AIM: HOW DID THE MONGOLIAN EMPIRE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GENGHIS KHAN IMPACT THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD?

JOURNAL ENTRY
Why did such a remarkable family, gifted and competent, arise from such an isolated area at this time?

How did the Mongols, with a total population of less than 1.5 million, conquer such a large area and hold it for a century?
Nomadic Empires: The Mongols, 1200-1550

- Pastoral Nomadic Group of the Asian Steppe
- Genghis Khan united the tribes of the steppe under the Mongol banner.
- Horsemanship, archery, terror, and military strategy were keys to the Mongols quick rise to power.
- Established the largest continual land empire in history.
- GREATEST STRENGTH: Mobility via horses and mandatory military conscription of all men during times of war (ages 15-70).
“Man’s highest joy is victory: to conquer one’s enemies, to pursue them, to deprive them of their possessions, to make their beloved weep, and to embrace their wives and daughters.” GENGHIS KHAN
MONGOL WAR MACHINE

- All males 15-70 served in army all as cavalry.
- Organized army in “Myriads” (10,000’s).
- Used modern weapons, formation style would deploy men in groups of ten. Ten thousand men was called a tuman.
- TACTICS: retreat, turn, flank, destroy.
- ARMAMENTS: horsemanship, bow.
E: Counterweight trebuchet at Xiangyang, China 1272
What was the Mongol Leader, Chinggis Great Khan, Really Like? Depends on Whom You Ask!

According to a southern Chinese author who was an eyewitness of the bloody Mongol campaign in north China:
This man is brave and decisive, he is self-controlled, and lenient [merciful] towards the population; he reveres [respects] Heaven and Earth, prizes loyalty and justice (Qtd. in Ratchnevsky 167).

The Indian historian Juzjani wrote in 1256 in the Sultanate of Delhi and had been an eyewitness of Chinggis Khan’s raid on India in 1221. According to him:
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 [judgment], genius and understanding, awe-inspiring, a butcher, just, resolute, an over thrower of enemies, intrepid [fearless], sanguinary [bloodthirsty] and cruel (Qtd. in Saunders 63).

Chinggis himself had a letter written to a Chinese Daoist sage whom he had invited to discuss religious topics. The Daoist’s companion included the letter in the account of the trip. He said:
I wear the same clothing and eat the same food as the cow-herds and horse-herders. We make the same sacrifices and we share our riches. I look upon the nation as my new-born child, and I care for my soldiers as if they were my brothers (Qtd. in Ratchnevsky 149).

The Muslim historian Rashid al-Din, the official court historian of the Mongol khan of Persia. According to him, some of Chinggis’s sayings included.

- From the goodness of severity the stability of government.
- When the master is away hunting, or at war, the wife must keep the household in good order. Good husbands are known by their good wives. If a wife be stupid or dull, wanting in reason and orderliness, she makes obvious the badness of her husband.
- Only a man who feels hunger and thirst and by this estimates the feelings of others is fit to be a commander of troops. The campaign and its hardships must be in proportion with the strength of the weakest of the warriors.
- My bowmen and warriors loom like thick forests: their wives, sweethearts and maidens shine like red flames. My task and intention is to sweeten their mouths with gifts of sweet sugar, to decorate their breasts, backs and shoulders with garments [clothes] of brocade, to seat them on good geldings [horses], give them to drink from pure and sweet rivers, provide their beasts with good and abundant [plentiful] pastures, and to order that the great roads and highways that serve as ways for the people be cleared of garbage, tree- stumps and all bad things; and not to allow dirt and thorns in the tents.
- It is delightful and felicitous [good] for a man to subdue rebels and conquer and extirpate [destroy] his enemies, to take all they possess, to cause their servants to cry out, to make tears run down their faces and noses, to ride their pleasant-paced geldings [horses], to make the bellies and navels of their wives his bed and bedding, to admire their rosy cheeks, to kiss them and suck their red lips (Rashid al-Din, Collected Chronicles, qtd. in Riasanovsky 91)

According to inference from the laws that by tradition Chinggis set up:
If it is necessary to write to rebels or send messages to them they shall not be intimidated by an excessive display of confidence on our part or by the size of our army, but they shall merely be told: if you submit you will find peace and benevolence. But if you continue to resist—what then do we know [about your future]? Only God knows what then shall become of you (Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Syriacum, qtd. in Spuler 40-41).

Whoever gives food or clothing to a captive without the permission of his captor is to be put to death. [Leaders are to] personally examine the troops and their armament before going to battle, even to needle and thread; to supply the troops with everything they need; and to punish those lacking any necessary equipment. Women accompanying the troops [are] to do the work and perform the duties of men, while the latter are absent fighting.
All religions [are] to be respected and ... no preference [is] to be shown to any of them (Qtd. in Riasanovsky 83-85).

According to inference from the following decisions made by Chinggis Khan:
When fighting against hereditary enemies of his tribe, Chinggis’s own son begged him to spare the life of the enemy leader’s son. Chinggis replied: “How often have we fought them? They have caused us much vexation and sorrow. How can we spare his life? He will only instigate another rebellion. I have conquered these lands, armies, and tribes for you, my sons. Of what use is he? There is no better place for an enemy of our nation than the grave (Rashid al-Din, Collected Chronicles, qtd. in Riasanovsky 86)!

At a Grand Council meeting headed by Chinggis in 1202, it was decided that “in days gone by the Tartars killed our ancestors and forefathers. [Therefore] we will sacrifice them in revenge and retribution... by massacring all except the youngest... down to the very last male and the remainder will be shared as slaves among us all (Secret History of the Mongols, secs. 148, 154, qtd. in Ratchnevsky 151).

**Mongol Conquests and Expeditions 1211-1300 CE**
How Did Chinggis Turn a Pastoral Nomadic Society Into an Efficient War Machine?

Before Chinggis, the Mongols were organized into tribes that fought and raided each other for plunder, for women (no marriages were allowed between members of the same tribe), and to avenge insults. Largely self-sufficient, they often raided, traded with, and extracted tribute from neighboring settled agricultural communities.

In most tribes, there were no specialists other than shamans and blacksmiths. Women and men both contributed to the economy, and the division of labor by sex was not rigid. Those men who could afford it married more than one wife, each of whom had her separate household, owned property outright, and had considerable freedom of action. Women rode, shot with bow and arrow, and hunted. They gave political advice and could rise to the rank of chief, though rarely. The senior wife had special status and respect, and her children were often favored as heirs. On campaign, wives, children, and flocks often went with the army. Women and even children could be drafted to ride on the fringes of battle to simulate larger numbers. It is unclear whether they ever took an active part in combat. The tribes were divided into nobles and commoners, and only members of noble lineages could become chiefs, though class differences were not strongly marked.

All Mongols were fighters, but Chinggis made a reorganized army the core of the society and the carrier of many of his reforms. Under him and his successors, the Mongol army had the following characteristics, many designed by Chinggis himself:

- All males 15-70 served in the army, all as cavalry.
- The army’s 95 units of 10,000 soldiers were subdivided into units of 1,000, 100, and 10. Members of different tribes were mixed together in units of every size to ensure loyalty to the army above loyalty to the tribe. Allies and levies from conquered territories were also integrated into the fighting force, the latter usually being placed in the front ranks.
- Absolute obedience to orders from superiors was enforced.
- Officers had tight control over their troops’ actions (plunder only with permission, no one allowed to transfer out of their unit).
- Officers and men were bound to each other by mutual loyalty and two-way responsibilities.
- No one in the army was paid, though all shared to varying degrees in the booty. All contributed to a fund to take care of those too old, sick, or hurt to fight.
- During three months every year, large-scale hunting expeditions served as intensive military training simulations.
- Cavalry troops had to supply their own bows and other military equipment, which had to meet officers’ standards.
- Gathering intelligence had high priority. Scouts were sent out, local knowledge sought, and traveling merchants rewarded for information.
- Foreign experts and advisors were extensively used, notably Chinese and Persian engineers skilled at making and using siege weapons such as catapults and battering rams.

The highest level of government was Chinggis and his family, especially his sons by his senior wife and their descendants, known as the “Golden Family.” From among their members the Great Khans and after Chinggis Khan’s death the khans ruling the four successor empires were selected by agreement of the Kuriltai, the council made up of Chinggis’s family members and those others they invited.

Lack of clear-cut rules of succession opened the way for power struggles after the death of each ruler. Some earlier pastoral nomadic empires did not long survive the death of the leader who founded them. The Mongol state was unusual in surviving for so long as it did, even though it divided into four separate kingdoms, or khanates after about 1260.

Chinggis Khan’s administrators were picked for demonstrated high performance regardless of their wealth or social class. Among Chinggis’s closest advisors were people from both allied and conquered non-Mongol backgrounds, notably literate scholars and scribes from China, Persia, and the Inner Eurasian oasis towns.
What was the Mongol Leader, Chinggis Great Khan, Really Like?

5. What characteristics of Chinggis shown by the documents would have been particularly helpful to him in his career of conquest? If you had to choose three characteristics as the most helpful, which would they be? Why?

6. What characteristics of Chinggis shown by the documents would have been particularly helpful to him in governing his empire? If you had to choose three characteristics as most helpful, which would they be? Why?

7. Which of the items of information above about Chinggis’s character would you question as to accuracy, and why?

8. How would you explain variations in the descriptions of what Chinggis was like?

9. In what ways could Mongol ideas about women’s position in society help the Mongols’ career of conquest? To answer this question use information from all parts of this unit so far.
10. Would you agree with Chinggis’s idea that severity is good, because it leads to stable government? Why or why not? Did the idea apply more in Chinggis’s time and place than today? Why or why not?

11. Which of the accounts above do you consider most reliable, and why?

Student Handout 1.3 Discussion Questions – *How Did Chinggis Turn a Pastoral Nomadic Society Into an Efficient War Machine?*

12. What features of Mongol social organization and way of life favored their success in conquest. In what ways?

13. What features of Mongol social organization and ways of life would have favored successful government of conquered territories. In what ways?

14. What features of Mongol social organization and ways of life would have made for difficulties in conquest and in subsequent government of conquered territories?

15. What problems was Chinggis trying to solve by setting up his army the way he did?

16. What features of Mongol society favored the possibility of mobilizing a large proportion of the population for a war effort?

17. In what ways might the diversity and mixing that Chinggis favored have been an advantage, and in what ways a handicap in the conquests and the running of his empire?
AIM: WAS KUBLAI KHAN SUCCESSFUL IN CONTINUING THE EMINENT MONGOLIAN LEGACY OF GENGHIS KHAN?
Quotes, quotes, quotes: Here are four quotes from the later part of the 13th century. Read through them and decide which of them you believe to be the most and least accurate. Be prepared to explain why.

Persian historian: “They came, burnt, killed, plundered, and left.”

Persian historian Juvaini: “In the Muslim countries devastated by Chinggis Khan, not one in a thousand of the inhabitants survived.”

Muslim chronicler Ghazi: “Under the reign of Chinggis Khan, all the countries … enjoyed such peace that a man might have journeyed form the land of the sunrise to the land of sunset with a golden platter upon his head without suffering the least violence from anyone.”

Adviser to Kublai Khan: “I have heard that one can conquer the empire on horseback, but one cannot govern it on horseback.” [This is also recorded as, "The Mongol empire has been won from the saddle, but it could not be ruled from the saddle."]
Before his death, Genghis Khan divided his empire into administrative states called Khanates to be ruled by his sons and their descendants.
Nomadic Empires: The Mongols, c. 1000-1450

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Russia: The Golden Horde
Like their counterparts in the Middle East, the Mongol conquerors kept many of the local Russian rulers in place. Taxes on peasants were heavy, but they were collected by Russian bureaucrats. Trade was also supported.

China: The Yuan Dynasty
Established by Kublai Khan who defeated the Song Dynasty.
Established centralized rule via the use of Persian bureaucrats.
Confucianism outlawed, civil service eliminated.
Chinese were segregated from Mongol population.

The Middle East: The Ilkhantes
Mongols in Middle East employed local bureaucrats and converted to Islam by 1295.
Local rulers kept in place as long as sufficient tax revenues were delivered to Mongol authorities.
Westward expansion into Africa was stopped in 1260 when they were halted by the Mamluks of Egypt.
The Pax Mongolia: The Mongol Peace

For a century, the continent of Asia was united under Mongol rule resulting in peace and an increase in trade and cultural interaction. The benefit of this “peace” is debatable when contrasting it the loss of human life during the initial Mongol reign of terror.
The Mongol Decline

What factors do you think caused the decline of the Mongol Empire?

1. Despite great military accomplishments the Mongol Empire only lasted three to four generations.
2. They were great conquerors, but horrible administrators.
3. Overexpansion (as seen in the failed invasion of Japan) and over spending
4. Rivalries among Mongol leaders
5. By 1350, most Mongol territories had been conquered by other armies.
**Document 4**

**Information on the source:** In one of his wars of conquest, Chinggis Khan fought the Khwarezmid Empire in Central Asia and what is now Iran and part of Iraq. After his Mongol army took over the city of Bukhara, he spoke to the Muslim population at a mosque. These words from that speech are reproduced from Ata Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, translated by J. A. Boyle, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 105. Juvaini was a native of an area the Mongols conquered in what is now the northeastern part of Iran.

O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you.

**Document 5**

**Information on the source:** In 1243, Pope Innocent IV sent Franciscan friar John Plano Carpini to Karakoram to meet with the Kuyuk Khan, the third Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, to ask him to stop his attacks on Christians. After a wait, Carpini was given a reply, part of which is reproduced here.

And when you say: “I am a Christian. I pray to God. I arraign and despise others,” how do you know who is pleasing to God and to whom He allot's His grace? How can you know it, that you speak such words?

Thanks to the power of the Eternal Heaven, all lands have been given to us from sunrise to sunset. How could anyone act other than in accordance with the commands of Heaven? Now your own upright heart must tell you: “We [the Pope and monarchs of Europe] will become subject to you, and will place our powers at your disposal.” You in person, at the head of the monarchs, all of you, without exception, must come to tender us service and pay us homage, then only will we recognize your submission. But if you do not obey the commands of Heaven, and run counter to our orders, we shall know that you are our foe.

**Document 6**

**Information on the source:** Another passage from William of Rubruck’s account of his travels to the Mongol capital, Karakoram.

The next day (the Khan) sent his secretaries to me, who said: “Our lord sends us to you to say that you are here Christians, Saracens [Muslims] and Tuins [Buddhists]. And each of you says that his doctrine is the best, and his writings—that is, books—the truest. So he wishes that you shall all meet together, and make a comparison, each one writing down his precepts, so that he himself may be able to know the truth.” Then I said: “Blessed be God, who put this in the Khan’s heart. But our Scriptures tell us, the servant of God should not dispute, but should show mildness to all; so I am ready, without disputing or contention, to give reason for the faith and hope of the Christians, to the best of my ability.” They wrote down my words, and carried them back to him. Then it was told the Nestorians that they should look to themselves, and write down what they wished to say, and likewise to the Saracens, and in the same way to the Tuins.
Information on the source: Perhaps the most famous European visitor to China under Mongol rule was Marco Polo. He left Venice in 1271 and did not return until 1295. His account was treated with some doubts at first, though over time many Europeans had their views of China shaped by it. This passage deals with Khubilai Khan, a grandson of Chinggis Khan who became the fifth Great Khan of the Mongol Empire and the founder of China’s Yuan Dynasty. Here Marco deals with Khubilai’s views on Christianity and other religions. From *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (London: Penguin Books, 1958).

It was in the month of November that Kubilai returned to Khanbalik. And there he stayed until February and March, the season of our Easter. Learning that this was one of our principal feasts, he sent for all the Christians and desired them to bring him the book containing the four Gospels. After treating the book to repeated applications of incense with great ceremony, he kissed it devoutly and desired all his barons and lords there present to do the same. This usage he regularly observes on the principal feasts of the Christians, such as Easter and Christmas. And he does likewise on the principal feasts of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters. Being asked why he did so, he replied: ‘There are four prophets who are worshiped and to whom all the world does reverences. The Christians say that their God was Jesus Christ, the Saracens Mahomet, the Jews Moses, and the idolaters Sakyamuni Burkhan [Buddha] who was the first to be represented as God in the form of an idol. And I do honour and reverence to all four, so that I may be sure of doing it to him who is greatest in heaven and truest; and to him I pray for aid. But on the Great Khan’s own showing he regards as truest and best the faith of the Christians, because he declares that it commands nothing that is not full of all goodness and holiness. He will not on any account allow the Christians to carry the cross before them, and this because on it suffered and died such a great man as Christ.

**Document 8**

Information on the source: The Mongol Ilkhanate was founded in the 1200s by Chinggis Khan’s grandson Hulagu in what is now mainly Iran and Iraq and nearby parts of Central Asia. It arose at first during Mongol wars against the Khwarezmid Empire. At first the Ilkhanate was sympathetic to Buddhism and Christianity. After 1295, its rulers embraced Islam. This passage is by Persian chronicler Ata Malik Juvaini, who worked for the Mongols. In it, he describes the results of the Mongol destruction of a Shi’a group known as the Assassins. From Ata Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, translated by J. A. Boyle, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

So was the world cleansed which had been polluted by their evil. Wayfarers now ply to and fro without fear or dread or the inconvenience of paying a toll and pray for the fortune of the happy King who uprooted their foundations and left no trace of anyone of them.
DOCUMENT 4.
What do you think Chinggis Khan meant by referring to himself as “the punishment of God”?

What would have made him seem punishing to the Muslims in the mosque at which he was speaking? Consider the fact that his audience was Muslim. Might that fact alone explain the choice of words Chinggis Khan uses to describe himself here? Or do you think he really does think of himself literally as the punishment of God?

Ata Malik Juvaini worked for the Mongols and wrote a chronicle about them. He was also a native of Khorasan, an area of northeastern Iran conquered by the Mongols. How might this background explain the way he depicts Chinggis Khan here? Do you think he might be altering what Chinggis Khan said in some way or reporting it fairly and accurately? Explain your answer.

DOCUMENT 5.
From what you know about the pope and the Catholic Church’s leadership in the 1200s in Europe, why might the pope have felt justified in telling the Khan about his power in relation to the monarchs of Europe?

What can you reasonably conclude about the Khan’s actual feelings about Christianity from his brief remarks here?

DOCUMENT 6.
What can you conclude from this passage about the cultural life of Karakorum, the Mongol capital, in 1253–55 when William of Rubruck was there?

Why do you think the Mongol Khan wanted to have all the representatives of these religions meet and compare their ideas?

What do you think of the reasons William of Rubruck gives for refusing to take part in what he calls a “disputation”?

Compare this source with others that deal with Mongol views about religions other than their own. What similarities and differences do you notice among these sources?

DOCUMENT 7.
In what ways does Marco Polo’s account here of Khubilai Khan’s views about religion seem similar to that of William of Rubruck in Primary Source Document 6? What differences can you see?

Given the similarities, do you think these two sources show accurately how the Mongols viewed the religious ideas of the various cultures they encountered?

In what way might Marco Polo’s account reflect his own attitudes about Christianity as much as it describes Khubilai Khan’s? How reliable do you think his account is? Explain your answer.

DOCUMENT 8.
This passage refers to the Mongol efforts to eliminate a Shi’a sect known as the Assassins. What do you know about Shi’a Islam and about this particular sect?

Given the fact that the Mongols came to control the routes known as the Silk Road, what does this passage suggest their role was in fostering worldwide trade?

How would you compare this source’s evidence with the Mongols’ tolerant views about religion as described in Primary Source Documents 6 and 7?

CONCLUDING QUESTION:
BASED ON YOUR RESEARCH ABOUT THE MONGOLS, WHAT CAN YOU INFER ABOUT THEIR CIVILIZATION? WHAT ARE THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS OF THEIR EMPIRE? DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH VARIOUS HISTORIANS’ DESCRIPTION OF THE MONGOLS THAT THEY WERE A “BARBARIAN CIVILIZATION”? EXPLAIN