

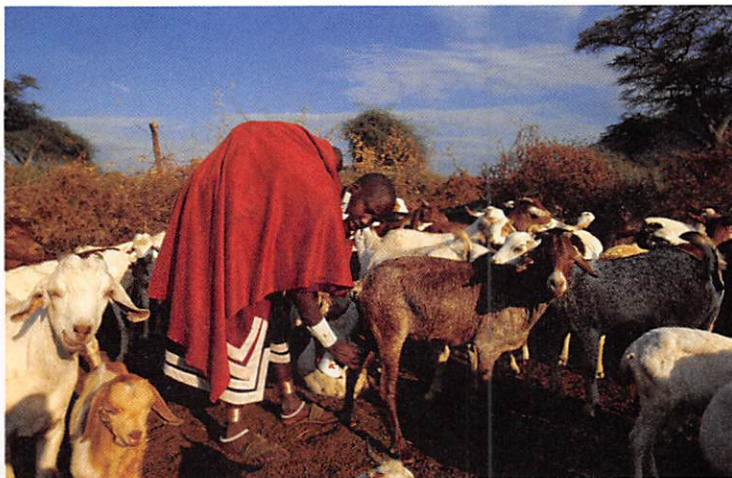
abandoning cultivation only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they migrated southward from the upper Nile Valley into the more arid regions of central Kenya. Later several Masai groups returned to agriculture after bitter conflicts in the mid-nineteenth century drove them to the periphery of Masai territory. Furthermore, the Masai, while trumpeting the superiority of their culture, were altogether willing to admit others into its charmed circle, much like the Chinese in relation to surrounding barbarians. Outsiders could become Masai, and many did so by obtaining a herd of cattle, by joining a Masai age-set, by learning the language, or by giving a woman in marriage to a Masai man and receiving “bride-wealth” in cattle in return.

The Masai were also dependent on those practicing other ways of life. Although they despised hunters as “poor people without cattle,” the Masai relied on them for animal skins, bows and arrows, shields, and, most of all, honey, which was required in their ritual ceremonies. They were even more involved with neighboring agricultural peoples. Despite a great deal of mutual raiding and warfare, that relationship also involved substantial economic exchange as women conducted frequent trade to supplement the diet of milk, meat, and blood derived from their cattle. Elaborate peace negotiations after periods of conflict, frequent intermarriage, and occasional military alliances against a common enemy also brought the Masai into close contact with nearby farmers, such as the Gikuyu. And in times of desperation owing to drought or disease, the Masai might find refuge with hunters or farmers with whom they had long-established relationships.¹¹

The prestige and the military success of the Masai encouraged those agricultural societies to borrow elements of Masai culture, such as hairstyles, shield decorations, terms referring to cattle, and the name for their High God. Farming societies also adopted elements of Masai military organization, the long Masai spear, and the practice of drinking cow’s milk before battle.¹² Peaceful interaction and mutual dependence as well as conflict and hostility characterized the relationship of nomadic herders and settled farmers in East Africa, much as it did in Eurasia.

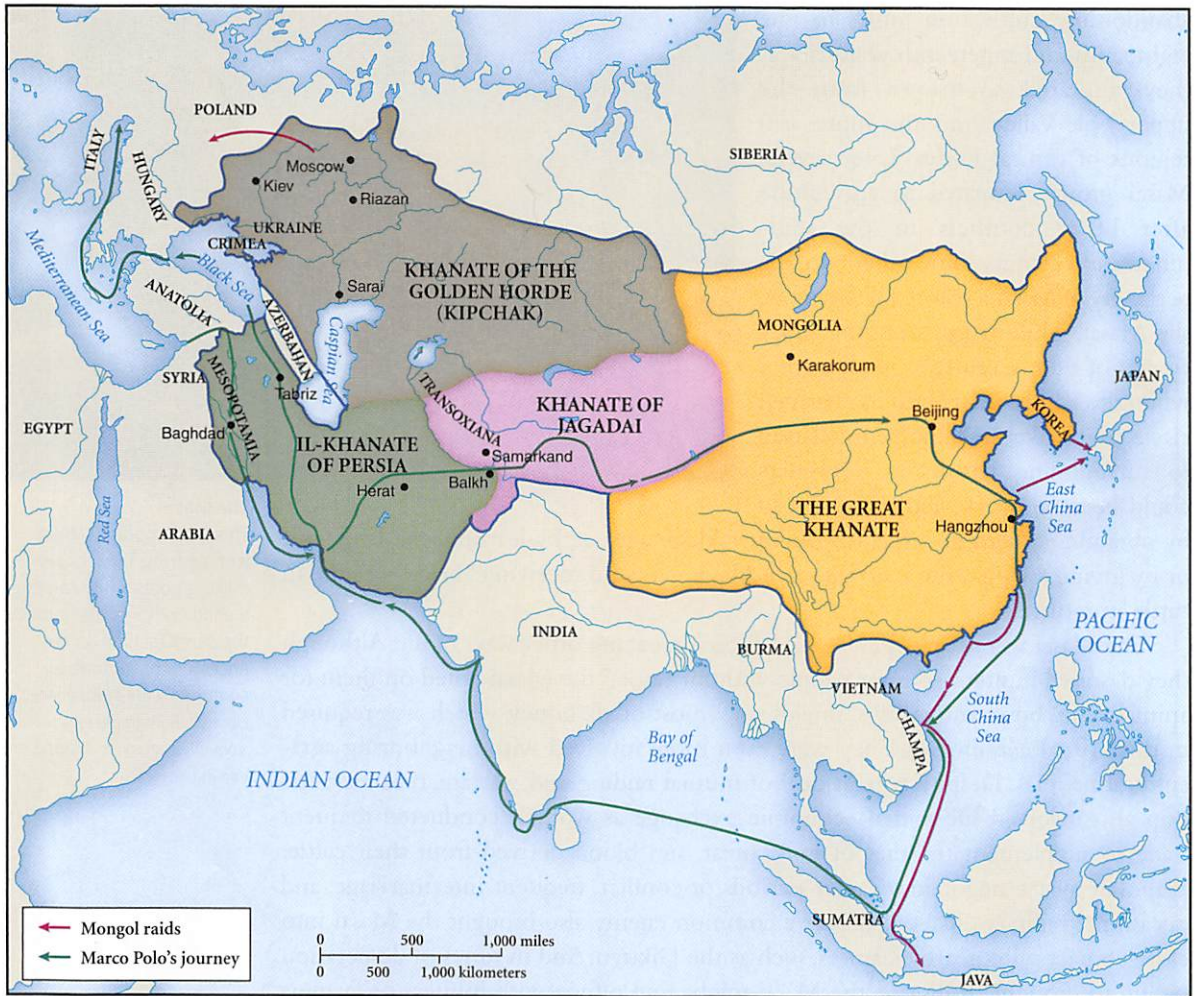
Breakout: The Mongol Empire

Of all the pastoral peoples who took a turn on the stage of world history, the Mongols made the most stunning entry. Their thirteenth-century breakout from Mongolia gave rise to the largest land-based empire in all of human history, stretching



The Masai

This contemporary Masai woman from Tanzania is milking goats while carrying a child on her back, in much the same fashion as her ancestors have done for centuries. (The Africa Image Library, photographersdirect.com. Photographer: Ariadne Van Zandbergen)



Map 12.1 The Mongol Empire

Encompassing much of Eurasia, the Mongol Empire was divided into four khanates after the death of Chinggis Khan.

from the Pacific coast of Asia to Eastern Europe (see Map 12.1). This empire joined the nomadic peoples of the inner Eurasian steppes with the settled agricultural civilizations of outer Eurasia more extensively and more intimately than ever before. It also brought the major civilizations of Eurasia—Europe, China, and the Islamic world—into far more direct contact than in earlier times. Both the enormous destructiveness of the process and the networks of exchange and communication that it spawned were the work of the Mongols, numbering only about 700,000 people. It was another of history's unlikely twists.

For all of its size and fearsome reputation, the Mongol Empire left a surprisingly modest cultural imprint on the world it had briefly governed. Unlike the Arabs, the Mongols bequeathed to the world no new religion or civilization. Whereas the Islamic community offered a common religious home for all converts—conquerors and conquered alike—the Mongols never tried to spread their own faith among

subject peoples. At the level of family life, that religion centered on rituals invoking the ancestors, which were performed around the hearth. Rulers sometimes consulted religious specialists, known as *shamans*, who might predict the future, offer sacrifices, and communicate with the spirit world, and particularly with Tengri, the supreme sky god of the Mongols. There was little in this tradition to attract outsiders, and in any event the Mongols proved uninterested in religious imperialism.

The Mongols offered the majority of those they conquered little more than the status of defeated, subordinate, and exploited people, although people with skills were put to work in ways useful to Mongol authorities. Unlike the Turks, whose languages and culture flourish today in many places far from the Turkic homeland, Mongol culture remains confined largely to Mongolia. Furthermore, the Mongol Empire, following in the tradition of Xiongnu and Turkic state building, proved to be “the last, spectacular bloom of pastoral power in Inner Eurasia.”¹³ Some Mongols themselves became absorbed into the settled societies they conquered. After the decline and disintegration of the Mongol Empire, the tide turned against the pastoralists of inner Eurasia, who were increasingly swallowed up in the expanding Russian or Chinese empires. Nonetheless, while it lasted and for a few centuries thereafter, the Mongol Empire exercised an enormous impact throughout the entire Eurasian world.

Snapshot Key Moments in Mongol History

Birth of Temujin	1162
Temujin gains title of Chinggis Khan (“universal ruler”)	1206
Reign of Chinggis Khan	1206–1227
Beginning of Mongol conquests	1209
Conquest of China	1209–1279
Initial assault on Persia	1219–1221
Conquest of Russia	1237–1240
Attacks in Eastern Europe; then withdrawal	1241–1242
Mongol seizure of Baghdad	1258
Khubilai Khan as ruler of China	1271–1294
Failed Mongol attacks on Japan	1274, 1281
Conversion of Il-khan Ghazan to Islam	1295
High point of plague in Europe	1348–1350
Ming dynasty established; end of Mongol rule in China	1368
End of “Mongol yoke” in Russia; Moscow emerges as center of Russian state	1480

From Temujin to Chinggis Khan: The Rise of the Mongol Empire

■ Description

Identify the major steps in the rise of the Mongol Empire.

World historians are prone to focus attention on large-scale and long-term processes of change in explaining “what happened in history,” but in understanding the rise of the Mongol Empire, most scholars have found themselves forced to look closely at the role of a single individual—Temujin (1162–1227), later known as Chinggis Khan (“universal ruler”). The twelfth-century world into which he was born found the Mongols an unstable and fractious collection of tribes and clans, much reduced from a somewhat earlier and more powerful position in the shifting nomadic alliances in what is now Mongolia. “Everyone was feuding,” declared a leading Mongol shaman. “Rather than sleep, they robbed each other of their possessions. . . . There was no respite, only battle. There was no affection, only mutual slaughter.”¹⁴

The early life of Temujin showed few signs of a prominent future. The boy’s father had been a minor chieftain of a noble clan, but he was murdered by tribal rivals before Temujin turned ten, and the family was soon deserted by other members of the clan. As social outcasts, Temujin’s small family, headed by his resourceful mother, was forced to live by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods. Without livestock, they had fallen to the lowest level of nomadic life. In these desperate circumstances, Temujin’s remarkable character came into play. His personal magnetism and courage and his inclination to rely on trusted friends rather than ties of kinship allowed him to build up a small following and to ally with a more powerful tribal leader. This alliance received a boost from Chinese patrons, who were always eager to keep the nomads divided. Military victory over a rival tribe resulted in Temujin’s recognition as a chief in his own right with a growing band of followers.

Temujin’s rise to power amid the complex tribal politics of Mongolia was never a sure thing. What contributed to his growing power were shifting alliances and betrayals, a mounting string of military victories, the indecisiveness of his enemies, a reputation as a leader generous to friends and ruthless to enemies, and the incorporation of warriors from defeated tribes into his own forces. In 1206, a Mongol tribal assembly recognized Temujin as Chinggis Khan, supreme leader of a now unified Great Mongol Nation. It was a remarkable achievement, but one little noticed beyond the highland steppes of Mongolia. That would soon change.

The unification of the Mongol tribes raised an obvious question: What was Chinggis Khan to do with the powerful army he had assembled? Without a common task, the new and fragile unity of the Mongols would surely dissolve into quarrels and chaos; and without external resources to reward his followers, Chinggis Khan would be hard pressed to maintain his supreme position. Both considerations pointed in a single direction—expansion, particularly toward China, long a source of great wealth for nomadic peoples.¹⁵

In 1209, the first major attack on the settled agricultural societies south of Mongolia set in motion half a century of a Mongol world war, a series of military

campaigns, massive killing, and empire building without precedent in world history. In the process, Chinggis Khan, followed by his sons and grandsons (Ogodei, Mongke, and Khubilai), constructed an empire that contained China, Korea, Central Asia, Russia, much of the Islamic Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe (see Map 12.1). “In a flash,” wrote a recent scholar, “the Mongol warriors would defeat every army, capture every fort, and bring down the walls of every city they encountered. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus would soon kneel before the dusty boots of illiterate young Mongol horsemen.”¹⁶

Various setbacks—the Mongols’ withdrawal from Eastern Europe (1242), their defeat in Egypt (1260), the failure of their invasion of Japan owing to violent typhoons (1274, 1281), and the difficulty of penetrating the tropical jungles of Southeast Asia—marked the outer limits of the Mongol Empire. But what an empire it was! How could a Mongol confederation, with a total population of less than 1 million people and few resources beyond their livestock, assemble an imperial structure of such staggering transcontinental dimensions?

Explaining the Mongol Moment

Like the Roman Empire but far more rapidly, the Mongol Empire grew of its own momentum without any grand scheme or blueprint for world conquest. Each fresh victory brought new resources for making war and new threats or insecurities that seemed to require further expansion. As the empire took shape and certainly by the end of his life, Chinggis Khan came to see his career in terms of a universal mission. “I have accomplished a great work,” he declared, “uniting the whole world in one empire.”¹⁷ Thus the Mongol Empire acquired an ideology in the course of its construction.

What made this “great work” possible? The odds seemed overwhelming, for China alone, after all, outnumbered the Mongols 100 to 1 and possessed incomparably greater resources. Nor did the Mongols enjoy any technological superiority over their many adversaries. Clearly the key to the Mongols’ success lay in their army. According to one scholar, “Mongol armies were simply better led, organized, and disciplined than those of their opponents.”¹⁸ In an effort to diminish a divisive tribalism, Chinggis Khan reorganized the entire social structure of the Mongols into military units of 10, 100, 1,000, and 10,000 warriors, an arrangement that allowed for effective command and control. Conquered tribes especially were broken up and their members scattered among these new units, which enrolled virtually all nomadic men and supplied the cavalry forces of Mongol armies. A highly prestigious imperial guard, also recruited across tribal lines, marked the further decline of the old tribalism as a social revolution, imposed from above by Chinggis Khan, reshaped Mongol society.

An impressive discipline and loyalty to their leaders characterized Mongol military forces, and discipline was reinforced by the provision that should one or two members of a unit desert in battle, all were subject to the death penalty. More

■ Explanation

What accounts for the political and military success of the Mongols?

positively, loyalty was cemented by the leaders' willingness to share the hardships of their men. "I eat the same food and am dressed in the same rags as my humble herdsmen," wrote Chinggis Khan. "I am always in the forefront, and in battle I am never at the rear."¹⁹ Such discipline and loyalty made possible the elaborate tactics of encirclement, retreat, and deception that proved decisive in many a battle. Furthermore, the enormous flow of wealth from conquered civilizations benefited all Mongols, though not equally. Even ordinary Mongols could now dress in linens and silks rather than hides and felt, could own slaves derived from the many prisoners of war, and had far greater opportunities to improve their social position in a constantly expanding empire.

To compensate for their own small population, the Mongols incorporated huge numbers of conquered peoples into their military forces. "People who lived in felt tents"—mostly Mongol and Turkic nomads—were conscripted en masse into the cavalry units of the Mongol army, while settled agricultural peoples supplied the infantry and artillery forces. As the Mongols penetrated major civilizations, with their walled cities and elaborate fortifications, they quickly acquired Chinese techniques and technology of siege warfare. Some 1,000 Chinese artillery crews, for example, took part in the Mongol invasion of distant Persia. Beyond military recruitment, Mongols demanded that their conquered people serve as laborers, building roads and bridges and ferrying supplies over long distances. Artisans, craftsmen, and skilled people generally were carefully identified, spared from massacre, and often sent to distant regions of the empire where their services were required.

A French goldsmith, captured by Mongol forces in Hungary, wound up as a slave in the Mongol capital of Karakorum, where he constructed an elaborate silver fountain that dispensed wine and other intoxicating drinks.

A further element in the military effectiveness of Mongol forces lay in a growing reputation for a ruthless brutality and utter destructiveness. Chinggis Khan's policy was clear: "whoever submits shall be spared, but those who resist, they shall be destroyed with their wives, children and dependents . . . so that the others who hear and see should fear and not act the same."²⁰ The Central Asian kingdom of Khwarizm, whose ruler had greatly offended Chinggis Khan by murdering and mutilating Mongol envoys and merchants, was among the first, but by no means the last, to feel the full

A Mongol Warrior

Horseback-riding skills, honed in herding animals and adapted to military purposes, were central to Mongol conquests, as illustrated in this Ming-dynasty Chinese painting of a mounted Mongol archer. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London/V & A Picture Library)



effects of Mongol terror. City after city was utterly destroyed, and their soldiers were passed out in lots to Mongol troops for execution, while women and skilled craftsmen were enslaved. Unskilled civilians served as human shields for attacks on the next city or were used as human fill in the moats surrounding those cities.

One scholar explained such policies in this way: “Extremely conscious of their small numbers and fearful of rebellion, Chinggis often chose to annihilate a region’s entire population, if it appeared too troublesome to govern.”²¹ These policies also served as a form of psychological warfare, a practical inducement to surrender for those who knew of the Mongol terror. Historians continue to debate the extent and uniqueness of Mongol brutality, but their reputation for unwavering harshness proved a military asset.

Underlying the purely military dimensions of the Mongols’ success was an impressive ability to mobilize both the human and material resources of their growing empire. Elaborate census taking allowed Mongol leaders to know what was available to them and made possible the systematic taxation of conquered people. An effective system of relay stations, about a day’s ride apart, provided rapid communication across the empire and fostered trade as well. Marco Polo, the Italian trader who traveled through Mongol domains in the thirteenth century, claimed that the Mongols maintained some 10,000 such stations, together with 200,000 horses available to authorized users. The beginnings of a centralized bureaucracy with various specialized offices took shape in the new capital of Karakorum. There scribes translated official decrees into the various languages of the empire, such as Persian, Uighur, Chinese, and Tibetan.

Other policies appealed to various groups among the conquered peoples of the empire. Interested in fostering commerce, Mongol rulers often offered merchants 10 percent or more above their asking price and allowed them the free use of the relay stations for transporting their goods. In administering the conquered regions, Mongols held the highest decision-making posts, but Chinese and Muslim officials held many advisory and lower-level positions in China and Persia respectively. In religious matters, the Mongols welcomed and supported many religious traditions—Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Daoist—as long as they did not become the focus of political opposition. This policy of religious toleration allowed Muslims to seek converts among Mongol troops and afforded Christians much greater freedom than they had enjoyed under Muslim rule.²² Toward the end of his life and apparently feeling his approaching death, Chinggis Khan himself summoned a famous Daoist master from China and begged him to “communicate to me the means of preserving life.” One of his successors, Mongke, arranged a debate among representatives of several religious faiths, after which he concluded: “Just as God gave different fingers to the hand, so has He given different ways to men.”²³ Such economic, administrative, and religious policies provided some benefits and a place within the empire—albeit subordinate—for many of its conquered peoples.

Encountering the Mongols: Comparing Three Cases

The Mongol moment in world history represented an enormous cultural encounter between nomadic pastoralists and the settled civilizations of Eurasia. Differences among those civilizations—Confucian China, Muslim Persia, Christian Russia—ensured considerable diversity as this encounter unfolded across a vast realm. The process of conquest, the length and nature of Mongol rule, the impact on local people, and the extent of Mongol assimilation into the cultures of the conquered—all this and more varied considerably across the Eurasian domains of the empire. The experiences of China, Persia, and Russia provide brief glimpses into several expressions of this massive clash of cultures.

China and the Mongols

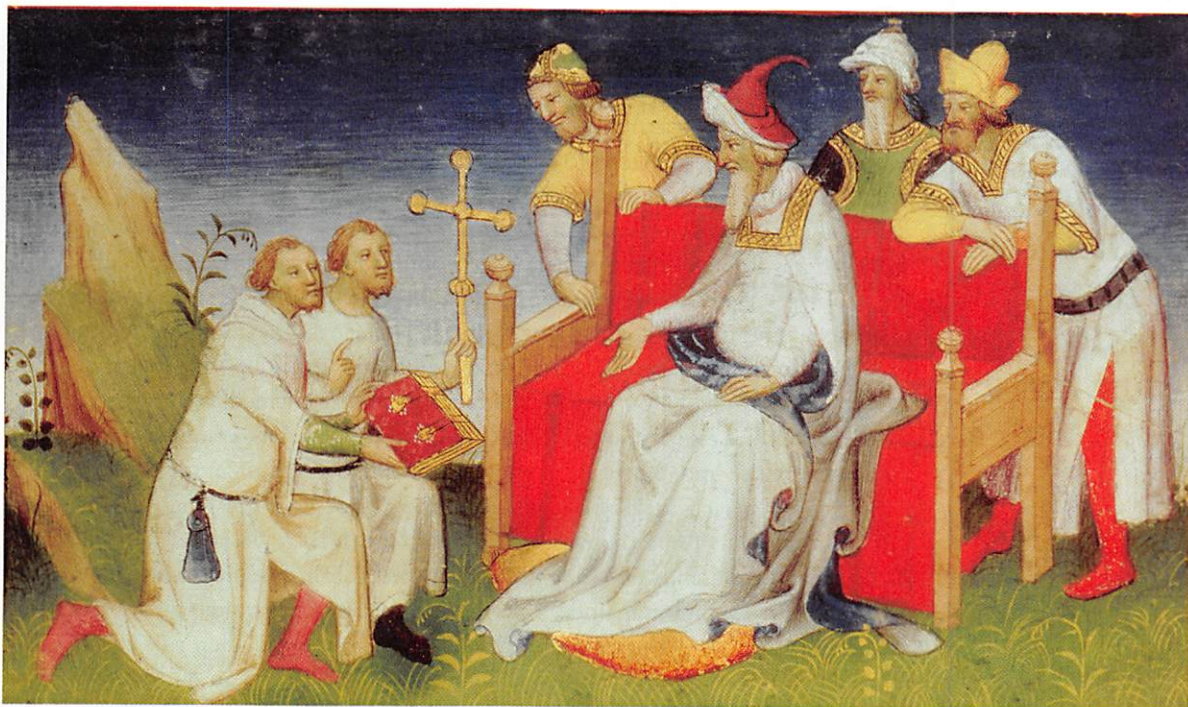
■ Change

How did Mongol rule change China? In what ways were the Mongols changed by China?

Long the primary target for nomadic steppe-dwellers in search of agrarian wealth, China proved the most difficult and extended of the Mongols' many conquests, lasting some seventy years, from 1209 to 1279. The invasion began in northern China, which had been ruled for several centuries by various dynasties of nomadic origin, and was characterized by destruction and plunder on a massive scale. Southern China, under the control of the native Song dynasty, was a different story, for there the Mongols were far less violent and more concerned to accommodate the local population. Landowners, for example, were guaranteed their estates in exchange for their support or at least their neutrality. By whatever methods, the outcome was the unification of a divided China, a treasured ideal among educated Chinese. This achievement persuaded many of them that the Mongols had indeed been granted the Mandate of Heaven and, despite their foreign origins, were legitimate rulers.

Having acquired China, what were the Mongols to do with it? One possibility, apparently considered by the Great Khan Ögödei in the 1230s, was to exterminate everyone in northern China and turn the country into pastureland for Mongol herds. That suggestion, fortunately, was rejected in favor of extracting as much wealth as possible from the country's advanced civilization. Doing so meant some accommodation to Chinese culture and ways of governing, for the Mongols had no experience with the operation of a complex agrarian society.

That accommodation took many forms. The Mongols made use of Chinese administrative practices, techniques of taxation, and their postal system. They gave themselves a Chinese dynastic title, the Yuan, meaning "great beginnings." They transferred their capital from Karakorum in Mongolia to what is now Beijing, building a wholly new capital city there known as Khanbalik, the "city of the khan." Thus the Mongols were now rooting themselves solidly on the soil of the world's most sophisticated civilization, well removed from their homeland on the steppes. Khubilai Khan, the grandson of Chinggis Khan and China's Mongol ruler from



Marco Polo and Khubilai Khan

In ruling China, the Mongols employed in high positions a number of Muslims and a few Europeans, such as Marco Polo, shown here kneeling before Khubilai Khan in a painting from the fifteenth century. (Ms 2810 f.5. Nicolo and Marco Polo before the Great Khan [vellum], Boucicaut Master, [fl. 1390–1430, and workshop]/Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France/The Bridgeman Art Library)

1271 to 1294, ordered a set of Chinese-style ancestral tablets to honor his ancestors and posthumously awarded them Chinese names. Many of his policies evoked the values of a benevolent Chinese emperor as he improved roads, built canals, lowered some taxes, patronized scholars and artists, limited the death penalty and torture, supported peasant agriculture, and prohibited Mongols from grazing their animals on peasants' farmland. Mongol khans also made use of traditional Confucian rituals, supported the building of some Daoist temples, and were particularly attracted to a Tibetan form of Buddhism, which returned the favor with strong political support for the invaders.

Despite these accommodations, Mongol rule was still harsh, exploitative, and foreign. Marco Polo, who lived in China during the time of Khubilai Khan, observed the hostility between the Mongols and their Chinese subjects.

The Cathayans [Chinese] detest the Grand Kaan's rule because he set over them governors who were Tartars [Mongols], or still more frequently Saracens [Muslims], and these they would not endure, for they were treated by them just like slaves.²⁴

The Mongols did not become Chinese, nor did they accommodate every aspect of Chinese culture. Deep inside the new capital they established the so-called Forbidden City, where the royal family and court could continue to experience something of steppe life. Animals roamed freely in large open areas, planted with

steppe grass. Many of the Mongol elite much preferred to live, eat, sleep, and give birth in the traditional tents that sprouted everywhere. In administering the country, the Mongols largely ignored the traditional Chinese examination system and relied heavily on foreigners, particularly Muslims from Central Asia and the Middle East, to serve as officials, as Marco Polo observed, while keeping the top decision-making posts for themselves. Few Mongols learned Chinese, and Mongol law discriminated against the Chinese, reserving for them the most severe punishments. In social life, the Mongols forbade intermarriage and prohibited Chinese scholars from learning the Mongol script. Mongol women never adopted foot binding and scandalized the Chinese by mixing freely with men at official gatherings and riding to the hunt with their husbands. Furthermore, the Mongols honored and supported merchants and artisans far more than Confucian bureaucrats had been inclined to do.

However one assesses Mongol rule in China, it was brief, lasting little more than a century. By the mid-fourteenth century, intense factionalism among the Mongols, rapidly rising prices, furious epidemics of the plague, and growing peasant rebellions combined to force the Mongols out of China. By 1368, rebel forces had triumphed, and thousands of Mongols returned to their homeland in the steppes. For several centuries, they remained a periodic threat to China, but during the Ming dynasty that followed, the memory of their often brutal and alien rule stimulated a renewed commitment to Confucian values and practices and an effort to wipe out all traces of the Mongols' impact.

Persia and the Mongols

■ Comparison

How was Mongol rule in Persia different from that in China?

A second great civilization conquered by the Mongols was that of an Islamic Persia. There the Mongol takeover was far more abrupt than the extended process of conquest in China. A first invasion (1219–1221), led by Chinggis Khan himself, was followed thirty years later by a second assault (1251–1258) under his grandson Hulegu, who became the first *il-khan* (subordinate khan) of Persia. More destructive than the conquest of Song dynasty China, the Mongol offensive against Persia and Iraq had no precedent in their history, although Persia had been repeatedly attacked, from the invasion of Alexander the Great to that of the Arabs. The most recent incursion had featured Turkic peoples, but they had been Muslims, recently converted, small in number, and seeking only acceptance within the Islamic world. The Mongols, however, were infidels in Muslim eyes, and their stunning victory was a profound shock to people accustomed to viewing history as the progressive expansion of Islamic rule. Furthermore, Mongol military victory brought in its train a degree of ferocity and slaughter that simply had no parallel in Persian experience. The Persian historian Juwayni described it in fearful terms:

Every town and every village has been several times subjected to pillage and massacre and has suffered this confusion for years so that even though there be generation and increase until the Resurrection the population will not attain to a tenth part of what it was before.²⁵

The sacking of Baghdad in 1258, which put an end to the Abbasid caliphate, was accompanied by the massacre of more than 200,000 people, according to Hulegu himself.

Beyond this human catastrophe lay the damage to Persian and Iraqi agriculture and their peasant farmers. Heavy taxes, sometimes collected twenty or thirty times a year and often under torture or whipping, pushed large numbers of peasants off their land. Furthermore, the in-migration of nomadic Mongols, together with their immense herds of sheep and goats, turned much agricultural land into pasture and sometimes into desert. In both cases, a fragile system of underground water channels that provided irrigation to the fields was neglected, and much good agricultural land was reduced to waste. Some sectors of the Persian economy gained, however. Wine production increased because the Mongols were fond of alcohol, and the Persian silk industry benefited from close contact with a Mongol-ruled China. In general, though, even more so than in China, Mongol rule in Persia represented “disaster on a grand and unparalleled scale.”²⁶

Nonetheless, the Mongols in Persia were themselves transformed far more than their counterparts in China. They made extensive use of the sophisticated Persian bureaucracy, leaving the greater part of government operations in Persian hands. During the reign of Ghazan (1295–1304), they made some efforts to repair the damage caused by earlier policies of ruthless exploitation, by rebuilding damaged cities and repairing neglected irrigation works. Most important, the Mongols who conquered Persia became Muslims, following the lead of Ghazan, who converted to Islam in 1295. No such widespread conversion to the culture of the conquered occurred in China or in Christian Russia. Members of the court and Mongol elites learned at least some Persian, unlike most of their counterparts in China. A number of Mongols also turned to farming, abandoning their nomadic ways, while some married local people. When the Mongol dynasty of Hulegu’s descendants collapsed in the 1330s for lack of a suitable heir, the Mongols were not driven out of Persia as they had been from China. Rather they and their Turkic allies simply disappeared, through assimilation into Persian society. From a Persian point of view, the barbarians had been civilized.

Russia and the Mongols

When the Mongol military machine rolled over Russia between 1237 and 1240, it encountered a relatively new third-wave civilization, located on the far eastern fringe of Christendom (see Chapter 10). Whatever political unity this new civilization of Kievan Rus had earlier enjoyed was now gone, and various independent princes proved unable to unite even in the face of the Mongol onslaught. Although they had interacted extensively with nomadic people of the steppes north of the Black Sea, nothing had prepared them for the Mongols.

The devastation wrought by the Mongol assault matched or exceeded anything experienced by the Persians or the Chinese. City after city fell to Mongol forces,

■ Comparison

How was the Russian experience of Mongol domination different from that of Persia or China?



Mongol Russia

This sixteenth-century painting depicts the Mongol burning of the Russian city of Ryazan in 1237. Similar destruction awaited many Russian towns that resisted the invaders. (Sovfoto/Eastfoto)

Russians, it was the “Khanate of the Golden Horde.” By whatever name, the Mongols had conquered Russia, but they did not occupy it as they had China and Persia. Because there were no garrisoned cities, permanently stationed administrators, or Mongol settlement, the Russian experience of Mongol rule was quite different than elsewhere. From the Mongol point of view, Russia had little to offer. Its economy was not nearly as developed as that of more established civilizations; nor was it located on major international trade routes. It was simply not worth the expense of occupying. Furthermore, the availability of extensive steppe lands for pasturing their flocks north of the Black and Caspian seas meant that the Mongols could maintain their preferred nomadic way of life, while remaining in easy reach of Russian cities when the need arose to send further military expeditions. They could dominate and exploit Russia from the steppes.

And exploit they certainly did. Russian princes received appointment from the khan and were required to send substantial tribute to the Mongol capital at Sarai, located on the lower Volga River. A variety of additional taxes created a heavy burden, especially on the peasantry, while continuing border raids sent tens of thousands

which were now armed with the catapults and battering rams adopted from Chinese or Muslim sources. The slaughter that sometimes followed was described by Russian chroniclers, although twentieth-century historians often regard such accounts as exaggerated.

They likewise killed the Prince and Princess, and men, women, and children, monks, nuns, and priests, some by fire, some by the sword, and violated nuns, priests’ wives, good women and girls in the presence of their mothers and sisters.²⁷

From the survivors and the cities that surrendered early, laborers and skilled craftsmen were deported to other Mongol lands or sold into slavery. A number of Russian crafts were so depleted of their workers that they did not recover for a century or more.

If the ferocity of initial conquest bore similarities to the experiences of Persia and China, Russia’s incorporation into the Mongol Empire was very different. To the Mongols, it was the Kipchak Khanate, named after the Kipchak Turkic-speaking peoples north of the Caspian and Black seas, among whom the Mongols had settled. To the

of Russians into slavery. The Mongol impact was highly uneven, however. Some Russian princes benefited considerably because they were able to manipulate their role as tribute collectors to grow wealthy. The Russian Orthodox Church likewise flourished under the Mongol policy of religious toleration, for it received exemption from many taxes. Nobles who participated in Mongol raids earned a share of the loot. Some cities, such as Kiev, resisted the Mongols and were devastated, while others collaborated and were left undamaged. Moscow in particular emerged as the primary collector of tribute for the Mongols, and its princes parlayed this position into a leading role as the nucleus of a renewed Russian state when Mongol domination receded in the fifteenth century.

The absence of direct Mongol rule had implications for the Mongols themselves, for they were far less influenced by or assimilated within Russian cultures than their counterparts in China and Persia had been. The Mongols in China had turned themselves into a Chinese dynasty, with the khan as a Chinese emperor. Some learned calligraphy, and a few came to appreciate Chinese poetry. In Persia, the Mongols had converted to Islam, with some becoming farmers. Not so in Russia. There “the Mongols of the Golden Horde were still spending their days in the saddle and their nights in tents.”²⁸ They could dominate Russia from the adjacent steppes without in any way adopting Russian culture. Even though they remained culturally separate from Russia, eventually the Mongols assimilated to the culture and the Islamic faith of the Kipchak people of the steppes, and in the process they lost their distinct identity and became Kipchaks.

Despite this domination from a distance, “the impact of the Mongols on Russia was, if anything, greater than on China and Iran [Persia],” according to a leading scholar.²⁹ Russian princes, who were more or less left alone if they paid the required tribute and taxes, found it useful to adopt the Mongols’ weapons, diplomatic rituals, court practices, taxation system, and military draft. Mongol policies facilitated, although not intentionally, the rise of Moscow as the core of a new Russian state, and that state made good use of the famous Mongol mounted courier service, which Marco Polo had praised so highly. Mongol policies also strengthened the hold of the Russian Orthodox Church and enabled it to penetrate the rural areas more fully than before. Some Russians, seeking to explain their country’s economic backwardness and political autocracy in modern times, have held the Mongols responsible for both conditions, though most historians consider such views vastly exaggerated.

Divisions among the Mongols and the growing strength of the Russian state, centered now on the city of Moscow, enabled the Russians to break the Mongols’ hold by the end of the fifteenth century. With the earlier demise of Mongol rule in China and Persia, and now in Russia, the Mongols had retreated from their brief but spectacular incursion into the civilizations of outer Eurasia. Nonetheless, they continued to periodically threaten these civilizations for several centuries, until their homelands were absorbed into the expanding Russian and Chinese empires. But the Mongol moment in world history was over.

The Mongol Empire as a Eurasian Network

During the postclassical millennium, Chinese culture and Buddhism provided a measure of integration among the peoples of East Asia; Christianity did the same for Europe, while the realm of Islam connected most of the lands in between. But it was the Mongol Empire, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that brought all of these regions into a single interacting network. It was a unique moment in world history and an important step toward the global integration of the modern era.

Toward a World Economy

■ Connection

In what ways did the Mongol Empire contribute to the globalization of the Eurasian world?

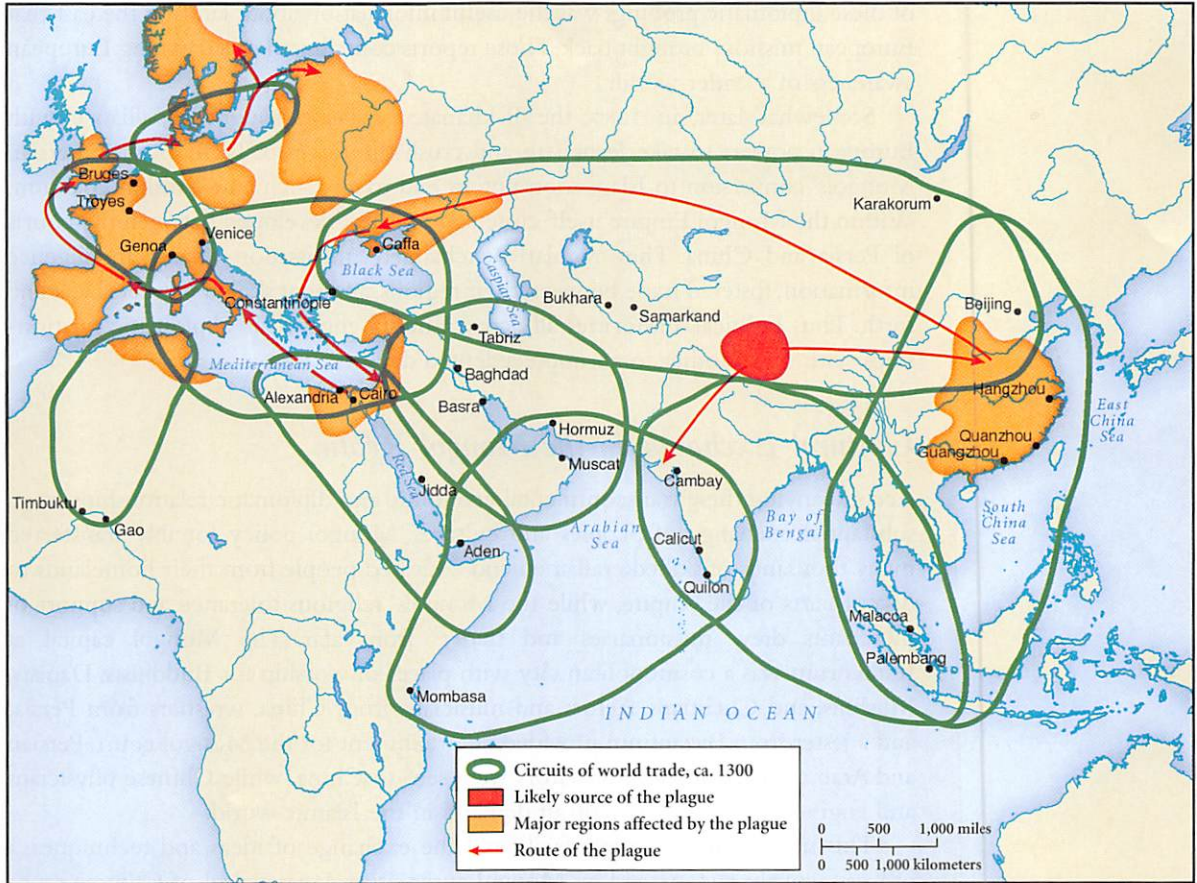
The Mongols themselves produced little of value for distant markets, nor were they active traders. Nonetheless, they consistently promoted international commerce, largely so that they could tax it and thus extract wealth from more developed civilizations. The Great Khan Ögödei, for example, often paid well over the asking price in order to attract merchants to his capital of Karakorum. The Mongols also provided financial backing for caravans, introduced standardized weights and measures, and gave tax breaks to merchants.

In providing a relatively secure environment for merchants making the long and arduous journey across Central Asia between Europe and China, the Mongol Empire brought the two ends of the Eurasian world into closer contact than ever before and launched a new phase in the history of the Silk Roads. Marco Polo was only the most famous of many European merchants, mostly Italians, who made their way to China through the Mongol Empire. So many traders attempted the journey that guidebooks were published with much useful advice about the trip. Merchants returned with tales of rich lands and prosperous commercial opportunities, but what they described were long-established trading networks of which Europeans had been largely ignorant.

The Mongol trading circuit was a central element in an even larger commercial network that linked much of the Afro-Eurasian world in the thirteenth century (see Map 12.2). Mongol-ruled China was the fulcrum of this vast system, connecting the overland route through the Mongol Empire with the oceanic routes through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. Here, some historians have argued, lay the beginnings of those international economic relationships that have played such a major role in the making of the modern world.

Diplomacy on a Eurasian Scale

Not only did the Mongol Empire facilitate long-distance commerce, but it also prompted diplomatic relationships from one end of Eurasia to the other. As their invasion of Russia spilled over into Eastern Europe, Mongol armies destroyed Polish, German, and Hungarian forces in 1241–1242 and seemed poised to march



Map 12.2 Trade and Disease in the Fourteenth Century

The Mongol Empire played a major role in the commercial integration of the Eurasian world as well as in the spread of the plague across this vast area.

on Western Europe. But the death of the Great Khan Ögödei required Mongol leaders to return to Mongolia, and Western Europe lacked adequate pasture for Mongol herds. Thus Europe was spared the trauma of conquest, but fearing the possible return of the Mongols, both the pope and European rulers dispatched delegations to the Mongol capital, mostly led by Franciscan friars. They hoped to learn something about Mongol intentions, to secure Mongol aid in the Christian crusade against Islam, and, if possible, to convert Mongols to Christianity.

These efforts were largely in vain, for no alliance or widespread conversion occurred. In fact, one of these missions came back with a letter for the pope from the Great Khan Guyuk, demanding that Europeans submit to him. “But if you should not believe our letters and the command of God nor hearken to our counsel,” he warned, “then we shall know for certain that you wish to have war. After that we do not know what will happen.”³⁰ Perhaps the most important outcome

of these diplomatic probings was the useful information about lands to the east that European missions brought back. Those reports contributed to a dawning European awareness of a wider world.

Somewhat later, in 1287, the Il-khanate of Persia sought an alliance with European powers to take Jerusalem and crush the forces of Islam, but the Persian Mongols' conversion to Islam soon put an end to any such anti-Muslim coalition. Within the Mongol Empire itself, close relationships developed between the courts of Persia and China. They regularly exchanged ambassadors, shared intelligence information, fostered trade between their regions, and sent skilled workers back and forth. Thus political authorities all across Eurasia engaged in diplomatic relationships with one another to an unprecedented degree.

Cultural Exchange in the Mongol Realm

Accompanying these transcontinental economic and diplomatic relationships was a substantial exchange of peoples and cultures. Mongol policy forcibly transferred many thousands of skilled craftsmen and educated people from their homelands to distant parts of the empire, while the Mongols' religious tolerance and support of merchants drew missionaries and traders from afar. The Mongol capital at Karakorum was a cosmopolitan city with places of worship for Buddhists, Daoists, Muslims, and Christians. Actors and musicians from China, wrestlers from Persia, and a jester from Byzantium provided entertainment for the Mongol court. Persian and Arab doctors and administrators were sent to China, while Chinese physicians and engineers found their skills in demand in the Islamic world.

This movement of people facilitated the exchange of ideas and techniques, a process actively encouraged by Mongol authorities. A great deal of Chinese technology and artistic conventions—such as painting, printing, gunpowder weapons, compass navigation, high-temperature furnaces, and medical techniques—flowed westward. Acupuncture, for example, was poorly received in the Middle East because it required too much bodily contact for Muslim taste, but Chinese techniques for diagnosing illness by taking the pulse of patients proved quite popular, as they involved minimal body contact. Muslim astronomers brought their skills and knowledge to China because Mongol authorities wanted “second opinions on the reading of heavenly signs and portents” and assistance in constructing accurate calendars, so necessary for ritual purposes.³¹ Plants and crops likewise circulated within the Mongol domain. Lemons and carrots from the Middle East found a welcome reception in China, while the Persian Il-khan Ghazan sent envoys to India, China, and elsewhere to seek “seeds of things which are unique in that land.”³²

Europeans arguably gained more than most from these exchanges, for they had long been cut off from the fruitful interchange with Asia, and in comparison to the Islamic and Chinese worlds, they were less technologically developed. Now they could reap the benefits of much new technology, new crops, and new knowledge of a wider world. And almost alone among the peoples of Eurasia, they could do so

without having suffered the devastating consequences of Mongol conquest. In these circumstances, some historians have argued, lay the roots of Europe's remarkable rise to global prominence in the centuries that followed.

The Plague: A Eurasian Pandemic

Any benefits derived from participation in Mongol networks of communication and exchange must be measured alongside the Eurasian catastrophe known as the “plague” or the “pestilence” and later called the Black Death. Originating most likely in Central Asia, the bacteria responsible for the disease spread across the trade routes of the vast Mongol Empire in the early fourteenth century (see Map 12.2). Carried by rodents and transmitted by fleas to humans, the plague erupted initially in 1331 in northeastern China and by 1347 had reached Western Europe. Its introduction to Europe is often attributed to a Mongol siege in 1346 of the Genoese city of Caffa in the Crimea, in which the Mongols, using catapults, hurled corpses infected with the plague into the city. It was perhaps the first recorded instance of biological warfare.

The disease itself was associated with swelling of the lymph nodes, most often in the groin; terrible headaches; high fever; and internal bleeding just below the skin. Infected people generally died within a few days. In the densely populated civilizations of China, the Islamic world, and Europe as well as in the steppe lands of the nomads, the plague claimed enormous numbers of human victims, causing a sharp contraction in Eurasian population for a century or more. Chroniclers reported rates of death that ranged from 50 to 90 percent of the affected population, depending on the time and place. Estimates for Europe suggest that between one-third and two-thirds of the population died within a few years. This intense first wave of the plague was followed by periodic visitations over the next several centuries. The plague, however, was not universal, for India and sub-Saharan Africa were much less affected than other regions of Eurasia.

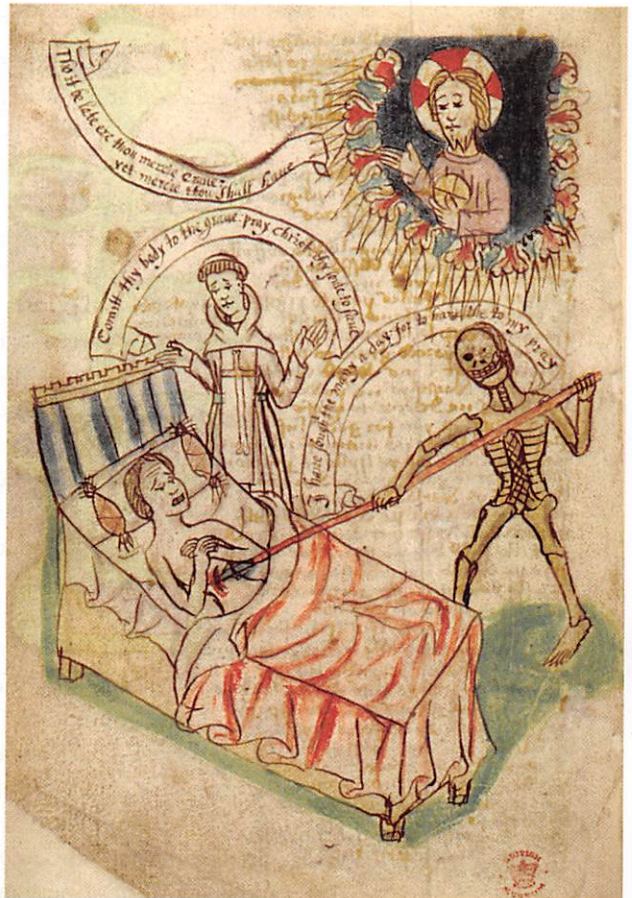
Although the plague in the fourteenth century represented a crisis all across Eurasia, our best information about its impact comes from Western

Change

Disease changes societies. How might this argument apply to the plague?

The Plague

In this English painting from the fifteenth century, a priest offers last rites to a man dying of the plague, while a smiling death figure wounds him with a spear and God looks down from above. What message does this picture convey? (British Library/HIP/Art Resource, NY)



Europe.³³ In some places, such as city governments in Italy, authorities learned practical ways of dealing with the disease by establishing quarantines, hiring doctors, and organizing burials, but the response of most people, no doubt, was couched in religious terms. So great was the initial shock of this massive mortality that chroniclers described it in apocalyptic language. “So many have died,” wrote an Italian observer in 1348, “that everyone believes it is the end of the world.” Viewing the plague as God’s judgment on a sinful world, many took part in the flagellant movement, in which people flogged themselves, sometimes almost to death, to atone for the sins that must have caused the pestilence. Attacks on Jews, who were sometimes held responsible for spreading the disease, sent many of them fleeing to Poland, where authorities welcomed their urban and commercial skills, leading to a flourishing of Jewish culture in the several centuries that followed. Still others fled into hedonism because life was so uncertain, while many joined mystical movements aimed at escaping from the world in an intense personal relationship with God. A clergyman in England expressed the dismay many must have felt.

For God is deaf nowadays and will not hear us
And for our guilt, he grinds good men to dust.³⁴

Beyond its immediate devastation, the plague worked longer-term changes in European society. Labor shortages following the initial outburst provoked sharp conflict between scarce workers, who sought higher wages or better conditions, and the rich, who resisted such demands. A series of peasant revolts in the fourteenth century reflected this tension, which also undermined the practice of serfdom. That labor shortage also may have fostered a greater interest in technological innovation and created, at least for a time, more employment opportunities for women. Thus a resilient European civilization survived a cataclysm that had the power to destroy it. In a strange way, that catastrophe may have actually fostered its future growth.

Whatever its impact in particular places, the plague also had larger consequences. Ironically, that human disaster, born of the Mongol network, was a primary reason for the demise of that network in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Population contracted, cities declined, and the volume of trade diminished all across the Mongol world. By 1350, the Mongol Empire itself was in disarray, and within a century the Mongols had lost control of Chinese, Persian, and Russian civilizations. The Central Asian trade route, so critical to the entire Afro-Eurasian world economy, largely closed.

This disruption of the Mongol-based land routes to the east, coupled with a desire to avoid Muslim intermediaries, provided incentives for Europeans to take to the sea in their continuing efforts to reach the riches of Asia. Their naval technology gave them military advantages on the seas, much as the Mongols’ skill with the bow and their mobility on horseback gave these nomads a decisive edge in land battles. As Europeans penetrated Asian waters in the sixteenth century, they took on, in some ways, the role of the Mongols in organizing and fostering world trade and in creating a network of communication and exchange over an even

larger area. Like the Mongols, Europeans were people on the periphery of the major established civilizations; they too were economically less developed in comparison to Chinese and Islamic civilizations; and both were prone to forcibly plundering the wealthier civilizations they encountered.³⁵ Europeans, of course, brought far more of their own culture and many more of their own people to the societies they conquered, as Christianity, European languages, settler societies, and their science and technology took root within their empires. Although their imperial presence lasted far longer and operated on a much larger scale, European actions at the beginning of their global expansion bore a striking resemblance to those of their Mongol predecessors. They were, as one historian put it, “the Mongols of the seas.”³⁶

Reflections: Changing Images of Nomadic Peoples

Until recently, nomads generally received “bad press” in history books. Normally they entered the story only when they were threatening or destroying established civilizations. In presenting a largely negative image of pastoral peoples, historians were reflecting the long-held attitudes of literate elites in the civilizations of Eurasia. Fearing and usually despising nomadic peoples, educated observers in China, the Middle East, and Europe often described them as bloodthirsty savages or barbarians, bringing only chaos and destruction in their wake. Han Kuan, a Chinese scholar of the first century B.C.E., described the Xiongnu people as “abandoned by Heaven ... in foodless desert wastes, without proper houses, clothed in animal hides, eating their meat uncooked and drinking blood.”³⁷ To the Christian Saint Jerome (340–420 C.E.), the nomadic Huns “filled the whole earth with slaughter and panic alike as they flitted hither and thither on their swift horses.”³⁸ Almost a thousand years later, the famous Arab historian Ibn Khaldun described nomads in a very similar fashion: “It is their nature to plunder whatever other people possess.”³⁹

Because nomadic peoples generally did not have written languages, the sources available to historians came from less-than-unbiased observers in adjacent agricultural civilizations. Furthermore, in the long-running conflict across the farming/pastoral frontier, agricultural civilizations ultimately triumphed. Over the centuries, some nomadic or barbarian peoples, such as the Germanic tribes of Europe and the Arabs, created new civilizations. Others, such as the Turkic and Mongol peoples, took over existing civilizations or were encompassed within established agrarian empires. By the early twentieth century, and in most places much earlier, nomadic peoples everywhere had lost their former independence and had often shed their nomadic life as well. Since “winners” usually write history, the negative views of nomads held by agrarian civilizations normally prevailed.

Reflecting more inclusive contemporary values, historians in recent decades have sought to present a more balanced picture of nomads' role in world history, emphasizing what they created as well as what they destroyed. These historians have highlighted the achievements of nomadic peoples, such as their adaptation to inhospitable environments; their technological innovations; their development of horse-, camel-, or cattle-based cultures; their role in fostering cross-cultural exchange; and their state-building efforts.

A less critical or judgmental posture toward the Mongols may also owe something to the “total wars” and genocides of the twentieth century, in which the mass slaughter of civilians became a strategy to induce enemy surrender. During the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union were prepared, apparently, to obliterate each other's entire population with nuclear weapons in response to an attack. In light of this recent history, Mongol massacres may appear a little less unique. Historians living in the glass houses of contemporary societies are perhaps more reluctant to cast stones at the Mongols. In understanding the Mongols, as in so much else, historians are shaped by the times and circumstances of their own lives as much as by “what really happened” in the past.

Second Thoughts

What's the Significance?

To assess your mastery of the material in this chapter, see the [Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/strayer](http://bedfordstmartins.com/strayer).

pastoralism	Temujin/Chinggis Khan	Kipchak Khanate/Golden
Xiongnu	the Mongol world war	Horde
Modun	Yuan dynasty China	Black Death/plague
Turks	Khubilai Khan	
Masai	Hulegu	

Big Picture Questions

1. Prior to the rise of the Mongols, in what ways had pastoral peoples been significant in world history?
2. What accounts for the often negative attitudes of settled societies toward the pastoral peoples living on their borders? Why have historians often neglected pastoral peoples' role in world history?
3. In what ways did the Mongol Empire resemble other empires, and in what ways did it differ from them? Why did it last a relatively short time?
4. In what different ways did Mongol rule affect the Islamic world, Russia, China, and Europe?
5. How would you define both the immediate and the long-term significance of the Mongols in world history?
6. How would you assess the perspective of this chapter toward the Mongols? Does it strike you as negative and critical of the Mongols, as “bending over backward” to portray them in a positive light, or as a balanced presentation?