even earlier, two distinct hordes had appeared in the *ulus* of the Golden Horde. In the east was the Blue Horde, centered near modern Kazakhstan. Its rulers traced their roots to Orda, older brother of Batu, the first khan of the Golden Horde. The White Horde, in the west, was linked directly to Batu and his descendants. By the 1370s, Urus was khan of the White Horde. He fought for power with his nephew Toqtamish (d. 1405), who had the support of Timur. Toqtamish eventually united the Blue and White Hordes under his rule.

Mamai was still involved in the khanate's politics in 1380, when the Russians made their first serious challenge to Mongol rule. Under Ozbek, Moscow had become the home of the Grand Princes of Russia. These princes were in charge of collecting taxes from the Russians for

the Mongols. Over time, the city's rulers became much stronger than the other Russian leaders. In September 1380, Grand Duke Dmitri Donskoi (1350–1389) led a Muscovite army against Mamai at Kulikovo Pole, near the Don River. The Russians won a decisive victory, and Mamai's defeat guaranteed Toqtamish's rule.

Toqtamish came to power with Timur's support. But in the beginning of the 1390s, Toqtamish tried to assert his independence from Timur. He did this by creating an alliance with Egypt and Lithuania and by acquiring new lands. Timur, however, struck before Toqtamish could attack him.

In 1395, Timur's forces destroyed Saray, the Golden Horde's capital, and Toqtamish fled. The Golden Horde never recovered from this blow. First Timur and then the Lithuanians chose their own representatives as khan. The Golden Horde gradually split into two distinct groups, and neither one had much power.

Kazan, a city near the Volga River, was one of the few areas where the remaining Mongols from the steppes of southern Russia and Eastern

Ukraine settled in. Later, three other distinct groups of Mongols settled in Astrakhan, on the Caspian Sea, and the Crimea, near the Black Sea. They became known as the Crimean Tatars. In 1475, the Crimean Mongols came under the influence of the Ottomans, a Turkic people who founded an empire centered in what is now Turkey.

In 1480, Ivan III (1440–1505; called Ivan the Great), prince of Moscow, insulted the khan in Saray when he refused to kiss his stirrup. By tradition, the Russian princes had done this to show their loyalty. Historians consider Ivan's defiance to be the end of Mongol

## The Black Death

One problem the Golden Horde struggled with during the 1340s and 1350s was an outbreak of a highly contagious disease called bubonic plague, which was also known as the black death. During the mid-14th century, this plague spread across Asia into Europe, eventually killing millions of people.

Some historians believe the black death can be traced to the Mongols, who brought it to the city of Kaffa, on the Crimean Sea. Fleas from rats and marmots (small rodents), which were common in Mongolia, carried the disease. The fleas spread the disease to the Mongols, who infected the Europeans they were fighting at Kaffa. The soldiers then carried the black death home with them when they returned to Europe.

rule over Moscow. Ivan went on to become one of Russia's most powerful czars (kings or emperors).

The Great Horde, as the Mongols were now called, planned to attack Moscow to punish Ivan, but they retreated before reaching the city. The Saray khan feared a war with Moscow would leave him defenseless against an attack by the Crimean Tatars. A war between the two groups of Mongols came in 1502, with the Crimean branch destroying the Great Horde.

Moscow was now the dominant power in what had once been the heart of the Golden Horde. Ivan would go on to create the modern state of Russia. In 1552, the Russians took control of Kazan and Astrakhan, ending the Mongol presence there. The remaining Mongols, the Crimean Tatars, posed only a minor threat to Russian power.

## SPLIT IN THE ULUS CHAGHATAI

In the decades after Chaghatai received his *ulus* from Chinggis, the Mongols of Central Asia remained nomadic. The first khan there to adopt a sedentary lifestyle was Kebeg (d. 1326). He built a palace in Transoxiana. His brother Tarmashirin (d. 1334) became the next khan.

Tarmashirin converted to Islam and tried to extend Mongol rule into the borderlands separating his khanate and India. At times the Mongols raided India, but they did not control territory there. Still, the khanate's borders were larger than they had originally been because earlier Chaghatai rulers gained control over land in Afghanistan and the eastern edges of Persia.

## Kulikovo Pole

One of the Russian chronicles supposedly records the words of a Mongol fleeing after his defeat at Kulikovo Pole. As quoted by Charles Halperin in *The Tatar Yoke*, the Mongol cried, "No longer, brethren, shall we live on our land, nor see our children . . . and no longer shall we go in battle against the Rus[sians], nor shall we take tribute from the Russian princes."

Until recent times, Russians considered Kulikovo to be one of the greatest moments in their history. It was the time when they threw off the "Tatar yoke." In reality, however, Toqtamish punished the Muscovites in 1382 by destroying their city. The Russians remained under Mongol control for another century.

Tarmashirin's conversion to Islam angered Mongols of the Ulus Chaghatai, who were loyal to the old nomadic culture. These conservative Mongols were based in the eastern part of the khanate, in southeastern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Xinjiang. Their territory was sometimes called Moghulistan, or "land of the Mongols."

The conservatives forced Tarmashirin out of power in 1334. The khans who followed him returned to the old Mongol religion. In the western half of the khanate, Turkic Muslim princes gained influence. They began to choose descendants of Chaghatai and Ögedei as khans, but they kept the real power for themselves. This region, centered in Transoxiana, was still called the Ulus Chaghatai.

The eastern and western halves of the khanate began to drift apart. The western half was largely sedentary, Turkic, and Muslim. Moghulistan also had a Turkic and Muslim influence, but was more nomadic and stayed closer to the Mongols' cultural roots. Around 1347, however, Islam became the official religion there with the rise of the Muslim leader Tughluq Temür (d. 1363). He claimed to have family ties to Chaghatai, and in 1360 he reunited the two halves of the khanate.

Tughluq Temür's rule was brief, because the political situation in the western half of the Ulus Chaghatai was unstable. Various tribes competed for power. Eventually, one man emerged as the supreme leader and founder of a new empire: Timur, or Tamerlane.

## THE RISE OF TIMUR

Born in 1336 in Kish, near Samarkand, Timur was shaped by the Turko-Mongol steppe culture that was hundreds of years old. His family had Mongol roots. Just like the Mongol rulers of old, he rode horses and shot arrows from an early age. Unlike the old khans, however, he grew up in an Islamic society and spoke Turkic.

Timur belonged to the Barlas tribe, an old Mongol tribe that traced its descent from one of Chaghatai's main advisors in Transoxiana. Some historians say the Barlas were the most important local tribe in the khanate, but the evidence is not clear. Timur's clan was a major one in the tribe, but was not the most important. Some medieval sources say he once had to steal sheep to survive.

As Tughluq Temür prepared to invade Transoxiana in 1360, the leader of the Barlas fled. Timur went with him, but then returned to Kish to defend the tribal lands. Some historians believe Timur saw an

opportunity to take control during a time of trouble. He already had as many as 300 warriors who served under him, and some were from outside his tribe. Timur also had political ties with important people in Moghulistan and lands just beyond it.

When Tughluq Temür reached Kish, he chose Timur as the leader of the region. The old tribal leader returned and briefly reclaimed his position, but Timur eventually became the leader again. He still had Tughluq Temür's support, and he built alliances with other tribal leaders.

Soon after, Tughluq Temür decided to throw out all the local leaders in Transoxiana and retake control. For several years Timur lived in

Timur controlled large parts of the old Golden Horde, Ilkhanate, and Chaghtai Khanate, but he was never able to extend his reach into China.



### A Ruler's Wounds

In 1364, Timur was shot by several arrows in battle, causing the wounds that troubled him the rest of his life. One arrow hit his right arm, which made it impossible for him to use his right elbow. A wound in his right leg left him lame, because the leg permanently stiffened. That is how he got his nickname Timur the Lame. In 1941, Russian scientists dug up Tamerlane's grave. By examining his bones, they confirmed these two injuries and a third to his right hand.

Khorasan. He and his allies returned to Transoxiana in 1364. In a battle that year, Timur received the wounds that made him lame. Eventually, he ended up with the nickname Timur-i leng, which means "Timur the Lame" in Persian. Europeans turned Timur-i leng into Tamerlane.

Also in 1364, Timur's chief ally, Amir Husayn (d. 1370), took control of the Ulus Chaghatai, ending Tughluq Temür's rule there.

During the next few years, Timur fought a series of military campaigns against forces from Moghulistan and their allies in Transoxiana. He strengthened his power by reaching out to a variety of groups. Muslims cheered his public devotion to the faith, merchants appreciated his efforts to keep trade flowing, and local princes admired his skill and leadership on the battlefield.

Fighting within the Ulus Chaghatai dragged on for several years. Timur eventually argued with Amir Husayn, who tried to rule as a khan over Timur and other local princes. The two former allies eventually became the chief rivals for power in the Ulus Chaghatai.

For a time, Timur fought with the Moghul forces against Amir Husayn. Finally, in 1370, Timur defeated his old friend and had him executed. At the same time, he took four of Amir Husayn's wives for himself. One of them was the daughter of a former khan of the Ulus Chaghatai. Through this wife, Timur created a connection to the royal family descended from Chinggis Khan. He compared himself to the great khans and tried to win the same respect the people of Central Asia had for Chinggis and his family. But Timur did not claim the title of khan. He simply referred to himself as the Great Commander and chose other men to rule as khans—while he held the real power.

Timur established his capital in Samarkand and spent several years tightening his control over the Ulus Chaghatai. His troops also threatened the Mughals and reached into Mongolia itself, although Timur never had direct control over that region.

In 1381, he began to attack what had once been the eastern part of the Ilkhanate, in modern-day Afghanistan. Timur quickly took the city of Herat, though the citizens rebelled the next year. His forces ended the rebellion, then cut off the heads of the dead and stacked them in a pile—a practice they repeated during their conquests. Timur seemed to be trying to copy Chinggis, who sometimes brutally punished enemies who resisted him. Timur called himself the "scourge of God," a force sent by Heaven to punish evildoers. *The Encyclopedia of the Middle*

*Ages* quotes Timur as telling one enemy, “You are wicked, but I am more wicked than you, so be silent.”

From Afghanistan, Timur’s forces moved westward into what is now Iran. Timur sought riches for himself and his army, as well as to extend his political control. And, just as during the early Mongol conquests, the Great Commander would not attack cities and kingdoms if their rulers accepted his dominance.

Around 1386, Timur faced a major challenge from Toqtamish, ruler of the Golden Horde. Timur had helped this Mongol leader come to power. But now Toqtamish attacked the Persian city of Tabriz, which Timur controlled. Timur sent a huge army into Persia, and in 1387 his forces defeated the Golden Horde. During this campaign, Timur’s

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### Brutal but Generous

In 1403, the king of Spain sent Ruy González de Clavijo (d. 1412) on a diplomatic mission to Timur. Clavijo was the only European to describe meeting Timur in his capital of Samarkand. In his story of the trip, Clavijo wrote about the brutality of some of the emperor’s men toward the local people:

*It is indeed as though the very host of Satan were present when these [Tartars] arrive in any place, what with . . . the pitiless acts that they do. . . . When they have found the . . . head man of the place, do not imagine that they speak courteously to him: nay they will insult him and then give him stripes and blows with the mace . . . these men always behave thus . . . for they boast that in carrying out the demands of their lord Timur, they may press to his service, even kill, all and any, for none may oppose them.*

A mace is heavy club, often with spikes in it. But despite the behavior of his men, Clavijo also saw that Timur could be generous:

*We found . . . ten sheep and a horse had been sent by order of Timur to supply the banquet with meat . . . and on this fare we dined sumptuously. At the conclusion of the feast, they presented each of us . . . with a robe of kincob [gold embroidery] and a shirt to match, also a hat; further, we each received a horse for our riding, all these being the gifts presented to us by order of the Lord Timur.*

(Source: Clavijo, Ruy González de, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*. Translated by Guy le Strange. New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1928.)

This 16th-century illustration from a book in Arabic shows some of the siege techniques used by Timur's armies.



troops covered a wide area, terrorizing Georgia and parts of Anatolia. Soldiers killed some residents of Anatolia by forcing them to jump off a cliff.

Unlike the Mongols of the 13th century, Timur had trouble creating effective governments in the lands he conquered. Unrest in the

defeated lands kept him from setting up strong central rule and forced him to keep returning to end rebellions.

In 1392, Timur had to go to Iran again, beginning what is now sometimes called the Five Year Campaign. After restoring order in western Iran, the Mongol forces headed into Baghdad. David Nicolle, in *The Mongol Warlords*, quotes an anonymous historian of the time who compared Timur's troops to "ants and locusts covering the whole countryside, plundering and ravaging."

From Baghdad the army headed north into Georgia and Armenia. They entered the lands of the Golden Horde in 1395. Once again, Toqtamish was threatening Timur's lands. Timur's troops won a decisive victory. Then they cut off the heads, hands, and feet of civilians, destroyed Saray and Astrakhan, and chased the Golden Horde's forces back toward Moscow. With Toqtamish defeated, Timur headed back to his capital in Samarkand.

His next goal was in the east, as he prepared to attack the sultanate of Delhi. This Muslim state in northern India had many Hindu residents. Timur said the sultanate's rulers should be punished for tolerating the Hindu religion. Delhi's great wealth also attracted him.

In 1398, Timur and an army of about 90,000 men crossed the Indus River and destroyed the city of Delhi. Before the battle, they killed 100,000 Hindus they had taken prisoner. After it, they killed still more Hindus, because Timur considered his campaign part of a holy war against the Hindus. The survivors of the massacre in Delhi later died from the famine and disease that spread through the city, and Timur further reduced the population by taking many slaves.

Once again, Tamerlane was not interested in controlling territory. He just wanted to collect tribute. By March 1399, he was back in Samarkand. Within a year he was focusing on new targets in the west.

After putting down another revolt in Iran, he headed toward Syria, which was still under the control of the Mamluks of Egypt. He took the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Damascus. At Damascus, the capital of modern Syria, Timur agreed not to destroy the city if the residents paid a tribute. They agreed, and let the invaders through the city's gates. But then Timur went back on his word and demanded a much larger tribute. When the Syrians refused, he ordered another massacre, telling his soldiers that each should bring him the head of one resident.

### A Symbol of Evil

Timur's vicious battlefield tactics spread his name throughout Eurasia. His brutality also inspired later writers to describe his life. The 16th century English playwright Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) wrote a play about him called *Tamburlaine the Great*. American author Edgar Allan Poe's (1809–1849) first published poem was called "Tamerlane," perhaps inspired by an earlier poem by the English poet Lord Byron (1788–1824). Poe's poem deals with the emperor's lost love, not his conquests. Both poems about Timur are still read today, and Marlowe's play is still sometimes performed.

Leaving Syria, the Mongol army headed north to Anatolia, as it had during the 1380s. In 1402, Timur defeated an Ottoman Turk army near Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey. After collecting tribute from the cities of Anatolia, Timur once again returned home.

## MILITARY AND POLITICAL LIFE IN TIMUR'S EMPIRE

Although Timur was definitely bloodthirsty and cruel, he also supported the arts and enjoyed stimulating conversations with the great thinkers of his lands. He sent artists and craftsmen from all over his conquests to Samarkand to beautify and glorify his home city. The ruler also showed practical intelligence in the way he built his army and political structures, although he did not do as well at controlling the lands he conquered.

In creating a powerful army and recruiting political allies, Timur repeated some of Chinggis's practices. As a result, Timur was able to conquer large parts of Asia.

Like Chinggis, he selected generals and aides for their personal loyalty, not their tribal ties. He also moved soldiers around to different regiments, so that they were not commanded by their tribal leaders.

The army was organized using the same system Chinggis had used, with the *tümen* as the largest unit. Over time, Timur also added conquered people to his forces, as the first Great Khan had done. The army in Timur's empire eventually included Christians, Muslims, and people of other religions from a wide range of countries.

Like all the Mongols, Timur demanded strict discipline from his troops. They were trained to follow orders communicated by the beat of a large drum. To win their loyalty, Timur shared the wealth he collected through conquest. He wrote (as quoted by David Nicolle in *The Mongol Warlords*), "To encourage my officers and soldiers I have not hoarded gold or jewels for myself. I admit my men to my table and in return they give me their lives in battle. I give generously and share in their sufferings. . . ." Some men who showed extreme bravery or skill were made *tarkhans*. As a *tarkhan*, a soldier did not have to pay taxes and could see the emperor without asking for permission.

In his government, Timur kept many of the old titles that had been used in the Ilkhanate and the Ulus Chaghatai. Two sets of

### Animals of the Army

Under Tamerlane, as with the nomadic Mongols before him, the horse remained the most important animal used in combat. But Tamerlane also relied on other creatures to carry out his battle plans. To communicate over long distances, he used carrier pigeons, which flew with messages strapped to their legs. Tamerlane also was the first Turko-Mongol emperor to use battle elephants, which had been used for centuries in parts of Eurasia.

officials, one Persian and one Turko-Mongol, carried out the empire's policies. Both sets handled military and political affairs, although the Persians focused mostly on political events in the sedentary parts of the empire.

Timur used government positions to reward the ruling classes in the lands he conquered. These jobs gave the local officials power and a source of money—and strengthened their loyalty to Timur.

The most important function of the government was collecting taxes and tributes. Timur, like all rulers, needed money to support his army and a lavish lifestyle. His government, like the khanates before it, taxed goods carried along the Silk Road and other trade routes.

Another key job of high-ranking Persians and Turko-Mongols was making sure the local officials beneath them did what they were told. In some cases, Timur let local governors stay in power after he defeated them. Meanwhile, royal officials collected taxes for the empire.

## THE EMPIRE AFTER TIMUR

With his victories, Timur held power over all or almost all of the old Mongol khanates. In 1404, he set his sights on the greatest prize: Kubilai Khan's old empire of China. China was now ruled by the Ming dynasty.

Timur began assembling a huge force to march east, but he died the next year before setting out on his conquest. After Timur's death, the Turko-Mongol princes of the Ulus Chaghatai and their allies competed for power. The foreign conquests ended during this era of civil war. Different rulers took control in different parts of the empire. Finally, in 1409, Timur's son Shahrukh (1377–1447) emerged as the next supreme leader of his father's lands.

Shahrukh was based in Herat, and controlled Khurasan. His son Ulugh Beg (1394–1449) ruled for his father in Transoxiana. When Shahrukh died in 1447, Ulugh Beg took control of the entire empire.



The center of the silver *tanka* (a type of coin) on the left shows Tamerlane's symbol, three small circles in the shape of a triangle.



## CONNECTIONS

### The Curse of the Gur-Emir Mausoleum

In 1404, Tamerlane built an elaborate mausoleum (a building designed to house the remains of a dead person and to honor them) for a favorite grandson who died young. It was called the Gur-Emir mausoleum, or “emir’s tomb” (*emir* is Arabic for “ruler” or “commander”). After Tamerlane’s death, his family buried him there as well, and other famous descendants were later buried there.

In June 1941, Samarkand was part of the Soviet Union, and Soviet scientists came to the mausoleum to open the graves inside. According to a local legend, residents told the scientists not to touch Tamerlane’s ashes. If they did, the people claimed, war would break out. The scientists ignored the warning, and Germany invaded the Soviet Union just a few days later.



**Tamerlane’s tomb still exists in the Uzbekistan city of Samarkand.**

Gur-Emir is famous for its beautiful architecture. Today it is a popular tourist attraction in Samarkand, which is now in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government has also honored Tamerlane, building statues of him during the 1990s.

Unlike Timur, Shahrukh did not see the need to claim ties to Chinggis Khan and his descendants. Shahrukh stopped his father’s practice of naming a member of the Mongol family as the supposed leader of the realm. Instead, he took on the Arabic title of sultan, which means “king.”

After Shahrukh firmly established his control, the empire was relatively peaceful. But soon after Timur’s death, local princes in Azerbaijan and present-day Iraq won their independence from his family. Timur’s former empire would continue to shrink through the 15th century, although his descendants, the Mughals, would form a powerful new state in India. The Mongol influence would also continue throughout Central Asia and in the distant lands that had once come under the Great Khans’ rule.



PART • II

**SOCIETY AND  
CULTURE**

MONGOL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

DAILY LIFE IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE

ART, SCIENCE, AND CULTURE IN MONGOL LANDS





## CHAPTER 4

# MONGOL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

BEFORE THE RISE OF CHINGGIS KHAN, THE BASIC MONGOL social and political unit was the clan. A group of related families formed a clan, and their primary purpose was to work together to survive.

By the end of the 12th century, the clans began to form larger units called tribes. Blood ties—that is, relationships within the clan and the tribes—determined a person’s social standing. The ruling clan of the Mongol tribes, called Borjigid or Kiyad, considered themselves to be born from heaven. They were known as people of the “white bone,” while commoners were people of the “black bone.” The ruling clan decided who and when the tribes would fight and enforced tribal customs.

Tribes elected their leaders at *quriltais*, which were social feasts as well as political gatherings. Some historians suggest the *quriltai* was not a true election, since not every Mongol could compete for the top position. Leaders came from the most powerful clans within a tribe. It is likely that voters picked the man who was basically in charge already, because he had the skills and the power to run the tribe.

The first tribal leaders may have been religious leaders, called shamans. By the time of Chinggis, leaders were chosen for their military skills and their ties to noble families.

The leaders relied on *nökörs* to carry out tribal affairs. *Nökörs* moved from one leader to another, looking for the one who could offer them the greatest riches or military power. *Nökörs* also acted

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### OPPOSITE

Mongolian horsemen ride during the opening ceremony of the *naadam*, a festival in modern Mongolia that originated as part of the *quriltai*.

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## CONNECTIONS

### A Mongol Tradition

The festivities that were part of the *quriltai* live on today in Mongolia, in celebrations called *naadam*. The largest *naadam* takes place in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar in July on National Day, which is a public holiday. Smaller *naadams* are held across the country during the summer. A *naadam* features archery, wrestling, and horse racing—sporting events with strong ties to the nomadic culture of the early Mongols.

as personal servants and bodyguards for their leaders. Their greatest service came during military campaigns, when they recruited and led soldiers to fight for the leader. Leaders, especially the khans, built loyalty among their *nökörs* by giving them riches taken during conquests or from taxes collected in the foreign lands the Mongols controlled.

### MEN, WOMEN, AND SLAVES

Women normally did not take an active role in politics or the military, except within the royal family. A khan's wife could serve as a regent, or temporary ruler, after her husband died, before the next Great Khan was elected. Some wives could also influence the khan's decisions. Khubilai Khan often took the advice of his favorite wife, Chabi (d. 1281).

Mongol khans usually had several separate households, with a different wife in charge of each one. Among the ruling class it was common for a man to have more than one wife. One was usually considered the favorite, or chief wife. The Mongols also looked outside their own clan for wives, which strengthened ties between the clans.

The Mongols also had people who were similar to slaves. Slavery played a more important role in sedentary societies, though, so it did not have a chance to develop in the nomadic Mongol culture. After a successful battle, Mongol commanders took their enemy's surviving relatives as *ötögus bo'ols*. The *ötögus bo'ols* could not leave the service of their masters, but they could own property. Over time, some of these *ötögus bo'ols* were treated like family members, while others became important members of society.

A lower class of slaves, *bo'ols*, did not have the same opportunities to seek wealth or social influence. The *bo'ols* were often sold into slavery by their families. *The Secret History of the Mongols* reports that

one hungry Turkic man sold his son into slavery for a “[morsel] from the flesh” of a dead deer.

## THE RISE OF IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT

Around 1185, Temüjin (Chinggis’s birth name) earned the title of khan among his tribe. It took another 20 years for him to unite all the tribes of Mongolia and become the Great Khan. Once he attained that position, he created a new form of government within a large and ethnically diverse society. Most historians say Chinggis’s rise as a great conqueror can be credited as much to his political skill as to his military brilliance.

Chinggis replaced many of the old clan and tribal leaders with military commanders who were loyal to him. When Chinggis was named Great Khan, he divided his army into 95 groups that each had 1,000 soldiers, and he required all healthy men to serve in the military. When dealing with hostile tribes and clans, he broke away from the Mongolian custom of putting soldiers from the same tribe into the same group. Instead, he scattered them among all the units. This way, they would not be tempted to unite with others from their tribe and rebel.

The soldiers’ families were also expected to follow the orders of their military commanders. A commander’s son could inherit his father’s position. A commander could also lose his job if the khan wanted a different commander in charge.

Chinggis also developed the *keshikten* (Mongolian for “those with favor”), who served as the imperial guard. The *keshikten* consisted of day guards, night guards, and archers. These special soldiers, as Chinggis said (quoted in *The Secret History of the Mongols*), “watch over my ‘golden life.’” Along with protecting the Great Khan, the *keshikten* carried out his orders and made sure the troops were ready for battle. As the empire grew, the *keshikten* provided the staff for the royal government and often represented the Great Khan in distant lands.

In the old days, pastures were owned by the clan, not individuals. This idea did not end with the coming of the khans. Chinggis ruled the empire for his family, not just himself. The only difference was that

### Woman Warrior

Almost all Mongol warriors were men, but one notable exception was Khutulun (dates unknown). She sometimes rode into battle next to her father, Khaidu, who spent decades challenging Khubilai’s authority in Central Asia. Khutulun was said to dare men who wanted to marry her, demanding that they prove they were stronger or more skilled in combat than she. Each opponent also had to bet 100 horses. Khutulun never did marry, and she eventually owned 10,000 horses.

A page from a 14th-century Persian history book shows a Mongol khan surrounded by his wives and family.



his family's lands stretched across an empire, not just a few pastures in Mongolia.

The land and the power to rule it comprised the *ulus*. The Persian historian Juvaini (as quoted by Peter Jackson in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*) described this arrangement: "Although authority and dominion [seem to] belong to one man, namely whoever is nominated *khan*, yet in reality all the children, descendants, and uncles partake of kingship and property." That arrangement changed somewhat as separate *uluses* developed among Chinggis's sons. But within each

khanate the royal family followed the traditional Mongol ideas of ownership.

## MONGOL LAWS

By uniting the Mongol tribes, Chinggis created a new nation. The tribes had a long history of conflict, and the Great Khan was determined to use his power to create order. Soon after receiving his title, Chinggis said (as quoted by Paul Ratchnevsky in *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*), “Punish robbery within the nation and clean up deception. Execute those who have deserved death and impose fines on those who deserve such fines.”

Chinggis ruled by decree—his rules and declarations had the force of law. For many years, modern Western historians wrote about a legal code, the Great Jasaq, that Chinggis created for the Mongols in 1206. The Great Khan’s brother-in-law was made the chief judge, and he was in charge of recording the laws and making sure they were followed. In recent years, however, some historians have begun to challenge the idea that Chinggis created the Great Jasaq all at once. There is no direct written evidence of this legal code, only the works of later historians, such as Rashid al-Din, who quoted what was supposedly in the code.

Currently, we do not know for sure if the Mongols of Chinggis’s time had a written legal code. They did, however, have unwritten tribal laws. And many of Chinggis’s decrees were written down as formal laws. Future khans put all these decrees into books and added their own, making a body of partly written and partly unwritten laws.

This collection, which has been called the Great Jasaq legal code, dealt with areas such as military operations and foreign affairs. Since the army was so crucial to the Mongol Empire, the laws enforced strict military discipline. A soldier who did not stop to pick up a dropped bow or other equipment would be executed.

Giovanni DiPlano Carpini noted (in *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*) that “when the line goes into battle, if one or two or three or more flee from the squad of ten, all ten are killed. . . . Also, if one or two or more proceed daringly into the fight and the remainder of the ten do not follow, they are killed.” The Mongols also had strict laws regarding politics. Anyone who tried to rule without

### Heaven’s Chosen One

The Mongol khans did not set up a theocracy (a government run by religious leaders), but religion often played a part in their political decisions. Chinggis based his authority, in part, on the idea that Eternal Heaven had chosen him to rule. After defeating the Kev-eyids, he said he was “protected by Everlasting Heaven” (as quoted in *The Secret History of the Mongols*). At the *quriltai* in 1206 that confirmed Chinggis as Great Khan, a holy man said that Eternal Heaven—“Teb Tenggeri” in Mongolian—had chosen Chinggis to lead.

## Shooting to Measure

Chinggis Khan sometimes rewarded generals with land. He gave them the chance to set the boundaries of the land by shooting four arrows, one toward each of directions—north, south, east, and west. The distance the arrows flew marked the boundaries of their land.

Khubilai did something similar when setting the boundaries for a new Buddhist monastery in his capital of Khan-baliq. Although the distance of an arrow shot could vary, the Mongols and others of the time often used it as a rough measurement of length, referring to distances as being about a bowshot, or half a bowshot.

first being elected at a *quriltai* was executed.

As in other cultures, the Mongol legal system also included taxation. When they were strictly nomads, the Mongol leaders took a share of their people's herds as a tax. As they began to rule over sedentary societies, the Mongols made each person pay a tax in goods or money. The Mongols also taxed trade, taking a percentage of the value of goods sold.

Since the *uluses* and wealth technically belonged to everyone in a khan's family, the Mongol rulers needed a way to make sure the wealth

they acquired was divided evenly. The system created to do this was the *jarqu*. The khan and other clan leaders met at the *jarqu*, which handled all clan affairs, not just money matters. Officials called *jarquchi* distributed the wealth to the clan members. In defeated lands, the *jarquchi* also conducted a census of the local population. The official count was used to determine how much tax the region owed to the Great Khan, who shared the money with local rulers as well as his family.

### THE ROLE OF LOCAL OFFICIALS

When the Mongols began conquering foreign lands, they had to create new political systems and rely on the help of local officials. Chinggis used officials called *daruqachi* and *basqaqs* to rule for him in distant lands. They collected taxes, raised troops, and settled disputes between local officials and nobles.

The *daruqachi* were usually Turkic peoples friendly to Mongol rule who were considered the equal of the Mongols because of their military service for the Great Khan. *Basqaqs* were local people chosen to work for the khan. They eventually played a prominent role in the affairs of

the Golden Horde, since the Mongols in Russia never set up a strong central government. In the other *uluses*, the Mongols used existing political structures to help them run local affairs.

During the early years of the Mongol empire, one of the key foreign officials was Mahmud Yalavach (d. 1262), a Muslim from Khwarazm. Under Chinggis, he served as a *basqaq*. Ögedei gave him control over all of China under Mongol rule. A series of *jarquchi* and other officials served under him. His son Mas'ud Beg (d. 1280s) held a similar position in Turkestan, a region centered in the cities of Central Asia.

The early Mongol khans also relied on Uighurs and other Turkic people of Central Asia to staff their imperial courts. The governments that developed in Central Asia and Persia were mostly Turko-Mongol, rather than purely Mongol.

By the time of Ögedei's death in 1241, the Mongols had split their lands beyond Mongolia into three main provinces. This division was to make sure they could keep strict control over the sedentary people. (The provincial system did not include Russia, which was not yet advanced and wealthy enough.) After the empire began to split into separate khanates, the provincial system was used to divide China into smaller political units. This system begun by the Mongols was the basis for the division of provinces still used in China today.

## MONGOL SOCIETY IN CHINA

Khubilai Khan's empire in East Asia was the largest of the four states that emerged from the single Mongol empire. The Great Khan considered China the grandest prize of the Mongol Empire. Modern historians know more about it than they do about the other khanates because of the detailed records the Chinese kept throughout their history. Khubilai's China also has drawn more Western interest because of the writings of Marco Polo and other Europeans who traveled there.

As both the emperor of China and the Mongol Great Khan, Khubilai blended the political systems of the two peoples. The overall political structure, however, was more clearly Mongol, with the government focused on tribal organizations. Khubilai relied on *jarquchi* and *daruqachi* to carry out their traditional functions, although many government officials and departments received Chinese names. Khubilai

### The Rule of Vengeance

During their early nomadic years, many Mongol feuds and wars resulted from vengeance—using violence to respond to a perceived offense or wrongdoing by a person or clan. In effect, the Mongols took the law into their own hands, because they did not have a government that would arrest and punish criminals. This idea remained during the early years of the empire, and a foreigner's personal insult to the Great Khan was sometimes used as an excuse to start a war.

wanted to at least appear Chinese, in an effort to hold onto the loyalty of his conquered subjects.

Soon after the 1260 *quriltai*, some of Khubilai's Chinese advisors made suggestions about how to run his central government. Not surprisingly, they wanted to keep as many traditional Chinese structures as possible. Khubilai accepted some of their ideas concerning economics. The government, for example, issued paper money and kept control of certain key industries, such as mining. But the Great Khan rejected the idea that he should keep the examination system used to select civil servants—the government workers who carried out most daily activities.

The Chinese system was designed to ensure that the most talented people served in the government, regardless of family connections and no matter who was ruling. Candidates for the civil service took examinations that tested their knowledge of Chinese history, literature, and philosophy. Those who passed the examination received government appointments. The civil service exam was dominated by the ideas of Confucius, one of China's greatest thinkers. Khubilai, however, was more interested in selecting civil servants who were loyal to him. He ended the examination system.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### A Ruler Is Named

In his mammoth *History of the World Conqueror*, Juvaini portrays the Mongols in a positive way. Since he worked for them, he wanted to keep his bosses happy. This selection from his work describes the naming of Möngke (called Mengü Qa'an here) as the Great Khan of the Mongols.

*That is to say, the keys of the kingdom . . . were laid in the powerful hands of the Supreme Monarch, the Lord of all mankind, the Khan of all Khans, Arab and*

*non-Arab, Mengü Qa'an (may he live till the end of the world!); and the surface of the face of the earth was again decked out and adorned because of his all-embracing justice, and the affairs of mankind in general and the concerns of the Muslims in particular took on a new freshness and brilliance.*

(Source: Juvaini. *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*. Reprint. Translated by J. A. Boyle. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, UNESCO Press, 1997.)

Khubilai divided the people of his empire into four classes. At the top were the Mongols, followed by western and Central Asians, then the Jin of northern China. The Song of southern China were at the bottom. Most of the emperor's most trusted officials came from the first two groups. The army was eventually split into three parts: a Mongol cavalry under Khubilai's direct control, a provincial cavalry led by local commanders, and a Chinese infantry.

Khubilai also tried to make the government more efficient. He eliminated some departments and directed affairs through three main offices. The Secretariat handled most civilian issues. The Privy Council addressed military affairs. The Censorate made sure local officials performed their duties. Khubilai set strict penalties for government officials who broke the law or whose work did not meet the Khan's standards. A lazy official, for example, might be beaten. The same punishment happened to officials who took bribes or used government workers to help them in their private lives.

Mongol dominance, however, was not consistent throughout China. Despite the systems he set up, Khubilai did not have much control in the more remote provinces. And although he demanded obedience and honesty, his legal system was not as harsh as the ones under some earlier and later Chinese dynasties.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND TRADE WITHIN CHINA

Within China, Khubilai relied on a communication system called the *jam*. This system was first developed by the Great Khan Ögedei in his *ulus* and eventually spread to the other khanates. The *jam* used a series



## CONNECTIONS

### Paper Money

The Chinese invented paper money several hundred years before the rise of Chinggis Khan. The Mongols, however, helped spread its use. Marco Polo wrote in *The Description of the World*, "[I]n almost all the kingdoms subject to [Khubilai's] rule none is allowed to make or spend any other money."

The Ilkhanate introduced paper money in Persia, and Marco Polo's descriptions of it introduced the idea of paper money to most Europeans. (The Ilkhans did not understand how the system worked and paper money was soon withdrawn there.) Today, just as in Khubilai's China, only the central government of a nation is allowed to print money.

## The Silk Road

For thousands of years, traders and travelers have passed along the Silk Road, which links China and Central Asia, across hot deserts and through high mountain passes, to the Middle East. The road is actually a series of roads. Its name comes from the silk that was one of the most valuable products carried from China to the West. The Mongols actively promoted trade along the Silk Road, especially in silk.



A 14th-century Spanish map shows Marco Polo's journey along the Silk Road.

of military posts about 25 or 30 miles apart. Each post had horses and supplies provided by local citizens. A rider on official business, such as carrying information to or from the Great Khan, picked up a new horse as he reached each post. By changing horses often, a messenger could cover about 200 miles in one day.

The *jam* was also used by diplomats and, at times, by merchants. Riders had to show proof that they were allowed to use the system. Officials or messengers working for the government carried a *gere'e*, or tablet of authority. This oval plaque was made of wood, silver, or gold.

The Mongols seem to have borrowed the idea of the *jam* from the Khitans, but used it on a much larger scale. Other Asian governments later copied the system, and during the 19th century the U.S. government tried something similar with its Pony Express mail service. Historian David Morgan

wrote in *The Mongols*, “. . . the *jam* system was probably the most effective of Mongol imperial institutions, after the Army.”

The roads constructed to speed riders along the *jam* also played an important role in Mongol China's commerce. Khubilai encouraged trade, since he could tax it, and groups of merchants called *ortoq* were allowed to use the *jam*. Mongol China relied on Islamic merchants from Central Asia to move goods in and out of the empire along land routes. They brought in such things as camels, horses,

medicines, and spices. Chinese merchants exported textiles, ceramics, and food.

Merchants also transported their goods by boat, sailing from Chinese ports such as Fuzhou and Guangzhou. There was overseas trade with South Asian nations, including India and Indonesia, as well as distant Persia. Boats also carried goods along China's many rivers. Khubilai Khan reconstructed and extended China's Grand Canal, which dates from about 486 B.C.E. The canal is about 1,200 miles long and runs from Beijing to Hangzhou. Parts of it are still used today. The canal made it easier to transport grain and other foods from the interior of China to the capital of Khan-Baliq.

## THE MONGOLS IN PERSIA

With Hülegü's conquests and the creation of the Ilkhanate, the Mongols gained control of Persia and neighboring lands. The Mongols took over a government and society dominated by Islam, although there were large Christian and Jewish minority communities. The Quran, the Muslim holy book, set down the laws of Islamic society. Under Hülegü, Mongol laws became more important, though the local people continued to live under Islamic law as well.

The Mongols tolerated all religions, and this weakened the role of Islam in the government until the Ilkhans converted to that faith. Even then, some Mongol leaders wanted to return to the traditional laws. In the early 14th century (according to David Morgan in *The Mongols*), one Mongol general told other Mongols that it was a "disgraceful and dishonorable act" to abandon the Great Jasaq of Chinggis Khan for the Quran.

As in China, the Ilkhans used some of the existing political structures to impose their rule. Hülegü and his successors, however, were more likely to use native officials in top positions. Several key officials who helped the Mongols govern came from the family of the Persian Baha al-Din Juvaini (d. 1253).

The Jewish doctor Sad al-Daulat (d. 1291) was another important non-Mongol official. Serving under Arghun in the late 13th century, he enforced tax laws, sometimes by using torture. The Persians disliked Sad al-Daulat because of these harsh tactics and because he was Jewish. He also gave out government positions to his friends and relatives. But the historian Wassaf (1264–1334) admitted (as cited by J. A. Boyle in

*The Cambridge History of Iran*) that “his reforms led to the disappearance of oppression, robbery and thieving.”

Sad al-Daulat clamped down on government officials who stole public funds and made sure Muslims were tried under their own laws rather than Mongol laws. Sad al-Daulat, like other officials, had to follow the decrees of the Ilkhans and also deal with Mongol princes and generals who wanted to collect their own taxes and otherwise dominate the regions where they lived.

While ruling their own lands, the first Ilkhans also had duties as part of the larger Mongol Empire. More so than the other *uluses*, the Ilkhanate remained loyal to the Great Khan. That changed when Ghazan took power. He seemed to make a break with the Mongols of East Asia when he dropped the title Ilkhan and took the Muslim title of sultan. He also removed the Great Khan’s name from his coins. The Ilkhans never again considered themselves part of a larger Mongol Empire. However, these changes may have been designed to win local support among the Persians and Arabs, and the Ilkhanate continued to have good military and diplomatic relations with the Great Khan.

One link between the Ilkhanate government and the court of the Great Khan was a Mongolian official named Bolad (ca. 1240–1313). His family belonged to one of the Mongol tribes that came under Chinggis’s rule before Chinggis became the Great Khan. Khubilai chose Bolad to be his ambassador at Tabriz, the Ilkhanate capital. Bolad arrived there in 1285. For almost 20 years, he loyally served the different Ilkhans who came to power. He was a chief advisor for Arghun and also served the Ilkhanate on the battlefield. Bolad helped strengthen the Persian Mongols’ ties to their traditional nomad culture.

## CHANGES UNDER GHAZAN

The Mongol traditions weakened under Ghazan. He converted to Islam and forced Christians and Buddhists within his lands to also convert. This gave Islam a greater influence among the ruling class. However, the government was not always united, and followers of the two main branches of Islam later struggled for influence.

One of Ghazan’s major goals at home was reforming the government’s impact on the local economy. According to some historians,

Mongol rule in Persia had led to cruelty and mismanagement. In some cities, Mongol raids had left half of all the homes empty, with the residents dead or forced to flee. Taxes on commerce made it difficult for the



Ghazan tried to impose a new tax system on the empire, with mixed success. This 16th-century illustration shows tax collectors at their work.



## CONNECTIONS

### Great Grapes

Shiraz was a major Persian city before the Mongol conquests, and it is still an industrial center in Iran. The city's name is perhaps best known around the world for a type of grape that comes from there. Shiraz grapes are now commonly used to make fine wines.

towns and cities to rebuild. Ghazan wanted to fix tax rates so everyone knew what they owed and local princes could not demand higher payments for themselves. He also introduced a new currency system and tried to improve the *jam* message system, which was similar to the one used in China.

Ghazan encouraged farmers to return to land that had been abandoned, and he tried to improve the system for paying the army. He gave his commanders land that was supposed to be used to support the troops. In the Islamic world, rulers and other wealthy people sometimes create a *waqf*, which sets aside revenue from land or a business enterprise to maintain mosques and support charities. Ghazan created new land *waqfs* and used the money to help the elderly and sick.

Some historians believe Ghazan's changes did have some positive effect, especially in improving peasants' lives. Others, however, are not sure how deeply the reforms truly changed life for the overtaxed peasants. And after Ghazan's death, the Mongol princes who had lost power because of his reforms once again resumed control, leading to more economic stress.

As in China, Ilkhanate merchants took part in a vast trade network that linked Asia with Europe and North Africa. Some towns were famous for specific products. Shiraz, for example, was a center for iron works and wool weaving, while Isfahan was noted for its silk and cotton. (Both cities are located in modern-day Iran.) Other cities prospered with markets, called bazaars, set up in locations the Mongols often passed while traveling between their summer and winter camps.

## POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN MONGOL RUSSIA

Before the Mongol invasion of Russia, the cities and towns were dominated by local princes. Nobles called *boyars* served the princes. Some *boyars*, in turn, had their own personal military and political aides, and these men did not owe loyalty to their *boyar's* prince. The Russians

did not have any concept of a single powerful emperor, as in China and Persia.

This local political system largely remained intact after Batu's conquest and the coming of the Golden Horde. Batu and his successors were seeking tribute and were not concerned with having direct control over Russian lands. They were steppe dwellers, and did not want to live in the northwest forests. The Mongols controlled the steppe regions of their khanate, leaving the towns to the Russian princes. Focusing on the steppe also let them collect taxes on the trade that moved along the Silk Road and other caravan routes.

For the most part, the Mongols did not interact with the Russians. Their direct cultural contact was with the Kipchak nomads, a Turkic people of the steppes. Both peoples led a traditional nomadic lifestyle. One clear sign of the importance of Turkic culture among the Golden Horde turned up before the end of the 13th century: The Turkic language replaced Mongol on the khanate's coins.

In the Russian towns and cities, the Mongols sent *basqaqs* to collect taxes, and Mongol soldiers protected them as they carried out their duties. The Mongols also recruited some local men to serve in their army. At times the "recruiting" could be violent, as Mongols forced Russians to serve.

The Russians also had to pay for Mongol officials' food and housing. The Mongols based these taxes on the number of households in a region, borrowing a system first developed in China. The Mongols also collected taxes on trade. An individual who could not pay taxes was forced into slavery. If the local people refused to pay tribute or rebelled against the Mongol officials, the khan quickly sent in large military forces from the steppes to assert Mongol rule.

With their typical tolerance for all religions, the rulers of the Golden Horde did not make Russia's Orthodox Church pay taxes. The leader of the Church sent representatives to Saray to keep good



## CONNECTIONS

### The Language of Taxes

With their tax system, the Mongols introduced several new words into the Russian language. The Russian word for "money" (*denga*) came from the Mongol word *tamga*, a government seal that showed merchants had paid a tax on their goods. The Russian word for "customs house" (*tamozhina*), where taxes were collected, also came from the same Mongol word. These words are still used in Russian today.

Russian prince Alexander Nevsky had his stronghold in the city of Novogorod. By serving the Mongol rulers, he gained wealth and power for his family.



relations with the khan, and the freedom from taxes helped the Orthodox Church grow wealthy.

This arrangement did not stop local priests from speaking out against Mongol rule, which was not Christian. One Russian chronicle

from the late 13th century records several sermons by a bishop named Serapion (d. 1275). Serapion (as quoted by Charles Halperin in *The Tatar Yoke*) called the Mongols “merciless heathen, having neither mercy for the young, for the weak and aged, nor for infants.” Yet Serapion and other religious leaders believed the Russians had themselves to blame for this treatment. They felt the Mongol conquest was God’s way of punishing Russians for their sins.

The Russian princes kept most of their local power, but the Mongols never let the princes forget they owed their power to the khan. The princes had to travel to the Golden Horde’s capital of Saray or, until 1259, to Karakorum to receive a *yarlik*. This was a document that spelled out the princes’ right to rule. Many princes seem to have made their wills out before they left, not knowing if they would survive the journey—or the meeting with their Mongol masters.

Despite the fear they may have had of their Mongol lords, the Russian princes used the Mongol conquest to their advantage. With his loyal service to Batu and Berke, Alexander Nevsky developed more power than other Russian princes, helping to build wealth for himself and his family. Princes could also use their ties to the Mongols to control their local populations. As Richard Pipes writes in *Russia Under the Old Regime*, “A prince . . . had merely to threaten with calling in the Mongols to secure obedience.”

Some Russian princes also used violence to keep order. Mongol words related to punishment became part of the Russian language. A *nagaika* was a type of whip and *kandaly* were chains. These were both Mongolian words that entered the Russian language unchanged. Under the Mongols, the Russians had their first death penalty, and the khans used it against disloyal princes.

Although the Golden Horde brought violence, Russians saw some economic benefits. With Mongol protection, Russian merchants could travel to the Caspian and Black Seas to trade with Persians and Turks. The Russians offered furs and grains, and the fur trade helped turn Moscow into a major city. Goods also flowed through the Golden Horde’s lands on their way to Egypt. The commerce included glass, pottery, and slaves. As always, the Mongols encouraged international trade, since they collected taxes on it.

Starting in the 14th century, Moscow (also called Muscovy) developed into the center of Russian military and political power. Even after the princes of Moscow were able to throw off the Golden Horde, they

kept some of the Mongol methods for collecting taxes, organizing the government, and running the army. The Mongol influence lasted until the late 17th century, when Russian czar Peter the Great eliminated systems that were based on Mongol practices and replaced them with European methods of government.

### THE MONGOLS OF THE ULUS CHAGHATAI

Historians know less about the Ulus Chaghatai than they do about the other Mongol khanates. The region remained mostly nomadic, and neither the Mongols nor the defeated local peoples kept detailed written records. Even the khanate's precise borders are unknown, although it included Transoxiana and Semireche (modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and southeastern Kazakhstan), and western Xinjiang, which now forms the western part of China.

Chaghatai and his descendants did not take over a large, established empire, the way the Mongols did in China and Persia. The Chaghatai khans did not have a true capital city, and in general, they ignored their empire's cities. When they held a *quriltai*, the Mongol

leaders usually met in the city of Almaliq, in what is now Uzbekistan. The rest of the time, the leaders lived nomadic lives along the Ili River, which flows from western China into Kazakhstan.

For the later decades of the 13th century, the Ulus Chaghatai was dominated by Khaidu, who was not a direct descendant of Chaghatai. He wanted to control lands that he believed belonged to his branch of Chinggis Khan's family, which was founded by Ögedei. Khaidu's influence forced the khanate into wars with other Mongols and sparked civil war within the

## Mongol Devastation

The wars of conquest and the resulting Mongol control in the Ulus Chaghatai had different effects on different cities in Central Asia. Some cities were destroyed but were eventually rebuilt during the peace that followed.

The city of Merv, however, was one place that suffered tremendously. Located in what is now Turkmenistan, the city had once been thought to be the home of the first humans. Under Muslim rule it turned into a center of learning. The Mongols, however, killed all the city's residents, and the surrounding farmlands soon turned to desert.

Today, the town of Mary sits on the site of ancient Merv, which never really recovered from the Mongol destruction.

*ulus*. Still, he also brought some stability. He provided defense against non-Mongol nomads from the north, and rebuilt some cities.

The Ulus Chaghatai was not truly free of Khaidu's control until the reign of Du'a (d. 1307). Some historians call him the greatest khan of the *ulus*. He tried to introduce reforms similar to the ones Ghazan carried out in Persia. In general, the Chaghatai rulers followed the Mongol *jasaq* and traditional political ways, at least until the khans converted to Islam in the 14th century. Until that time, the Mongols mostly let the Muslims of Chaghatai do as they pleased, as long as they paid their taxes. Muslim governors, watched over by Mongol or Turkish officials, ruled in the sedentary areas of the khanate.

The Mongols of Central Asia wanted to convert some farmland of their *ulus* into steppe, where their herds could graze. Local officials convinced them that using the land for agriculture would lead to more tax revenue, so the Mongols gave up the plan. Still, in some regions, this transformation did occur. Shihab al-Din al-Umari (d. ca. 1348), a Syrian geographer, described what he saw on a visit to Turkestan (as quoted by Svat Soucek in *A History of Inner Asia*): "A person . . . finds the buildings still standing but devoid of humans except for some nomads and herders, without any agriculture . . . what is green there consists of . . . steppe vegetation, which nobody has sown or planted."

With its steppe lands and nomadic values, the Ulus Chaghatai had less commerce than the other khanates. Most economic activity centered on the few cities that survived the original Mongol invasion, such as Samarkand and Bukhara. Smaller towns also served as commercial centers, such as Almaliq and Besh-baliq. The Silk Road linked the khanate with the major trading centers of eastern and western Asia.



# CHAPTER 5

## DAILY LIFE IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE

MONGOL LIFE IN THE TIME OF CHINGGIS KHAN FOCUSED ON the herd. Farming was almost impossible on the steppes, since there was harsh weather and little rain. A family, tribe, or clan depended on its animals for the necessities of life.

Herds needed to be moved around the steppes to ensure there was enough for them to graze on. This is why the Mongols were nomads. The Mongols' most important animals were sheep and horses. Sheep provided food (both meat and milk), wool for cloth, and fuel—their waste was dried and burned. The Mongols used the food and clothing that came from their sheep for themselves and as goods to trade with sedentary communities. The Mongols traded with farmers and merchants for grains, cloth, and luxury goods.

Horses were the main source of Mongol transportation and played a large role in the success of the Mongol army. Horses also provided milk. When fermented (mixing yeast with a drink to create alcohol), this milk became a mildly alcoholic drink called *kumiss*. With the riches of their empire, the khans also bought huge quantities of strong alcoholic drinks, such as wine made from grapes or rice. The Mongols drank them often. In fact, some historians suggest that certain Mongol rulers died at an early age because of alcoholism.

In their original homelands, the Mongols spent their summers on the wide-open steppes, then moved into mountain valleys for the winter. The trip from one pasture to another might cover about 100 miles. If a pasture no longer provided enough grass for their grazing animals, the Mongols might attack other tribes or foreigners to take over their land.

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### OPPOSITE

Some Mongolian families still move their herds from one pasture to another. Many still live in *gers*—portable homes.

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On the steppes, the Mongols lived in tents called *gers*. (Europeans called them *yurts*.) Felt cloth made from sheep's wool was draped over a wooden frame. The *gers* were round, with a hole in the center that let in light and served as a chimney. The floor was covered with animal skins. The room inside was split into two halves, one for men and one for women.

*Gers* were easy to set up and take down quickly, so they could be moved without much trouble. Carpini noted (in *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*) that "whenever [Mongols] travel, whether to war or other places, they always take their homes with them." During the period of the empire, the Mongols also had larger *gers* that were set up on large wagons and moved intact.

Some Mongols who lived closer to the Gobi Desert also used tents called *maikhans*. A *maikhan* was more rectangular than a *ger*, and used poles to hold up the felt covering. These tents were never used as living spaces. Instead, they were places for entertainment and other special functions.

Time for lunch on the steppes, as this modern Mongolian couple settles down for a meal in their *ger*.



## FOOD AND CLOTHING

Mongolian men and women wore similar clothes, starting with a robe called a *de'el*. The robe might be lined with fur for warmth. It was closed with a belt. The outer part of the robe was usually covered in silk. Poorer people lined their clothing with wool or cotton.

Underneath the *de'el*, Mongols wore pants and some kind of an undershirt. During cold weather, they wore overcoats made of felt or fur. On their feet they wore thick stockings and boots made of leather. In very cold weather, they wore felt boots.

The one main difference between male and female clothing was headgear. Men usually wore fur hats with flaps that covered the ears. Wealthy women wore tall, fancy hats called *boqtas*. They were covered with feathers and pearls—hard-to-get items that could only be had by trading for them. Carpini wrote (in *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*) that only married women wore *boqtas*. This made it difficult to tell an unmarried woman from a man, because she would not wear a *boqta* and the rest of her clothing was just like a man's.

The basic Mongol food was dairy products and meat, either from their herd or animals such as rabbits and fowl killed during their hunts. Men also sometimes fished.



## CONNECTIONS

### No Barbecues

If the Mongols lacked fuel for a fire, they ate their meat raw, chopping it up and mixing it with garlic. The Mongol taste for raw meat led European chefs to name a dish for them, steak tartare, which uses raw beef that is finely chopped and mixed with spices.

For many meals, the Mongols roasted meat over an open flame. They continued that tradition even as they mixed with Asia's sedentary cultures. But the Mongols did not introduce the so-called Mongolian barbecue, which is found in some

U.S. restaurants today. In these restaurants, diners choose from a variety of meats and vegetables, which are then cooked in oil in a large pan.

This style of cooking is actually a Chinese invention and has nothing to do with the Mongols. In China, the meat and vegetables are cooked in a special pot with a cone in the center that holds burning charcoal. The pot has a ring around the outside filled with boiling flavored broth. The food is dipped in this broth to cook it.



## CONNECTIONS

### Ice Cream and Cake

In the lands they conquered, the Mongols were introduced to new foods. The fruity dessert we call sherbet was first made by Christians living in China under Khubilai Khan's rule. The emperor loved the frozen treat so much, he created the position of official sherbet maker. Sherbet then spread to the Ilkhanate, where it also became popular. Today, it is enjoyed all over the world.

One Turko-Mongol dish for the lands of Central Asia was a rich pastry similar to baklava, which features layers of nuts, spices, and sugar. The word *baklava* seems to come from the Mongol word *bakla*, which means "pile up in layers." Mongols may have introduced this sweet treat to the Middle East and other lands they conquered.

Some meat was dried in the sun, which preserved it and made it easy to eat while on horseback. Bones, with some meat still attached, were boiled in a broth called *shüülen*. Later this term was used to describe a stew of broth and meat thickened with grains or beans. Plant foods included seeds, berries, fruit, and mushrooms.

Before the Mongol conquests, a typical meal was usually limited to boiled meat and dairy products. But as the empire grew, new foods were introduced, such as roasted meats and dishes made with

grain products. Many of these foods came from the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. The Mongols also developed a taste for dishes from China and Persia.

During the time of the khanates, the common people provided food for the royal family and other leaders. The commoners ate whatever crops they grew that they did not give to the Mongol nobles. They also ate foods they got from trading animals or furs. As for slaves, William of Rubruck, in his book *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–1255, as Narrated by Himself*, wrote that they "fill their bellies with dirty water, and with this they are content." The slaves also caught rats or mice for their meals.

### MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN

In daily life, Mongol men and women shared many duties, although each also had some specific chores. For example, women set up and took down the tents, sewed clothes, and turned milk into other dairy products, such as cheese and butter. When not at war, the men's most important duties were making tools and hunting. The men had to make

their own military equipment, including saddles and stirrups, and they took care of the horses.

Mongol men often had many wives, sometimes capturing women from neighboring tribes. Chinggis Khan was said to have had hundreds of wives, although he always remained very close to his first wife, Ö'elün. Families arranged marriages between their young children. Parents from the ruling class did this to create political bonds that would last for generations.

The young Chinggis acquired his first wife this way when he was only nine years old, although the actual marriage ceremony took place about six years later. Following a Mongolian custom, Chinggis—still known as Temüjin at this time—was left with the parents of his future wife.

Before the empire was built, Mongol children did not go to school. The Mongols did not have a written language until Chinggis introduced

Mongol life centered around herding sheep and horses. Sheep provided food, clothing, and fuel. Horses provided transportation and milk. Herding sheep and horses is still a way of life for many people in modern Mongolia.



### Blood Brothers

The young Chinggis Khan had a “blood brother.” When he was 11, Temüjin and a friend exchanged gifts, marking their commitment to one another. Nomadic blood brothers also mixed a few drops of their blood in a glass and drank from it, although there is no record Temüjin did this. These choices were made by the young men themselves. But for the Mongols, choosing a blood brother was not merely child’s play. Taking a blood brother created an *anda*, a relationship that united two men as political and military allies through their adulthood.

one much later, so they did not need to learn how to read or write. Sons and daughters learned the skills they needed from their parents. For sons, the most important skills were hunting and archery. Daughters watched their mothers carrying out the typical women’s chores.

Education changed as the Mongol rulers interacted with the cultures of Persia and China. Wealthy families hired tutors to teach their children how to read and speak the local languages. The poor continued to just teach their children the skills they needed for adulthood.

### LIFE IN THE CONQUERED LANDS

Conditions for Europeans and Asians who came under Mongol rule depended on many things. People who had skills the khans needed were generally treated well. The poor and unskilled faced the same kind of difficult conditions they endured under their local emperors and princes.

Throughout the world in the 13th and 14th centuries, most rulers saw the peasant class as a source of taxes and resources, not as citizens with rights. It was a time when most people in Europe and Asia lived in poverty and kings and princes dominated society.

In China, Khubilai Khan set up four classes of citizens. The Mongols were clearly the ruling class, though they made up just a small percentage of the population. Khubilai drew most of his advisors from the second class, the foreigners. The bottom two classes, the northern and southern Chinese, provided most of the money and labor the Great Khan needed for his government.

Khubilai forced Chinese peasants to build his palaces and projects such as the Grand Canal. Yet he also tried to help the Chinese farmers. After the Mongol wars of conquest, the peasant farmers’ lands had been destroyed. Khubilai forbid the Mongols from grazing their animals on the farmland that remained, so the peasants could survive and help feed the empire. Khubilai helped other farmers by lowering taxes, and he gave grain to poor Chinese who could not afford to buy food.

In rural areas, the Mongols preserved the traditional Chinese *she*, a system that united 50 farming families into one group. The government believed that if the farmers worked together, they could more quickly reclaim damaged land and increase their crop production. Southern farmers focused on rice and tea, while northern farmers raised barley, wheat, and cotton. Chinese farmers also raised fruits and

vegetables. Some grew mulberry trees, which were used to feed the worms that produce silk. The *she* also gave rural dwellers some of their first schools, where young boys learned farming skills and the basics of reading Chinese.

Khubilai Khan also needed the skilled workers and merchants in the cities. Artisans, such as jewelers and weavers, received food and clothing from the government and could sell some of their goods on the open market.

Merchants benefited because the Mongols welcomed trade. Traditional Chinese rulers considered buying and selling goods to be an unworthy profession and saw merchants as greedy. The Mongols helped merchants by freely loaning them money and removing an old Chinese restriction on how much profit they could make.

Under Mongol rule, cities bustled with economic activity. Marco Polo often described the number of merchants, food sellers, and artisans he saw at work. Of the city of Quinsai (modern Hangzhou, on the east coast of China), he wrote (in *The Description of the World*), “. . . on every market day all the . . . squares are covered and filled with people and merchants who bring [goods] on carts and on boats, and all is disposed of.”

## LIFE IN THE ILKHANATE

The early decades of Mongol rule in Persia and neighboring lands brought great changes to the local people—most of them bad. The

## An International Society

Under Khubilai Khan, Chinese society took on an international flavor—probably more so than in any other nation at that time. The Mongol conquests had touched many countries and peoples, and Khubilai welcomed to China anyone who could help him develop his empire.

Most numerous were Turkic peoples and Muslims from Persia and Central Asia. His army also included Alans, who were steppe dwellers from southern Russia who belonged to the Orthodox Church. Marco Polo was the only European known to serve Khubilai, but under earlier Great Khans, Europeans artisans worked in Central Asia. These included William Boucher, a goldsmith from France. He is best known for designing a fountain in the palace of Karakorum. Shaped like a tree, the fountain poured out wine and *kumiss*.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Bad Table Manners**

Many of the first reports of Mongol customs and daily life came from people who feared or disliked the Mongols. Simon of Saint Quentin was a French monk who visited Mongol-controlled lands during the 1240s. His description of their eating habits was not kind.

*They are the most unclean and filthy in their eating . . . they lick their greasy fingers and wipe them dry on their boots. . . . They do not wash their hands before eating, nor their dishes afterward. . . . They eat human meat like lions; devouring it roasted on the fire and soaked with grease. And whenever they take*

*someone contrary or hostile to themselves, they come together in one place to eat him . . . for the rebellion raised against them. They avidly suck his blood just like hellish vampires.*

Simon was not an accurate historian, because the Mongols did not eat human flesh or drink human blood. Stories such as this created an unfair image of the Mongols throughout much of Europe.

(Source: Lane, George. *Daily Life in the Mongol Empire*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006.)

region was mostly sedentary, though some nomadic Turks had already ruled there before the Mongols. Warfare and the Mongol policy of trying to convert farmlands to pastures destroyed the agricultural economy.

As in China, the local population greatly decreased during the early years of Mongol rule. Many people were forced into slavery. One historical account says that after the conquests, the survivors in the region of Balkh in northern Afghanistan could only find dogs, cats, and human flesh for food.

Before the invasions, the people of Persia had a healthy economy. Farmers produced corn, rice and other grains, fruits, and vegetables, as well as cotton and silk. Under the Mongols, farmers struggled to make their fields productive again.

This changed under the rule of Ghazan at the end of the 13th century. His tax relief and other programs helped the farmers. Still, agricultural output did not return to the levels it had reached before the Mongols arrived. Peasant farmers did not have the freedom to live and work where they chose. The government forced them to stay

on the land where their families had always lived. And, as in China, peasants might be forced to do construction work at no pay, which further harmed their efforts to farm the land.

By the mid 14th century, the local people were once again growing a variety of crops. Melons were grown everywhere, with many sent abroad. Fruits were a major part of agriculture. The fruits included figs, lemons, peaches, pears, and oranges. Vegetables were mostly grown near larger cities.

City life in Persia felt the same harsh effects of the Mongol conquest. The early Mongol policy of heavily taxing trade slowed the rebuilding of some cities. Other cities, however, managed to do well, especially after Ghazan cut some of the taxes on trade. A typical city dweller might do craft work, such as making clothes, ceramics, or carpets. Artisans who worked in the same craft often lived and worked together in a particular section of a city. Other city residents helped transport or store goods that were traded with foreign cities. Local residents also earned money working for the Mongols, who had several camps throughout the khanate.

The most powerful local people in Persia were the landlords and officials. They usually owned land outside the cities, and they began to take a more active interest in trade during Mongol rule. The landowners and the wealthy merchants formed the upper class, with artisans and peasants at the bottom.

The influence of Islam on Persian society endured under Mongol rule. Schools called madrasas taught both religion and Islamic law, usually just to boys. Still, under the khans, non-Muslims found they had greater social and political influence than they had in the past.

## LIFE IN THE GOLDEN HORDE

The rulers of the Golden Horde did not play a role in the everyday affairs of their Russian lands. Their most direct contact was with the Russian officials who collected taxes and the princes who ruled local areas. The Mongols' greatest contact was with the Turkic people who had moved into Russia before the Mongol conquests.

The Russians in the towns of the east were Slavs and were related to other Slavic people of Eastern Europe. For the average people of Slavic Russia, life did not change much under Mongol rule—unless

### One Rosy Picture

One Persian industry that prospered during Mongol times was growing flowers for the oils. These oils were used to create a variety of medicines and perfumes. The oil of roses was used to make rose water, which helps moisten dry skin. Today, parts of southern Iran are still known for their rose water.

they were forced into the military. Farming was never easy in the forests around the upper end of the Volga River. Peasants cleared away the trees, then had to deal with short summers and bad soil. Families hunted and fished to make sure they had enough food. They lived in log cabins made from the trees they cut. In a typical rural home, the grandparents, their adult children, and the adults' children all lived together.

Farther south along the river, the farming was better. The area where the Volga meets the Oka River, near Suzdal and Vladimir, drew many Russian settlers. That area remained a main source of wheat under Mongol rule.

Land was the main source of wealth in the isolated regions of Russia. Families with large farms used slaves or peasants to work the land for them. In general, the peasants were not required to work just one plot of land. They could move on and work for a different landowner if they chose. If they owed a landowner money, however, the peasants could not leave. Therefore, the landowners tried to make sure the peasants were always in debt.

Novgorod, Russia's only large city at the time, was a thriving trade center. At the city's peak in the 13th century, its merchants traded furs and hemp (a plant fiber used to make rope) in Europe for wine and cloth. The Mongol capital of Saray also developed a strong economy. Many city residents worked smelting iron (separating pure iron from iron ore) and turning it into finished products. Archaeologists have also found remains of clothing shops and jewelers on the site of the city.

In some ways, Russians benefited under the Golden Horde. Foreign trade increased as Russia joined the international trade network the Mongols supported. The Mongol presence also helped unite the Russians and create a sense of being Russian, of having a national identity, and not merely being the subject of the local prince.

The Russian Orthodox Church played a part in creating this nationalism. It was the only native, central power in the land. The people looked to church leaders and their own faith for the strength to endure the foreign invaders. Recent historians have also questioned the idea, held by earlier historians, that the Mongol conquests totally disrupted life across Russia. In *The Crisis of Medieval Russia*, John Fennell writes, "things returned to normal, or near-normal, in a remarkably short time."

### Civil Wars

Although the Russians may have had some sense of nationalism under Mongol rule, the Russian princes continued to fight among themselves for power. During the 1280s and 1290s, princes from the same family sometimes battled each other, trying to win control of larger regions. At one time, Mongol forces fought against each other during these Russian wars, because Noghai and Tode Möngke backed rival princes.

## NOMADIC LIFE IN THE ULUS CHAGHATAI

Daily life in the khanate of Chaghatai most resembled the life the Mongols knew in their homeland. Most of the conquered people were nomadic Turks, so they shared many cultural similarities with the Mongols. Over time, the Mongols completely blended in with the Turks. This led to the creation of a new language, called Chaghatai Turk.

Their nomadic culture remained basically unchanged. The one exception is that the Mongols adopted Islam as their major faith in the mid-14th century.

Not all the natives of Central Asia were strictly nomads. Some were semi-nomads. That means they kept a base camp or village but moved out to farther pastures during part of the year. At their permanent homes, the semi-nomads farmed, and women wove colorful bags and carpets. The bags could be used to carry items or decorate the walls of a *ger*.

Since the Mongols of Central Asia remained true to their nomadic roots, they largely ignored the cities in their midst. But in such places as Samarkand and Bukhara, the local people lived typical urban lives of the time. The cities, although heavily damaged during the Mongol conquests, slowly rebuilt their schools and marketplaces.

## RELIGION IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE

Across Europe and Asia, religion played a huge role in political and daily life throughout the medieval period. The various parts of the Mongol Empire were dominated by Christianity (in Russia), Islam (in Persia), and Buddhism (in China).

The different religions shaped the Mongol khans' personal lives and their political decisions. The local khan's faith sometimes determined what laws were enforced and who was considered an enemy. And some religious leaders labeled anyone who did not follow their faith "heathens" (people lacking a proper religion and morality). They sometimes used religious difference as a reason to wage wars.

The Mongols' original religious beliefs centered on worship of their ancestors (the people from whom you are descended). They kept images of their deceased relatives and prayed to their spirits. They believed that ancestors could become spirits of mountains and water. Above all these spirits was Eternal Heaven (Teb Tenggeri). Earth was seen as an ancient grandmother.



## CONNECTIONS

### Shamans Today

Shamanism developed across Central Asia and Siberia. The “medicine men” of North and South American Native peoples are also shamans. Shamanism is still practiced around the world today, including in Mongolia, although Tibetan-style Buddhism is now the dominant religion. A shaman’s powers are thought to pass from parents to their children.

Stanley Stewart, in *In the Empire of Genghis Khan: A Journey Among Nomads*, described a session with a shaman who entered a trance and made predictions about the future. The shaman told Stewart that contacting the spirits is not easy: “I am often afraid. The way to the spirits is littered with the souls of fallen shamans.”



Roadside shrines known as *oboo* are built of stones, sticks, and branches. Ceremonies are held around the shrines by both shamanist believers and Buddhists.

In the time of Chinggis, the Mongol religion was shamanistic, which means the people looked to religious leaders, called shamans, to offer religious guidance. The shamans were mostly men, but some were women. The Mongols believed shamans had the power to communicate with gods and spirits.

The shamans were the link between the world of humans and the spirit world. They could drive out evil spirits and seek help from good ones. They usually performed their duties, such as praying, on hills or mountains, so they would be closer to heaven.

The Mongols believed shamans could also use their skills to cure disease and to predict the future. When Chinggis was named Great Khan, a Mongol shaman said (as reported by Juvaini and quoted in Paul Ratchnevsky’s *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*), “God spoke to me, saying: ‘I have given the whole Earth to Temüjin and his sons. . . . See that he rules justly!’”

At times, the Mongols sacrificed animals to the gods and spirits. To keep evil spirits out of their homes, they made strangers walk between two fires. The fires were thought to drive out any spirits occupying their guests. They were also used to purify relatives who were inside a *ger* when a family member died. Carpini reported a

rumor (in *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*) that a Russian prince who refused to walk between the fires and then bow to a statue of Chinggis Khan was trampled to death.

Modern historians now suggest that the Russian prince was killed because of a political disagreement with the Mongols, not for rejecting a practice of their religion. The truth is that when it came to religious beliefs, the Mongols were perhaps the most tolerant people in the medieval world. In general, they accepted other peoples' gods, while often still following their shamanistic traditions.

## CHRISTIANITY

Even before Chinggis united the Mongol tribes, the Mongols had some contact with other faiths, primarily Christianity and Buddhism. The Christians in Mongolia belonged to the Church of the East, formed by the Assyrian people in what is now Iraq. European Christians called them Nestorians.

The Assyrian Christians had a different view of the nature of Jesus as both a god and human than other Christians did. In church, they used the Syriac language, which is closely related to Aramaic, the language Christ spoke.

During medieval times, the Church of the East spread across Asia. It was the first form of Christianity to reach India and China. Some Mongol tribes embraced it. Some later members of Chinggis's own family were Christians, including the wives of Hülegü and Tolui.

When the European missionary William of Rubruck reached Karakorum in 1254, he met with these Nestorians and noted that they had their own church in the capital city. During the 1280s, the head of the Assyrian Church was based in the Ilkhanate, and the Mongol leaders sometimes turned to him for advice. The growth of the Church of the East and reports from Assyrian priests led some Europeans to believe the Mongol khans had become Christians, or were at least considering it.

Through conquest and diplomacy, the Mongols made their first contact with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, two other forms of Christianity in the medieval era. Roman Catholicism, led by the pope in Rome, dominated Western and Central Europe. The Eastern Church was centered in Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Its focus was on Eastern Europe, including Russia, and parts of the Middle

East. Differences between the religions sometimes led to political conflicts between rulers of these two faiths.

These conflicts increased during the Crusades, which began in the 11th century and lasted for several hundred years. During this series of wars, Catholic soldiers and their leaders fought for control of lands in the Middle East. These lands were controlled by Muslims, but they bordered the major Orthodox nation, the Byzantine Empire. Political and religious differences kept the Catholics and the Orthodox Christians from uniting to fight their common enemy, the Muslims.

The first Christians the Mongols fought were in Georgia, during Chinggis's western campaign of the early 1220s. The Europeans regarded the Mongols as heathens seeking to dominate the world. By the time the Mongol Empire was firmly established across Asia, the Roman Catholics of Europe began sending ambassadors and missionaries to Karakorum and other parts of the empire.

In 1245, Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) sent the Italian priest Giovanni DiPlano Carpini to Mongolia on a diplomatic mission.

The monk met both Batu and Kyk. Neither was interested in converting to Catholicism. However, these and other khans welcomed the Christians who came to their lands as both diplomats and missionaries.

By about 1275, the Catholic leaders of Western Europe had become friendlier toward the Mongols. They knew that Asian armies with Christian (that is, Nestorian) troops were advancing westward. They hoped these forces were led by someone who would help them fight the Muslims.

The Golden Horde dealt primarily with the Russian Orthodox Church, a branch of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Russian church did not have to

## The Myth of Prester John

The presence of Christians in China and Central Asia gave rise to a powerful myth in medieval Europe. Many Europeans believed that a great Asian king named Prester John was a Christian who would come to the Middle East and help the Crusaders defeat the Muslims.

There was no real Prester John. Marco Polo associated the mythical Prester John with Toghriq, a real Christian prince of the Church of the East from Mongolia. In his *Travels*, Polo spent several chapters describing a war between Toghriq and Chinggis. Prester John was also associated with an earlier Central Asian ruler, Yelu Dashi (1087–1143), who founded the Kara-Khitay Empire during the 12th century.

pay taxes under Mongol rule. In return, the priests were expected to pray for the Mongol leaders and their families. Still, the Mongol leaders never embraced Orthodox Christianity (or Roman Catholicism) the way they did other faiths they encountered during their conquests. In their first years in Russia, the Mongols remained separate from the Russians and their church, choosing to follow their traditional beliefs.

## BUDDHISM

Buddhism was developed in India more than 2,500 years ago. It is based on the teachings of the Buddha (“enlightened one”), a prince who gave up his wealth to try to understand the meaning of life and death. The Buddha’s beliefs were based on Indian religious teachings, which stressed reincarnation. When a living being dies, according to Buddhism, its essence lives on and is reborn in another person or animal.

The Buddha went beyond this, setting down what he called the Four Noble Truths: 1. All existence is suffering. 2. The cause of suffering is desire, which is made worse because we do not understand the true nature of the world. 3. There is a way to end ignorance and suffering, by ending our attachments to objects and feelings. 4. The way to end desire is to follow the Buddha’s eight rules for right living.

The goal of Buddhism is to help people stop the endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth. When Buddhists end this cycle, they say they are enlightened, just like the Buddha, and they have reached a state of existence called nirvana. There are many forms of Buddhism, but they all have the same core beliefs.

Buddhism existed in China for hundreds of years before the Mongols arrived. At some times, it was the country’s official religion. The first form of Buddhism to spread among the Mongols was Chan, which is the Chinese version of the Zen Buddhism still practiced in Japan and other nations.

Under Kubilai Khan, Buddhism received strong royal support. Still, following Mongol custom, the Great Khan did not proclaim it the state religion.

During the Yuan dynasty, the Mongols adopted many Chinese traditions, including Buddhism. This statue of the Buddha of Compassion is from 14th-century China.



Khubilai's Buddhism, however, was not Chan or other forms commonly practiced in China. He turned to Tibet for religious inspiration. Tibetan Buddhism is sometimes called Lamaism from the word *lama*, which means "teacher" in Tibetan.

In China, the Buddhists battled for influence at Khubilai's court with the followers of a native Chinese religion, Daoism. Daoism is based on the teachings of the philosopher Laozi, and also has some elements of magic and fortune telling. In the end, the Buddhists won, and one of Khubilai's most important advisors was the Phags-pa Lama (1235–1280). The lama helped Khubilai win favor among China's Buddhists by associating the Great Khan with Buddhist holy figures. Khubilai then banned the practice of Daoism.

During the peak years of their empire, the Mongols helped spread Buddhism to other parts of Asia. The Ilkhanate's first rulers, particularly Arghun, supported Lamaism and built Buddhist temples. But Buddhism was never an official religion, since the Ilkhans followed the Mongol policy of tolerating all faiths—that is, until Ghazan banned Buddhism.

## ISLAM

As the Mongols moved westward across Asia, the dominant faith they encountered was Islam. The Middle East and parts of Central Asia were ruled by Islamic leaders. The religion had developed during the seventh century under its founder, Muhammad. Muslims believed he was the last prophet sent by God, and his teachings became both religious and civil law.

The Muslims believed in the same god of the Jews and Christians. But Muhammad said only people who accepted his own teachings regarding God's word were true followers of Allah (the Arabic word for God).

Muhammad and his followers won a series of wars that helped Islam spread from its starting point in Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia. In the lands they conquered, Muslims allowed Christians and Jews to practice their faith, but they did not tolerate any other religions. The coming of the Mongols marked the first time large Islamic populations were not governed by fellow Muslims.

The Muslims believed they had a holy mission to place the entire world under Islamic rule. Their conquests, however, had largely stopped by the time the Mongols rose to power in Asia.

The khans of the Golden Horde were the first to convert to Islam, even though the religion was not particularly strong in Russia. Eventually, all the khanates except Yuan China were mostly Islamic. As the Mongols converted, they also continued their shamanist practice. However, over time the traditional beliefs died out outside the Mongol homelands.

In Persia, the Mongols eventually saw value in sharing the same religion as the largest part of the population. They kept the traditional Muslim tolerance of Christians and Jews. But believers of other faiths, such as Buddhism, lost their freedom of religion. Almost all traces of Buddhism in Persia were destroyed once the Ilkhans converted to Islam.

Ahmad Tegüder was the first Ilkhan to convert. Since him, every ruler in Persia (and now Iran) has been a Muslim. Öljeitü, the next Mongol Ilkhan after Ghazan, embraced the Shiite branch of Islam, leading to its spread in Persia. Today, Iran's rulers and most of its citizens still follow Shiism. The Mongol conversion in Persia and elsewhere led many Mongols to embrace the native Islamic cultures and lose their distinct Mongol traditions.

The khans of the Ulus Chaghatai were the last to convert to Islam. The first one to do so, Tarmashirin (d. 1334), angered other Mongols who still practiced shamanism. At a *quriltai*, the Mongol princes forced him from power, saying he should not have replaced Mongol laws with Islamic laws. By the end of the 14th century, however, the khans of Central Asia had accepted Islam.

## Judaism in the Mongol Empire

Mongols came into contact with Judaism through their conquest of Islamic lands. Jews had lived in such cities as Baghdad for generations, and sometimes held important positions. Jews (and Christians) who converted to Islam had the greatest chance of success under the Islamic Empire, and later under the Mongols.

One prominent Jew during Mongol times was Rashid al-Din, a convert to Islam. He was trained as a doctor, as were many Jews in Islamic lands, but served the Ilkhanate as an advisor. He is best known today as a historian, and his books on Mongol history are still read.

هَلَمُّ إِلَى الْعَيْرِ فَأَوَى عِنْدَهَا . فَلَمَّا سَمِعَ ذَلِكَ الْفَيْلُ اعْجَبَ بِهِ فَأَنظَرَهُ مَعَهُ  
 فَأَرَاهُ ظِلَّ الْقَمَرِ ففَعَلَ الْفَيْلُ ذَلِكَ فَأَضْرَبَ الْمَاءَ وَتَحَرَّكَ ظِلُّ الْقَمَرِ فِيهِ فَقَالَ انظُرْ لِي  
 غَضَبِيهِ فَقُلْتُ فَخُوفٌ ذَلِكَ وَاشْفَقَ مِنْهُ وَقَالَ لَسْتُ عَابِدًا وَلَا آخِذًا مِنَ الْفَيْلِ  
 صُورَةُ الْفَيْلِ غَايِرٌ فِي الْعَيْرِ وَظِلُّ الْقَمَرِ فِي الْعَيْنِ وَالْأَرَابُ تُرَفِّعُهُ سَنَطْرُ وَتُخَاطِبُ الْفَيْلَ

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وَأَمَّا ضَرْبُ لَكُمْ هَذَا الشَّكْلُ لِأَنَّ الْبَنُوْمَ شَرِيحَ الْعَدَبِ شَدِيدٌ لَا يَسْتَطَاعُ  
 الدُّنُوْمِيْنَهُ وَلَا الْمَشَاوِنَ لَهُ الْعَجْوُونَ وَحَمَلَهُ وَشَقَّ شَرِيحَ وَكَسَرَ أَمَلُ الْمَلِكِ وَلَا

# CHAPTER 6

## ART, SCIENCE, AND CULTURE IN MONGOL LANDS

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN arts and science have come from cultures that were settled in one place. In early societies that were based on agriculture, the people eventually developed farming methods that enabled fewer workers to produce enough food for everyone. More people then had time to pursue other activities, such as arts and crafts, writing literature, educating others, and developing science and technology.

Because nomads such as the Mongols keep moving and carry all their belongings with them, they cannot create museums or universities. Certainly, though, they must master the many skills of artisans and learn and apply their scientific knowledge. And they certainly have a rich heritage of culture and learning. As the Mongols proved, once nomadic peoples conquer cities, they can appreciate the value of other cultures' artistic and intellectual achievements, as well.

### **MONGOL ARTS**

Thousands of years before the Mongol tribes settled in Mongolia, people in the region painted scenes of everyday life in caves. These cave paintings, called *petroglyphs*, illustrate one of the earliest forms of nomadism. The earliest artists of Mongolia painted on rocks and other natural surfaces, and they also created large monuments called deer stones. These stones ranged from about six to 30 feet high and

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#### OPPOSITE

This 1354 Syrian book of Persian fables is called *Kalila and Dimna*. Here, a hare talks to the king of the elephants. The visual arts flourished in Persia under Mongol rule.

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Singing and dancing were important parts of Mongol festivals. Dancers wore masks and colorful costumes to show what character they played.



featured carvings of deer and other animals. Historians believe the stones marked the graves of important leaders and warriors.

Other art items from the era before the Mongols include jewelry, pottery, and felt carpets. The Mongols made similar items, finding ways to decorate the tools they used in their everyday life. Clothes and other items featured embroidered designs symbolizing such things as fire or the artist's hopes for the future. About 7,000 of these symbols are known, and they still appear in modern Mongolian art.

The Mongols also made musical instruments and wrote songs, usually dealing with animals and aspects of nomadic life. The instruments included the *morin khuur*, a two-stringed instrument played with a bow. The first ones were made from horse skin and hair. The *morin khuur* was used to mimic the sounds of animals and nature. The Mongols also developed other string instruments and played drums and flutes. The earliest Mongol dances came out of the shamans' movements as they entered trances (mental states where they seemed not to be aware of the world) to reach the spirit world.

Singing and dancing were an important part of festivals. Folk dances were performed either inside or just outside the Mongols' *gers*. The small space led to a dancing style that stressed moving the hands, head, and upper body and limited leg movements. Today, Mongolians still dance in this way, even when they have more room to move.

The Mongols passed on their history and folk tales by memorizing them and telling them to one another. Some proverbs date back at least to the times of the Huns, which ended around the fourth century. The first Mongol alphabet did not appear until 1206, when Chinggis Khan decided to use the script of the Uighur Turks. This script was already used by the Naimans, one of the tribes Chinggis defeated in Mongolia. Words were written from top to bottom, and sentences were read from left to right, as in English.

The only major piece of writing to survive from the empire is *The Secret History of the Mongols* (other writings have survived only in Persian or Chinese translations). Historians have debated whether it is pure fiction or a mixture of fact and fantasy. The beginning, for example, says that the first Mongols descended from a "bluish wolf" and a deer. Most historians, however, accept that *The Secret History* is probably accurate when it describes the events of Chinggis's life.

Historians continue to debate when *The Secret History of the Mongols* was written. The book's unknown author (or authors) says the book was completed in the year of the mouse. The Mongols, like the Chinese, based their calendar on 12-year cycles in which each year was named for a different animal. This calendar system is still used in many parts of Asia today. By examining other dates and events mentioned in *The Secret History*, historians believe that 1228, 1240, or 1252 are the most likely years of the mouse in which the book was written.

## MONGOL TECHNOLOGY

By studying nature, using trial and error, and borrowing from neighboring peoples, the Mongols created technology that made daily life easier. One example of this is the *ger*, a warm, comfortable, yet thoroughly portable house.

Among the greatest Mongol achievements, though, came in warfare, especially archery. The Mongols developed a bow made out of several layers of wood and animal horns. This bow required greater strength to pull than other bows of the time. But it remained flexible longer than other bows and shot arrows farther.

The Mongols also developed a wide range of arrows, each with a specific purpose. A short arrow was useful for hunting small animals. Heavy arrows were used against an enemy wearing armor or any time the arrow had to penetrate deep into its target. The Mongols also had a special “whistling” arrow that made noise in flight or when it struck its targets. These arrows were used for sending signals.

Arrowheads were often made of bone. Once again, the Mongols had different heads for different purposes. Small arrowheads were

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Khubilai Khan regarded hunting as a sport and built a huge hunting park in Shangdu.





## CONNECTIONS

### Falconry Today

The Mongol fondness for falcons continues today, especially among the Kazakhs of Mongolia. These Turkic-speaking people live in the western part of the country. They continue to hunt with golden eagles, most likely the same type of bird Marco Polo saw snatching wolves off the ground.

As hunters ride their horses, the birds sit on their arms. The eagles are so large and heavy, the riders use wooden poles to help their arms support the birds. Since 2000, the Golden Eagle Festival has been held in the Altay Mountains (a mountain range in central Asia, where Russia, China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan come together). It attracts tourists, who come to watch the eagles hunt.



**The ancient tradition of training birds to hunt continues. This modern hunter has a golden eagle.**

good for entering hard surfaces. Wider heads created more damaging wounds when they struck an animal or an enemy soldier.

## HUNTING SKILLS

For Mongol men, hunting was an important part of survival. But among the elite, it was also a form of leisure and a social event. Even as they settled in sedentary communities, the Mongols valued hunting as a recreational activity. In his summer capital of Shangdu, Khubilai Khan built an enormous hunting park. The park had streams and woods, and deer roamed the grounds. Khubilai also hunted in the wild, using trained lions and leopards to help him. The animals he hunted included boars (wild pigs), bears, and deer.

The Mongols also enjoyed falconry—using trained falcons to capture small game and other birds. Their trained birds included large eagles. In his *Travels*, Marco Polo wrote, “. . . those especially that are trained to wolf-catching are very large and powerful birds, and no wolf is able to get away from them.”

## CHINESE CULTURE AND THE MONGOLS

Before their conquests, the Mongols had contacts with China through trade and political alliances. The Chinese built their first dynasty almost 1,500 years before Temüjin earned the title of Great Khan. Throughout their history, the Chinese excelled at writing in many forms and styles, especially philosophy.

Even before the first Chinese dynasty, a group of great thinkers set down rules of society and government that continued to influence China through Mongol times and beyond. The most important of these thinkers was Confucius. He taught that everyone had a specific role to play in society and should accept their position. Within this role, people were obligated to act morally. For example, just as a citizen had a duty to obey the rulers, the rulers had to govern fairly.

Confucius's ideas helped shape the system that trained government officials in China. Khubilai was suspicious of Chinese officials in his government, but Confucians still served the Mongols. These Chinese officials hoped they could make the Mongols accept Chinese culture and perhaps rule less harshly.

The Confucians tried to teach Khubilai their beliefs, but his limited knowledge of Chinese made this difficult. Still, the Great Khan made sure his second son was schooled in Confucianism and other aspects of Chinese culture. To further link the Mongols with the Chinese and to help educate the Mongols, Khubilai had some Confucian books translated into Mongolian. Khubilai also approved the establishment of the National History Office to document Mongol rule in China.

Throughout China's rise to power as the dominant nation in East Asia, its rulers supported the arts. Under Khubilai and his Mongol successors, this support continued. Khubilai enjoyed theater and had plays staged at his royal palaces. Theaters also drew large crowds in China's cities during his rule. Yuan Dynasty theater often combined short plays or skits with singing and dancing. Theatrical performances might also include mime and acrobatics.

Actors and other entertainers had higher social status under Khubilai than they had in the Jin and Song dynasties. The Mongols also did not seem to limit what subjects playwrights could show on stage. Under the old Confucian system, playwrights came from the class of educated government officials. Khubilai ended the civil service examination system, and anyone could write and stage plays. Under Khubilai,

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## The Riverside Pavilion

Guan Hanqing (ca. 1240–ca. 1320) was the leading playwright of the Yuan dynasty and one of China's greatest dramatic writers. His plays reflect the social conditions of his time—especially the problems faced by women.

This excerpt is from the play *The Riverside Pavilion*. Tan is a young widow. She is tricked by Abbess Bai, the head of a Buddhist convent, into marrying the abbess' nephew, Bai Shizhong. Bai Shizhong is the governor of Tanzhou, and Tan makes Bai promise to govern justly.

Powerful Lord Yang wants to take Tan for a concubine (a woman who lives with a man but is not married to him). To get her away from her husband, he tells the emperor that Bai is neglecting his duty. The emperor sends Lord Yang a gold marker that gives him permission to execute Bai.

Tan and Bai find out about the plot. Tan decides to pay a visit to Lord Yang, disguised as a fish seller. In this scene, she drinks with him, and asks him to write poetry.

**Tan:** *Your Honour, may I ask you to write a poem?*

**Yang:** *All right. Zhang Shao, bring pen, paper, and ink. . . . It is done.*

**Tan:** *Do read it to me, Your Honour!*

**Yang (reading):** *The chill dew falls, the moonlight gleams,*

*The autumn wind sweeps lakes and streams.*

*Let lovely maid a blossom hold,  
My inmost thoughts cannot be told;  
Descended from the sky by night,  
She knows my heart—for her I write.*

**Tan:** *What genius! I shall reply with another poem. . . .*

**Yang:** *Read it to me, ma'am.*

**Tan (reading):** *Two birds beneath the blooms are better than a lonely phoenix:*

*This sudden romance of ours was surely predestined,  
Like the fish and water we,  
The lake is cold but, with the moon as companion,  
We sail our boat through the night.*

**Yang:** *Wonderful, wonderful! Let's drink a few more cups, ma'am.*

After Yang and his servants are drunk, Tan steals the gold marker and Lord Yang's sword. When Yang goes to arrest Bai, he finds he has no permission from the emperor—only poems. Tan explains Lord Yang's plan, and the investigating sheriff declares that Yang will lose his official position.

(Source: *Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing. Silk Pagoda*. Available online. URL: [http://www.silkpagoda.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=600](http://www.silkpagoda.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=600). Accessed October 29, 2008.)



## CONNECTIONS

### Enduring Creative Works

More than 150 plays written in China during Mongol rule still exist today, and at least three times that many were written but did not survive. The Mongol theater of the Yuan dynasty shaped the kinds of opera still performed in China today.

playwrights and novelists also had greater freedom to use the language of everyday conversation, not the more formal language favored by native Chinese rulers.

During Khubilai's rule, more books appeared in China than during previous dynasties. In 1269, the Great Khan set up a government

office to print books, and he later gave land to schools so they could use the income from the land to publish texts.

In general, the Chinese were not interested in novels. They preferred poetry and essays, but these two written forms did not receive as much support from the Mongols as plays and novels did. Chinese poetry and essays were limited in conventions that were hundreds of years old by the time the Mongols arrived in China. They followed the Confucian ideals with which educated Chinese were familiar. For the Mongols, however, these very formal, subtle forms of literature were not as interesting or meaningful as the more narrative plays and novels. Still, Khubilai and his successors did invite poets to their palaces.

### THE VISUAL ARTS IN MONGOL CHINA

Khubilai and the other Mongol rulers of China appreciated their subjects' skills in making beautiful decorations. The Chinese had a long history as talented painters, sculptors, and porcelain (a type of very fine pottery) makers. They carved intricate designs into ivory, jade, and lacquer, a hard material made from the sap of Asian trees. Chinese artisans also produced colorful textiles out of silk and cotton. Some of these textiles were worn as clothes, while others were hung on the walls as art.

The Mongols did not make any specific contributions to the visual arts in China, but several important developments occurred under their rule. Some of the educated Confucians who were kept out of government service turned to the arts for work and self-expression. Under the Yuan dynasty, a style of painting called *wen ren hua* first appeared. The name means "literary man's painting" in Chinese. The works were

painted by well-educated amateur artists and were intended to appeal to educated people. *Wen ren hua* artists often painted highly detailed scenes from nature that depicted their own emotions.

Their work was different than the paintings done by “official” artists, who had trained at the Song dynasty academy for art. Traditional paintings focused on portraits, religious subjects, and scenes from everyday life. One Chinese painter at the Great Khan’s court, Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), was famous for his paintings of horses, a popular subject with the Mongols.

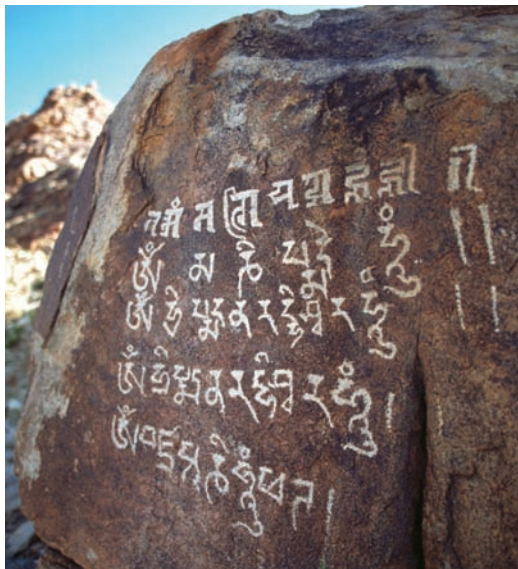
Sculpture under the Mongols tended to focus on traditional subjects. Most sculptures were bought by Buddhists, and focused on religious subjects. Sculptors worked with stone, wood, and bronze to create their images. Artists also carved reliefs—three-dimensional images that rose out from a flat surface.



## CONNECTIONS

### The Old Writing Returns

Mongol script was used from the time of Chinggis until 1942. At that time, Mongolia came under the influence of the Soviet Union. Soviet officials forced the Mongolians to write their language using the Cyrillic alphabet, which was developed in Russia. By 1990, only about 10 percent of Mongolians, mostly elderly, could still read the Mongolian script. However, Mongolian script survived in a part of Mongolia that became a region of China (called Inner Mongolia). As the Soviet Union began to break up in the early 1990s, many aspects of traditional Mongolian culture slowly returned. In the last few years, the Mongolian government has started teaching the traditional Mongolian script in schools.



**Mongolian script is slowly being revived.**

### A New Kind of Ceramics

One artistic innovation during Yuan times was the appearance of blue-and-white porcelain. This development did not occur with direct royal support, though the potters of the empire had great freedom to create what they wanted. The distinct blue-and-white style remained popular in China for several hundred years, and is often associated with the later Ming dynasty.

Under Khubilai, northern and southern Chinese artistic styles came together. His rule also helped bring Chinese influences to other lands, such as Persia, and introduced foreign artistic elements to China.

One important influence came to the empire from Tibet. Aniga (1244–1306), a Tibetan Buddhist artist and architect originally from Nepal, impressed the Phags-pa Lama with his artistic talents. The lama brought the artist to Khubilai, who commissioned him to build temples and other buildings in Shangdu and Khan-baliq. Aniga also designed gold jewelry, and the Great Khan eventually had him supervise all the artisans in China. The Tibetan influence on Chinese art included the depiction of religious figures wearing jewelry and colorful ornaments.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN MONGOL CHINA

The wide geographic range of the Mongol Empire helped bring new ideas to China. At the same time, the Mongols took Chinese technology and spread it to western Asia. One important Chinese technology was printing. The Chinese published the first books by carving characters onto wooden blocks. After dipping each block in ink, the printer pressed it onto a page.

Block printing was used in China for centuries, and historian Paul D. Buell suggests that the Mongols might have taken this process to the Middle East. As noted earlier in this chapter, Khubilai encouraged printing in China. This helped spread literacy there in the dynasties that followed the Yuan.

For many of his personal and political decisions, Khubilai relied on astrology. He and other Mongols wanted to know what might happen in the future, to help them make decisions. Marco Polo noted (in *The Travels of Marco Polo*) that the capital city of Khan-baliq had “about 5,000 astrologers” who “predict that there shall be thunder and storm in a certain month, earthquakes in another . . .”

To help his astrologers, Khubilai built a large observatory in Khan-baliq, where astronomers calculated the positions of the stars and planets. These people combined real science with astrology in their work. Many of the most learned astrologer/astronomers were Persian. The

Chinese astronomer Guo Shoujing (1232–1316) used a Persian calendar as the basis for his own accurate calendar.

After their conquests, the Mongols turned to outsiders for new medical knowledge. During their early nomadic years, the Mongols relied mostly on their shamans to heal them, which they did by using herbal remedies and contacting the spirit world. Their exposure to more scientific approaches to healing came from the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists and the Persian Muslims. Khubilai built a large medical college that housed ancient Chinese medical texts written on stone slabs.

Chinese medicine was based on the idea that the body is filled with a special energy called *qi*. Blocked or unbalanced *qi* leads to illness. Doctors use herbal medicine and acupuncture to try to restore the correct flow and balance of the energy. With acupuncture, the doctors place very thin needles at specific spots on a patient's body. Chinese doctors also use acupuncture on animals. A document from just after

## Why Is It So Hard to Make a Calendar?

Early peoples marked the months by the phases of the moon and the years by the movements of the sun and the change of seasons. Since the 12 phases of the moon add up to only about 354 days, while the year lasts about 365 1/4 days, the phases of the moon, movements of the sun, and change of seasons rapidly get out of sync.

Different cultures have solved this problem in different ways. In ancient Rome, Julius Caesar followed the advice of Egyptian astronomers and designed a calendar

that ignored the phases of the moon and only followed the sun. This Julian calendar is the ancestor of the Gregorian calendar we use today. Muslims use a lunar calendar that follows only the moon and ignores the sun. Thus, new year's day slowly cycles through all four seasons.

The Chinese calendar followed both the moon and the sun, but used a complex mathematical formula to add in extra months every few years to balance the two. The Mongols also adopted this system.



## CONNECTIONS

### Hot-Air Balloons

The Mongols borrowed another military idea from the Chinese and brought it with them on their European invasion of 1241. The Chinese developed the first simple hot-air balloons. At Liegnitz, in Poland, the Mongols used one shaped like a dragon as a signal for their troops. Later, European scientists began exploring the idea of using hot gases to lift humans off the ground. The first balloon flight with a human onboard took place in France in 1783. Today hot-air balloonists still rise above the ground for races, long-distance travel, and short rides over beautiful countryside.

the end of the Yuan dynasty shows where acupuncture needles should be placed to cure a horse's illnesses.

The Persians gave Chinese doctors new herbal drugs, and a Muslim medical book discussed how to treat burns, animal bites, and other wounds. The exchange also went the other way. Hülegü seems to have brought some Chinese medical practices to Persia.

For the Mongols, the influence of Persian and Chi-

nese technology was greatest in warfare. Historians are not sure where gunpowder was first used in warfare, although they know the Chinese used it to make fireworks around 1000. The Chinese also used it in making grenades, but they may have learned how to make these small explosives from the Muslims of Syria. In addition, the Chinese had simple guns that fired arrows. The Mongols used all these weapons, and they may have been the first people to use cannons, which were designed by their Chinese engineers.

The Song seem to have developed the first land mines in their efforts to stop the Mongol invasion. With one type, an enemy was lured to the mine with some kind of desirable object, such as an abandoned weapon. As the soldier got near the object, he stepped on a device just under the ground that lit a fuse and exploded gunpowder.

Under Mongol rule, Chinese engineers also developed naval mines. A bomb was placed in an inflated animal skin, and an incense stick served as the fuse. The bomb floated on the water near an enemy ship until the incense stick burned down and set off the gunpowder.

From the Persians, the Mongols in China borrowed the design for catapults, which could hurl either large stones or exploding bombs. The Chinese referred to one kind of catapult as the "Muslim engine." Marco Polo claims he showed the Mongols how to build a kind of catapult called a trebuchet, but these machines were already being

used before he reached China. Trebuchet catapults used a system of weights to lengthen or shorten the range of the missile being fired.

## PERSIAN CULTURE AND THE MONGOLS

When the Mongols invaded Persia, they found another country with a long and rich cultural history. The first Persian Empire reached its peak around 500 B.C.E. and spread from the Oxus River to northern Egypt. Two later empires were also centered in Persia.

The Persians absorbed the art and technology of ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria. After the Persian Empire began to weaken, it came under the influence of ancient Greece and Rome. The last major cultural influence on the region was Islam, which reached Persia soon after the religion was founded in the seventh century.

The rulers of Persia before the Mongols were the Seljuks, a nomadic Turkic people who had converted to Islam. Under their rule, both Arabic—the language of Islam in religious affairs—and Persian were used. Eventually Persian became the official language of the state. Since the Mongol Ilkhans relied on Persian officials to run the government, Persian remained the major everyday language. According to modern scholar Abolala Soudavar (writing in *The Court of the Il-Khans, 1290-1340*), Persian officials in the Mongol government also “were able to lure Mongol royalty . . . into the wonderful world of Persian literature and culture.”

## THE WRITTEN ARTS IN THE ILKHANATE

Persia had many great poets in its long history. Under the Seljuks, some poets wrote book-length works on personal subjects. Others wrote poems praising their rulers. During the first decades of the Mongol conquest, however, poetry declined in Persia. Many poets and other artists either died during the invasions or fled to other countries.

Under Mongol rule, poetry never regained the prominence it once had. The city of Shiraz, however, escaped Mongol destruction, and it produced several notable poets. One of these was Sadi (ca. 1184–1291), who followed a branch of Islam called Sufism. Sufis believe a person must go beyond the rules and regulations of religious life and search for a direct experience of God. Sadi’s most famous

## A Sufi Poet

The first Mongol conquest under Chinggis dramatically changed the life of another Sufi poet. Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) was born on the eastern edge of Persia, in what is now Afghanistan. When the Mongols roared through that region around 1221, Rumi fled to Syria and then settled in what is now Turkey.

During his travels, he met religious figures who shaped his beliefs, and those beliefs influenced his art. Rumi also developed a type of spinning dance that leads to a form of religious meditation. Some Sufis, known as “whirling dervishes,” still do this dance.

Rumi’s poetry was largely unknown in the Western world until relatively recently. Now he is often read and quoted by people who follow spiritual paths that stress love and tolerance for all people, as the poet did.

work, the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden), uses poetry and short sayings to instruct others—especially rulers—on how to live a good and meaningful life. He wrote in *Gulistan*, “All this is nothing as it passes away: Throne and luck, command and prohibition, taking and giving.” The poet meant that power and riches do not last forever and are not important to living a spiritual life.

Although poetry struggled under the Mongols, another form of literature reached its peak. Historiography is the study of history, looking at different original sources over time. The idea is to uncover how earlier historians may have distorted facts or made errors. It is the history of the

history of a particular subject. This kind of study requires a historian to carefully weigh other historians’ methods and prejudices.

Under the Mongols, Persian scholars excelled at historiography and general history. Writing in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, J. Rypka says, “. . . the principal historical works of the Mongol period are amongst the finest ever produced by any of the Islamic people.”

The historical writing of the Ilkhanate rested on several key factors. For one, the Mongols believed they were on a divine mission to rule the world, and they wanted their reign well documented. The Persians also had access to documents from all across the Mongol Empire. Some historians lived during the events they described, so they were able to add descriptions and quotes from their direct knowledge. At their best, the Persians wrote history that was also good literature.

The first of the great Persian historians under the Mongols was Juvaini (1226–1283). He worked for the Mongol government, serving in Baghdad. His greatest work was the three-volume *History of the World Conqueror*, about Chinggis and the Mongol Empire until 1258. The first volume detailed Chinggis's rise to power and included the brief rule of his son Küyük. The second volume focused on Khwarazm and Persia and the Mongol presence there. The last dealt with Möngke Khan's reign in the 1250s.

Even more notable was Rashid al-Din (1247–1318). He originally trained as a doctor, but served as a Mongol official as well as a historian. Rashid al-Din worked for the Ilkhan Ghazan, who asked him to write a history of the Mongols in Persia. The scholar went beyond that, writing a multi-volume work that also included a history of Mongol China and Europe.

## PERSIAN VISUAL ARTS

In arts and crafts, the Persians continued many old Seljuk styles during the Mongols' rule. In ceramics and other crafts, certain images were commonly used through the end of the 13th century. These included representations of stars and planets and people performing everyday activities. Craftsmen also illustrated scenes from the *Shah-nama* (Book of Kings), a poetic history of Persia's rulers.

Centuries after the Mongols lost control in Persia, Iranian scholars wrote that painting truly blossomed under Mongol rule. Rashid al-Din started a school for artists, and Ghazan and the Ilkhans who followed him supported the arts.

Painting received a boost when the Ilkhans commissioned a history of their rule, similar to the *Shah-nama*. The Mongols had Persian artists illustrate scenes from the history, and illustrated books became a long-lasting art form in Persia. Illustrating the books required small, detailed paintings, called miniatures. Some Chinese artistic styles were included in these works. The Chinese influence can be seen in how mountains and people are drawn. The Persian artists were the true masters of miniature painting.

Rashid al-Din also played a role in the building projects of the Mongol era. Persian architecture reflected styles that existed throughout the Islamic world, with domed buildings that had as many as

### Judging the Historians

Modern-day readers of Juvaini and Rashid al-Din must do their own historiographical examinations. Both men tried to be fair and accurate. Still, they were employed by the Mongols and could not be overly critical of them. This may have influenced what they wrote. Rashid al-Din, in particular, wanted to show that the Mongol rulers before Ghazan had harmed Persia, while Ghazan's reforms were helpful.

12 sides. The wealthy Persians and Mongols of the Ilkhanate spent lavishly on large burial complexes.

For the Mongols, building public tombs was a break from tradition. In their nomadic past, Mongol rulers always had themselves buried in secret locations. With their conversion to Islam, the Ilkhans followed the example of earlier Persian rulers. Ghazan, for example, built a 12-sided tomb surrounded by a mosque, schools, and a hospital. The complex also featured a pool house and a fountain. Later rulers of Persia and neighboring lands, such as the Ottoman Turks, copied the Mongol style in burial sites.

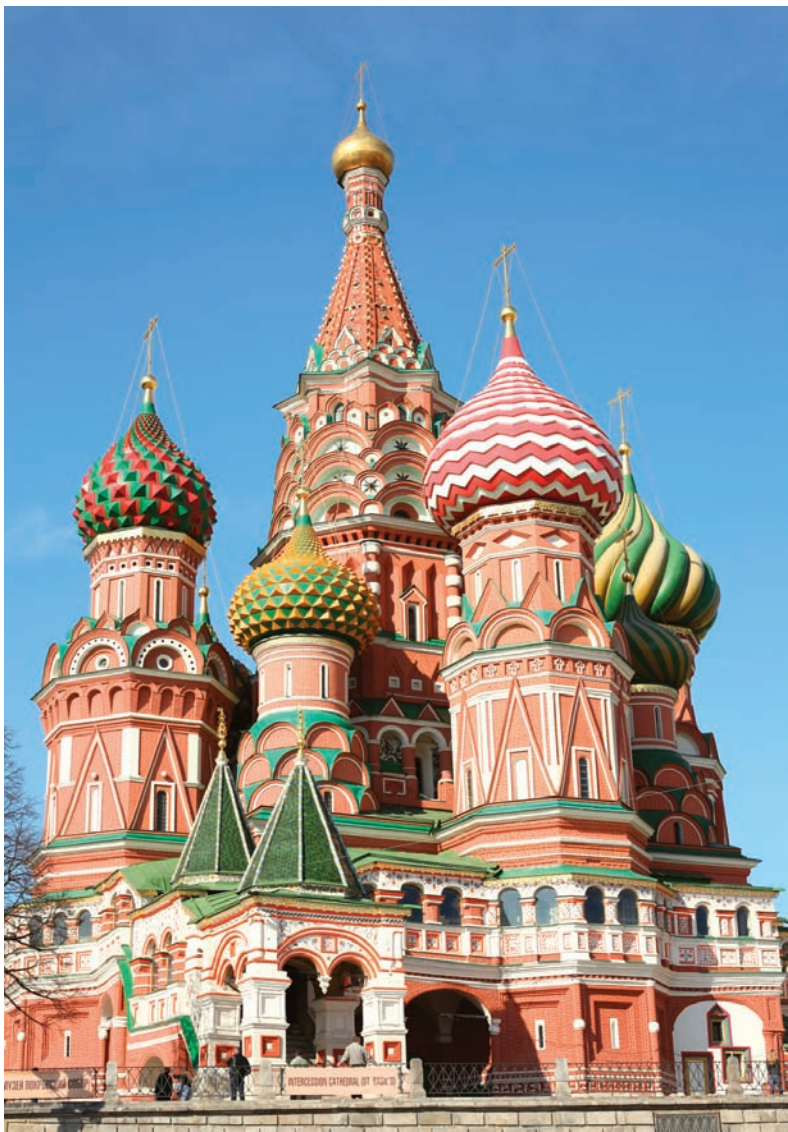
In Sultaniyya, the Ilkhan Öljeitü built himself a large tomb complex, or mausoleum. This domed mausoleum has been called one of the greatest construction projects carried out by a Mongol ruler. Part of the mausoleum still stands in Sultaniyya, where it is a popular tourist attraction.

## PERSIAN SCIENCE

Persia and other lands of the Middle East benefited from their exposure to both Western and Indian scientific traditions. As a result, Islamic scholars were known for their scientific and mathematical pursuits. Mathematics was used to calculate the position of stars and planets, helping to create accurate calendars. Modern algebra is based on work done by Islamic scholars, and the word *algebra* comes from the Arabic word *al-jabr*, which means the joining together of disorganized parts.

Under the Mongols, Persian mathematicians mostly improved on work that had been done a few centuries earlier, rather than making new discoveries. In astronomy, however, scientists under the Mongols excelled. The first Persian to work for the Mongols was Nasir al-Din (1200–1273). Hülegü built an observatory for him at Maragha, in what is now northwest Iran. It has been called the world's first true observatory for studying the skies. Nasir al-Din and other astronomers studied the orbits of the planets.

A scientist named Kamal al-Din (d. ca. 1320) studied at the Maragha observatory, but he focused more on light than on the stars and planets. He wanted to understand why humans saw rainbows. With his experiments, he learned that light passing through water at a certain angle creates the colors that make up a rainbow.



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St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow shows the typical onion dome style of Russian Orthodox churches. The Russian Orthodox Church did not have to pay taxes under the Mongols. It gradually increased its influence on society.

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## **ART AND CULTURE IN MONGOL RUSSIA**

The khans of the Golden Horde did not inherit the same rich cultures that existed in China and Persia. In many ways, they remained truer to their native Mongol culture. Still, historians believe they did promote some arts and sciences, although the historical evidence is weak.

In Russia, major support for the arts came from the Russian Orthodox Church. The Mongol policy of religious tolerance helped

the church thrive. It was able to build more churches and commission religious artwork. The most common form of art was the icon, a painting on wood of saints and other holy figures. People kept icons in their homes and considered them to be holy objects. Icons were powerful symbols of the importance of the Christian faith, especially among uneducated peasants who could not read the Bible.

Although icon painting developed centuries earlier in the Byzantine Empire, icons became more common during the Mongol era, especially in the cities of Novgorod and Moscow. During the first years of Mongol conquest, icon painting suffered. When the Mongols ended their attacks and simply collected tribute, the art form regained strength.

The Russian Orthodox Church also shaped musical development in Russia. The introduction of Christianity brought chanting, a form of sung prayer. The Russians combined Byzantine chanting traditions with their own folk songs, creating what is called *znamenny* chant. This musical form survived through the Mongol era, although written records of the chants did not.

Russian literature during the Mongol period was mostly limited to chronicles. These recorded historical events of the city-states that emerged before and during the Golden Horde's rule. But the chronicles also had elements of myth or fable, so they cannot always be trusted as true history.

Most of the chronicles focused on religious and political events and ideas, trying to build pride in the Orthodox Church and local leaders. The Mongols begin to appear in the chronicles after the first Mongol invasions, though at times the authors seem to ignore Mongol rule. The first mention of the "Tatars" in the chronicles from Novgorod says, ". . . no one knew who they were or where they came from. . . . Today they come to take our land, and they will come to take yours tomorrow" (as quoted in Charles J. Halperin's *The Tatar Yoke*).

## THE CULTURAL WORLD OF THE ULUS CHAGHATAI

As in the lands of the Golden Horde, the rulers of the Ulus Chaghatai largely remained true to their Mongol cultural roots. In Central Asia, the Mongols found a culture influenced by Turkic, Persian, and Arab

sources. The Mongols avoided the region's large cities, where art and culture—influenced by Islam—had flourished for several centuries.

The sedentary areas that survived the Mongol invasion did not see many changes. The cities of Transoxiana continued to educate their children and support artisans. During the 12th century, the region had produced one of the greatest medieval doctors, known in Europe as Avicenna (980–1037). His medical books were read throughout the Middle East and parts of Christian lands. Other notable books from the pre-Mongol period included a dictionary of Turkic phrases.

The Ulus Chaghatai saw a great period of artistic expression under the rulers who followed Timur—known as the Timurids. The Timurids turned away from conquest and focused on large building projects, mostly in Samarkand. On the walls of some buildings were elaborate mosaics (pictures made with pieces of colored tile).

The greatest Timurid patron of art and science may have been Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), a grandson of Timur. On the wall of one school he built (according to Svat Soucek in *A History of Inner Asia*) were the words, “The search for knowledge is every Muslim’s duty.” The astronomers he gathered created detailed charts of the stars that corrected mistakes from earlier works. Ulugh Beg himself took part in some of this work. He also found time to write poetry and compose music. His brother Baysunghur (1397–1433) had a similar influence on Central Asian culture in Herat, in what is now Afghanistan.

Despite their reputation as violent barbarians, the various branches of Chinggis’s family played a role in keeping the arts and sciences alive for several centuries. The great cultures of Persia and China continued to thrive, and ideas shared across Mongol lands influenced old ways of thinking and creating art.



# EPILOGUE

THE WEAKENING AND EVENTUAL COLLAPSE OF THE EMPIRE Timur created was not the end of Mongol involvement in Central Asian politics. Several more dynasties with family ties to Chinggis Khan emerged. However, these later Mongols had little in common with those from the 13th century. Most of the new rulers spoke Turkic, practiced Islam, and knew Persian culture. The Mongol language and culture were limited to the traditional homelands and the lands bordering them.

The people with Mongol ties included the Uzbeks, who developed in an *ulus* that once belonged to Chinggis's grandson Shibani (dates unknown). This land near the Ural Mountains bordered the Russian territory of the Golden Horde.

During the 1430s, the Uzbeks moved close to Transoxiana, and during the early 1500s their ruler Muhammad Shibani (1451–1510) took control of Timur's former lands. A true descendant of Chinggis now ruled a large part of what had been the Ulus Chaghatai.

## THE MUGHALS OF INDIA

The last great dynasty with ties to Chinggis reached its peak in lands outside the traditional Mongol empire, in India. The eastern half of Chaghatai's old realm had been called Moghulistan since the middle of the 14th century. The people who lived there were called Moghuls. In English, *Moghul* is sometimes written *Mughal*, and that name is used for a dynasty that ruled in northern India for almost four centuries.

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### OPPOSITE

The culture of the horse remains a huge part of Mongolian life. These young men show off their riding skills while playing polo.

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## CONNECTIONS

### Many Names

Around 1460, a group of rebel Uzbeks left their ruler and joined up with nomads from what had been the Blue Horde of Kazakhstan. Together they formed a small khanate and were called Kazakhs. In later centuries, Russians gave them a new name, calling them Kyrgyz (also spelled Kirghiz). Today, both names can be seen in the geography of Central Asia, in the nations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Both countries have a population that combines descendants of the Turko-Mongols with ethnic Russians.

The founder of this dynasty was Zahirrudin Babur (1483–1530), a descendant of Timur who also had family ties to Chinggis. From his base in Fergana, a region in what is now Uzbekistan, he wanted to reestablish Timur's old empire.

The Uzbeks and the Persians, however, controlled most of those lands at the beginning of the 16th century. So Babur decided instead to invade northern India, just as

Timur had. After his victories, Babur used his ancestor's previous conquests to justify his rule.

Babur's Mughal dynasty thrived, thanks to the gold and silver of northern India. His successor created an empire that covered two-thirds of modern India, as well as parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Through the 17th century, the Mughal leaders considered themselves Central Asians, not Indians. They treasured their ties to Timur, and the first rulers of the dynasty honored their Mongol heritage. They often noted in official records that they followed the rules and customs of Chinggis Khan.

The Mughals built one of the world's greatest empires. Some of their kings dreamed of winning back their ancestors' homelands in Central Asia, but they never fulfilled that dream.

## THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

A later empire did span the lands of the old Ulus Chaghatai, and included the former Golden Horde and part of the Ilkhanate as well. With the end of Mongol control in Russia, the princes of Moscow rose to create the modern state of Russia. The czars, as the Russian emperors were later called, then expanded into Central Asia.

Many of the Mongols' former lands were ruled by Europeans for the first time. The Russians, however, were not typical Europeans

because their culture and politics had been shaped by Mongol rule the 13th and 14th centuries.

By the 17th century, Russia's czars were moving eastward across the northern part of Eurasia. They had already defeated the remnants of the Golden Horde, except the Crimean Tatars. During the 18th century, Russia moved into the steppes of Central Asia, which was the heart of what had been the Mongol Empire. Turko-Mongol traders worked with Russian merchants, and khans of small Tatar groups declared their loyalty to the czars.

Where they could not take over peacefully, the Russians used superior military force to take control of former Mongol lands. By the end of the 18th century, Russia had built its own empire in Central Asia. According to historian Hidehiro Okada, writing in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, the Russians had an easier time asserting their rule because of the example set by Chinggis hundreds of years before. The Great Khan claimed he had a god-given right to unify the world, and the idea of a single powerful state across Central Asia endured long after Chinggis was gone.

The Russian presence brought peace to a region where local rivalries often led to war. The Russians also brought modern European technology to the nomadic lands, building the first railroads and telegraph lines. The rule of the Russian czar in Central Asia also led many Russians and Ukrainians to settle in the region, spreading both the Russian language and



## CONNECTIONS

### The Tatars Today

The Russians called the Mongols of the Golden Horde *Tatars*, taking the name from one of the tribes Chinggis Khan had defeated when he unified Mongolia. From this name, Europeans came up with *Tartars*. Some historical sources claim this name was a reference to Greek mythology. Tartarus was the deepest part of hell, where wicked people received their punishment after they died. To the Europeans, the Mongols seemed as if they were demons from hell, so it made sense to change their name from *Tatars* to *Tartars*.

During World War II, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin forced the remaining Tatars of the Crimea to leave their homes and settle in other regions of the Soviet Union. He feared the Tatars would help the Germans in their fight against the Soviet Union. Today, thousands of Crimean Tatars are still trying to return to their homeland, which is now part of Ukraine. Descendants of the Golden Horde also live today in Tatarstan.

Orthodox Christianity. Still, Islam and traditional languages continued to thrive.

But along with the benefits of Russian rule came policies that were as bad as the worst of Mongol dominance in Russia. The czars imposed heavy taxes and forced civilians into military service. They also supported serfdom, a system similar to slavery that forced peasants to work for wealthy landowners. Serfs had some legal protections, but they could not leave their masters' lands. Russian serfdom did not end until 1861. (Serfdom, however, was never applied in Siberia or Central Asia.)

Russia's eastward movement across Asia brought it into direct contact with both China and Mongolia. By the 19th century, China was ruled by the Qing dynasty. As the Russians had done, the Qing emperors claimed a right to rule all the lands around them, because of their historical link to the Yuan dynasty of the Mongols. China took control of Mongolia in 1691. The part of the old Mongol homelands where the Mongol nobles were tightly controlled by the Qing emperors became known as Inner Mongolia. The part of the Mongol homeland that remained under the control of local nobles descended from Chinggis Khan was known as Outer Mongolia.

## MODERN MONGOLIA

In 1917, Russian revolutionaries overthrew their country's last czar and eventually installed a communist government. Under communism, the state owns almost all property. One political party—the Communist Party—controls the government and the economy. The Russian communists divided the vast territory they controlled into a series of republics, all united under the name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Moscow was the capital of this new nation and Russia was the dominant republic. The Soviet Union created 14 other Soviet Socialist Republics, and most had once been part of the Mongol Empire. These territories were centered in what had been the Ulus Chaghatai, the northeastern part of the Ilkhanate, and the southern and eastern lands of the Golden Horde. The five in Central Asia were Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were under Ilkhanate influence, while the Golden Horde ruled or influenced what became Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. (After the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, all these republics became independent nations.)

In 1921, Soviet troops helped the Mongolians in Outer Mongolia defeat Chinese forces and Russians who opposed communism. In 1924, Mongolia declared its independence as the People's Republic of Mongolia. In reality, it came under the direct influence of the Soviet Union. Some Mongols also lived in lands that were part of the Soviet Union.

Under Soviet domination, Mongolia adopted a communist government. As in the Soviet Union, members of the Communist Party dominated all aspects of politics and the economy. Officials cracked down on the Mongolians' traditional religions—Buddhism and shamanism. The communists destroyed temples and killed monks. The Soviets forced the Mongolians to abandon their traditional writing system and use the Russian alphabet.

The Soviet influence also led to some positive changes. Education became more widespread and farming methods improved. Still, the Mongols lacked political and cultural freedom. They also became extremely isolated from the rest of the world. The Soviets set up military

Mongolia was dominated by the Soviet Union for much of the 20th century. This 1984 photo shows a wall with photos of local communist leaders.



bases across Mongolia and pressured the country to forbid tourism in order to maintain secrecy at these bases.

In 1990, when Mongolians began demanding changes in their government, some protesters carried signs saying *morindoo*—“mount up.” This was the same cry Chinggis Khan used to send his troops into battle. Mongolia threw off its ties to the Soviets in 1991, and Mongolian leaders began creating democratic political systems.

Today, the Mongols try to balance their nomadic ways from the past with modern life. People still live in felt *gers*, but outside the tent a solar-powered satellite dish pulls in television signals from around the world. Young boys still learn to ride bareback on horses, and then perhaps they attend college to study engineering.

Journalist Glenn Hodges, in an article published in the October 2003 issue of *National Geographic*, quotes Mongolian prime minister Nambaryn Enkhbayar, “In order to survive we have to stop being

## Unrest in Inner Mongolia

More Mongolians live in China than in Mongolia. Inner Mongolia, still a part of China, runs along the southern and eastern border of Mongolia and China. It includes large stretches of the Gobi Desert.

China named Inner Mongolia an “autonomous region” in 1947, which in theory means the people there govern themselves. In reality, the Chinese are firmly in control. Chinese immigrants began plowing up the Mongol steppes and pastures on a large scale in the early 1900s. And since 1947, the Chinese have established vast mines, steel mills, and cashmere mills to exploit Inner Mongolia’s resources.

Over the past few decades, the Chinese have tried to weaken Mongol culture by sending ethnic Chinese to work and live in Inner Mongolia. Ethnic Chinese now outnumber the Mongols by about six to one. Since the 1990s, some Mongols have protested the Chinese assault on their culture and limits on their political freedom.

In 2007, supporters of an independent Inner Mongolia protested the awarding of the 2008 Summer Olympics to China. They felt that a country that does not respect the culture of its minorities should not be awarded such a great honor.



nomads.” Yet many Mongols still choose the nomadic life—their main tie to the past glory of Chinggis Khan.

Finding a balance between old and new ways of life is not the only challenge facing Mongolians today. Recently, huge deposits of gold and copper have been found in Mongolia. It is estimated that the country has gold and copper ore worth at least \$38 billion. Mining these metals is bringing wealth. But it is also damaging the environment. Modern Mongolia must now try to balance its need for the wealth these minerals provide with a desire to preserve its natural environment.

### THE MONGOL LEGACY

The Mongol invasions influenced Asia and Europe in many ways. Thanks to the Mongols, the Ming dynasty ruled a united China, and

Television and tradition are side-by-side, as thousands of people in Mongolia still live in some form of traditional housing.

# EMPIRE OF THE MONGOLS



Mongol influence stretched from Korea to Eastern Europe and constituted the largest continuous area of land ever controlled by one family.

that unity remains today. China under the Mongols also made greater contact with the outside world than it ever had before.

The Mongol presence in Russia, through the Golden Horde, helped the princes of Moscow gain power and eventually build their own Central Asian empire. In Persia, the Ilkhans promoted the arts and helped the Persian language thrive, replacing Arabic as the main language. The Mongols' religious tolerance saw Roman Catholicism make its first gains in East Asia, and Buddhism spread into new areas. The Mongols also welcomed Islam and boosted its presence throughout Central Asia.

Another important feature of Mongol rule was greater contact between Europe and Asia. That contact, helped by the writings of several European priests and explorers, eventually led the nations of Europe to seek sea routes to Asia. By sea, the Europeans could trade directly for the highly valued spices of the Far East, instead of dealing



## CONNECTIONS

### The Lasting Attraction of Chinggis Khan

Today, the first Great Khan is honored across Mongolia. While some Asians and Europeans remember him as a bloodthirsty conqueror, modern Mongolians see him as a strong leader who united their people and created an empire that still shapes life in Eurasia.

In 1962, the Mongolian government erected a statue of Chinggis Khan in honor of his 800th birthday. He is a visible source of pride for most Mongolians. His name has also appeared on products, such as Genghis Khan vodka, and his face has appeared on Mongolia's money. An opera based on the life of Chinggis Khan was performed in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, in 2006.

Chinggis/Genghis Khan also appeals to Western filmmakers. The famous American actor John Wayne played Chinggis in a movie called *The Conqueror* in 1956, and in 1965 he was played by Omar Sharif in a movie called *Genghis Khan*. In 2007, Russian director Sergei Bodrov released *Mongol*, about the first Great Khan. The film was nominated for the 2007 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Bodrov plans to make two more movies about Chinggis's life.

Movies have also been made about Chinggis in France, Germany, Japan, China, and Great Britain. Chinggis has also appeared as a character on *The Simpsons* television show.

with Central Asian and Middle Eastern merchants who controlled the land trade with eastern Asia.

After the Mongols, no other nomadic people from the steppes challenged the power of sedentary societies. Modern technology changed warfare. Archers shooting from horseback could not compete with heavy artillery. And once the nomads stopped raiding others for their wealth, they could not compete with the growing economies of the cities of Eurasia. Even in their own homeland, until just recently, the Mongols had to accept foreign domination.

Historians David O. Morgan and Reuven Amitai-Preiss, in the introduction to *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy*, say the Mongols benefited from “the medieval equivalent of public relations consultants.” Such writers as Marco Polo and Rashid al-Din painted colorful, detailed portraits of the Mongols and their khanates. Thanks to those works, Morgan and Amitai-Preiss say, “the Mongols have remained on center-stage in the human imagination for hundreds of years.”

The Mongols still amaze because no other people ever built such a massive empire so quickly. They fascinate because they mixed horrible cruelties with wise policies. And parts of the world, from China to India to Eastern Europe, were changed forever because of their contact with the Mongols.

# TIME LINE

- 1206** The Mongols elect Temüjin as their leader, and he takes the name Chinggis Khan.
- 1209** Chinggis leads his first foreign invasions, against the Tanguts of Xixia.
- 1218** The Mongols launch their first major attack in the West, invading Khwarazm.
- 1227** Chinggis Khan dies. His territory is split into four parts.
- 1229** Chinggis's son Ögedei is named the new Great Khan.
- 1234** The Mongols defeat the Jin dynasty of northern China.
- 1237–1240** The Mongols establish control over northwest Russia, which is later known as the Kipchak Khanate or Golden Horde.
- 1242** The western campaign in Europe ends after the death of Ögedei.
- 1256** Hülegü begins the Mongol conquest of Persia, leading to the creation of the Ilkhanate.
- 1260** Kubilai Khan is chosen as the fifth Great Khan. A defeat in Syria ends the Mongols' westward drive across the Middle East.
- 1271** Kubilai Khan claims the title of emperor of China and founds the Yuan dynasty.
- 1279** Kubilai Khan defeats the Song dynasty and reunites northern and southern China.
- 1294** Kubilai Khan dies. His grandson Tëmur Öljeitü becomes the Great Khan.
- 1295** The Ilkhan Ghazan converts to Islam.
- 1334** The Ulus Chaghatai begins to split in half.
- 1335** Abu Said, the last Ilkhan, dies. The Ilkhanate breaks up.
- 1360** The Golden Horde breaks up.
- 1368** The Yuan dynasty is replaced by the Ming dynasty, ending Mongol rule in China.
- 1370** Timur rises to power in the Ulus Chaghatai.
- 1380** Russians defeat the Golden Horde at Kulikovo Pole.
- 1395** Timur defeats Toqtamish, severely weakening the Golden Horde's rule in Russia.
- 1405** Timur dies before his planned invasion of China.
- 1480** Ivan the Great of Moscow defies the Golden Horde.

## EMPIRE OF THE MONGOLS

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- 1504** Babur, a descendant of Timur and Chinggis, begins the conquests that lead to the founding of the Mughal Empire in India.
- 1575** Altan Khan proclaims Tibetan Buddhism the state religion of Mongolia.
- 1691** Mongolia comes under Chinese control.

# GLOSSARY

- ambassador** a person who represents a government in another country
- ancestor** the person from whom you are descended
- anda** a close bond in which two unrelated men promise their loyalty to one another and act as if they are related
- archery** using a bow and arrow
- architecture** the design of buildings
- astrology** a system for studying the movement of planets and stars to predict the future
- astronomers** people who study the planets and stars
- barbarian** person thought to be crude and warlike
- booty** wealth taken from the enemy after a victory in battle
- caravan** a group of people traveling together, often traders
- cavalry** soldiers who fight on horseback
- clan** a group of close-knit families
- communism** a political and economic system that calls for one political party to control the government, society, and most property
- corpses** dead bodies
- deported** forced to leave a country
- descendants** relatives who trace their roots back to one person
- dynasty** a family that keeps control of a government over many generations, with rule often passed from a parent to a child
- ger** a traditional Mongolian round tent made of felt draped over a wooden frame
- historiography** the study of historical research and the changing views of historians over time
- khan** a prince or king
- khanate** a mini-empire of the larger Mongol Empire, ruled by a Mongol prince
- lama** a Tibetan Buddhist monk
- lance** a weapon with a hard point mounted on a wooden pole
- loot** to steal valuable goods from a place, typically during a war or a riot
- nökör** a man who chose to serve under a particular leader, giving up their ties to their family in the process
- missionary** a person who is sent to a foreign land to convince others to accept his or her religious beliefs
- nationalism** strong support for one's own country, often with the belief that other countries are not as good
- nomad** a person with no permanent home who travels from place to place, usually to find fresh pasture for their livestock
- porcelain** a type of clay used to make pottery
- prophet** person who speaks for a god and often can predict the future
- proverbs** short sayings of wisdom passed down from one generation to another
- quriltai** a special meeting of Mongol chieftains to decide important issues
- reign** the length of time a particular ruler is in power
- reincarnation** after a person's death, the rebirth of his or her spirit into an animal or another person

**scourge** a person sent to carry out punishment, or a wide outbreak of suffering

**sedentary** living in one place and relying on farming as the main source of food

**siege** cutting off a town or fort from the outside so it cannot receive supplies and the citizens cannot escape

**steppes** flat, dry, mostly treeless areas of land

**stirrup** rings attached to a saddle in which a rider puts his or her feet

**successor** a person who comes after another and inherits or continues in the offices they held

**textiles** cloth, or the items made from cloth

**tribute** riches paid to a foreign ruler to prevent an invasion or show obedience

**ulus** hereditary territory

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# FURTHER RESOURCES

## BOOKS

Atwood, Christopher. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2004)

This book offers an overview of the nation of Mongolia, past and present.

Lane, George. *Daily Life in the Mongol Empire*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006)

Written by a well-known scholar of the Mongols, this book provides great detail in such areas of daily life as food, clothing, housing, religion, and health. The book also includes several traditional Mongol folktales.

Martell, Hazel Mary. *The World of Islam Before 1700* (Austin, Tex.: Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1998)

Islam was the dominant faith in much of the Mongol Empire. This book takes a brief look at the development of Islam from the seventh century until after the end of the Mongol era.

Pang, Guek-Cheng. *Mongolia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2000)

Traces the history of Mongolia with an emphasis on modern-day life in that country. The book examines such topics as religion, art, languages, and festivals.

Streissguth, Thomas. *Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire*. (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Lucent Books, 2006)

A look at the rise to power of Chinggis Khan and daily life during the early days of the empire. Photos highlight items made during the Mongol era.

Taylor, Robert. *Life in Genghis Khan's Mongolia* (San Diego, Calif.: Lucent Books, 2001)

This book covers Chinggis's rise to power, as well as social life within the empire he created. Special boxes deal with such issues as women wrestlers and Mongol personal habits.

Worth, Richard. *The Great Empire of China and Marco Polo in World History* (Berkeley Heights, N.J.: Enslow Publishers, 2003)

This book describes China during the reign of Khubilai Khan, focusing on the travels of Marco Polo. The author also addresses the historical debate regarding the truth of Polo's claims.

## WEB SITES

### Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan

[www.museum.upenn.edu/Mongolia/index.shtml](http://www.museum.upenn.edu/Mongolia/index.shtml)

The Web site has a history of Mongolia from ancient times to today, and a detailed look at modern Mongolia's links to its past. A companion site to an exhibit created by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

### Mongol-American Cultural Association

[www.maca-usa.org](http://www.maca-usa.org)

The Web site for this group explains ways in which traditional Mongol culture endures in the United States. The group holds an annual Chinggis Khan celebration, and the Web site includes photos from this event.

### Mongol Art

[www.mongolart.mn](http://www.mongolart.mn)

The Arts Council of Mongolia sponsors this site, which traces the history of many art forms in Mongolia. Current artwork is also featured.

### **Pre-Modern Imperialism: The Mongols**

[www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/index.html](http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/index.html)

This site covers both the main Mongol Empire and the smaller empires that developed after it. It offers detailed looks at Chinggis Khan and the Mongol army, as well as a time line.

### **The Silk Road Foundation**

[www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html](http://www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html)

This group, dedicated to the study of the Silk Road and Central Asia, offers information on the Mongols and other people who ruled this region. The site includes maps of the Mongol Empire and major trade routes in Central Asia.

### **The Silver Horde**

[www.viahistoria.com/SilverHorde/main.html](http://www.viahistoria.com/SilverHorde/main.html)

This Web site features the activities of Mongol reenactors—people who dress up as

Mongols and try to duplicate Mongol culture, especially military life. The site has detailed information on Mongol military practices.

### **The Story of the Weeping Camel**

[www.nationalgeographic.com/weepingcamel/index.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/weepingcamel/index.html)

This is a Web site for a documentary movie made in modern Mongolia. *The Story of the Weeping Camel* follows the adventures of a family of herders in the Gobi region who live in a traditional *ger*. They face a crisis when the mother camel rejects her newborn calf after a particularly difficult birth. The Web site offers information about the family in the film, camels, the Mongolian way of life, and Mongol history.

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