

The Last Great Nomadic Challenges: From Chinggis Khan to Timur

The Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan

- Mongols were typical nomads: living off of their herds and trade, organized around the tribe, forming short-lived confederations, electing leaders, and valuing warrior virtues.
- Kabul Khan, in the early 1100s defeated a Chinese Qin army. His grandson, Temujin emerged from Kabul Khan's fragmented dominions. A **kuriltai**—or meeting of the Mongol leaders—convened in 1206. Temujin was chosen **kha-gan**—supreme ruler—as Chinggis Khan, in 1206.
- The Mongol army relied on mounted archers. Chinggis Khan brought unity and organization, creating **tumens** of 10,000 warriors. Scouting parties and messengers allowed the khan to hold together large areas, as did swift punishment for disloyalty. Information gathering supplied Chinggis Khan with maps that facilitated his conquests.
- Chinggis Khan's ambition led him to attack the northern Chinese Xi Xia kingdom, then the Jin Empire of the Jurchens.
- The Mongolian Kara Khitai Empire was next conquered by Chinggis Khan's forces. Subsequently, the Mongols defeated Muhammad Shah's Khwarazm Empire. By the time of Chinggis Khan's death in 1227, the Mongol Empire extended from Persia to the North China Sea.
- Chinggis Khan, although capable of great brutality, patronized artists and intellectuals in the realms he conquered. At his capital at **Karakorum**, he gathered the greatest thinkers from China and from Muslim lands. The Mongol imperium meant lasting peace for much of Asia. Merchants in particular profited from the calm.
- Following the death of Chinggis Khan, his empire was divided by his sons and his grandson **Batu**. The kuriltai then chose **Ogedai** as the next great khan. Ogedai extended the empire to the east and north.

The Mongol Drive to the West

- The **Khanate of the Golden Horde** was one of the four divisions of Chinggis Khan's empire. The goal of the Golden Horde was the conquest of Europe. Division in Russia made it vulnerable to Mongol aggression. By 1240, only Novgorod had avoided conquest.

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- Mongol rule was demanding, but also extended religious and cultural toleration. Moscow profited by Mongol rule to rebuild and to strengthen its hegemony. Mongol rule of Russia had a negative impact, but only a minor cultural legacy. Its greatest impact was in changing the direction of Russian history, leading its rulers to consolidate their power, and temporarily cutting Russia off from western Europe.
 - Early news of the Mongols led Europeans to equate Chinggis Khan with the mythical Christian king, Prester John. Even the news of the defeat of Russia failed to alarm the western Europeans. King Bela of Hungary contemptuously rejected Mongol demands, only to be defeated in 1240. The Mongols then raided further north in eastern Europe before withdrawing.
 - Hulegu, one of Chinggis Khan's successors, captured Baghdad in 1258. The impact on the Islamic heartland was enormous. **Berke Khan** threatened Hulegu's domains from the north. Finally, the Mongols' defeat at the hands of the Mamluks under Baibars stopped Hulegu's push to the west.

The Mongol Interlude in Chinese History

- The Mongols under **Kubilai Khan** continued their assault on China, having already conquered the Xi Xia and Jin empires. Kubilai took the title of great khan, and the dynasty he founded was known as the Yuan. Under his rule, Mongol and Chinese cultures were kept separate, and intermarriage was forbidden. The Mongol elite ruled the ethnic Chinese. However, Kubilai Khan's capital at Tatu followed Chinese precedents, as did court ritual.
- Mongol women kept the freer roles to which they were accustomed. Kubilai's wife **Chabi** played an influential part in his government.
- Kubilai and Chabi patronized artists and intellectuals, especially Persians and Turks. Travelers from many areas arrived at their court, including Marco Polo.
- Kubilai was more effective in his efforts to keep Mongols and ethnic Chinese separate than he was in encouraging his people to adapt to Chinese ways. Chinese resentment of the invaders was exacerbated by Mongol support for artisans and merchants, upsetting the traditional order. The Yuan dynasty saw a revival of urban life and high culture. Kubilai Khan had plans, never fully realized, to lighten the tax burden on peasants and establish a system of village schools.
- The Yuan dynasty was short-lived, and lost much of its vigor at the death of Kubilai Khan. His successors' abuses heightened hostility towards the Mongols. Crime became widespread, and secret sects—the **White Lotus Society** is an example—found large followings. Order was restored under the leadership of **Ju Yuanzhang**, a commoner, who founded the **Ming dynasty**.
- The brief rule of **Timur-i Lang** again destabilized central Asia. From Samarkand, the Turkish leader conquered Persia, much of the Middle East, India, and southern Russia. Although Timur was himself cultured, his legacy was one of brutal destruction.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. One problem facing historians who study the Mongols is:
 - (A) lack of primary sources.
 - (B) inability to translate the Mongolian language and its literature.
 - (C) all contemporary chroniclers used exaggeration and hyperbole to describe the Mongols.
 - (D) the bias of historical accounts, written by those defeated by the Mongols.
 - (E) the Mongols never wrote anything down, leaving no written records.
2. Although the Mongols were often brutal, they were
 - (A) no more violent than Europeans, Muslims, or the Chinese of the day.
 - (B) tolerant of religious differences and encouraged trade.
 - (C) unwilling to destroy art works and buildings.
 - (D) devoted to nonviolence.
 - (E) apt to leave enemies alive and revolting cities unpunished.
3. Pastoral nomads from the central Asian steppe who had threatened sedentary cultures throughout world history included all of these EXCEPT:
 - (A) Indo-Europeans.
 - (B) Hsiung-nu (Huns).
 - (C) Scythians.
 - (D) Turks.
 - (E) Bantu.
4. When the Mongols divided their empire, the only region that did not become a center for one of their khanates was
 - (A) Iran and Mesopotamia.
 - (B) central Asia.
 - (C) India.
 - (D) East Asia.
 - (E) the steppes of Russia, the Ukraine, and Siberia.
5. Russia's defeat by the Mongols
 - (A) had little effect on Russian development.
 - (B) led to 250 years of Mongol dominance.
 - (C) was avoided by the willingness of Russian princes to pay tribute.
 - (D) was meaningless because the Mongols abandoned the area for their homeland.
 - (E) left Poland and Sweden the dominant powers in eastern Europe.
6. Mongol policies in Russia
 - (A) led to the rise of serfdom.
 - (B) left Moscow and Kiev weak and unimportant.
 - (C) led to the rise of Novgorod as the chief Russian town.
 - (D) weakened Orthodox Christianity in Russia and allowed Islam to spread.
 - (E) permitted a free exchange of ideas in eastern Europe through increased trade.
7. The Mongol assault on the Middle East
 - (A) led to the conversion of the Mongols in the area to Nestorian Christianity.
 - (B) strengthened Muslim armies to effectively resist the Mongols.
 - (C) led to the capture and devastation of Baghdad.
 - (D) was supported by Muslims living in the area.
 - (E) extended the life of the Abbasid Caliphate.
8. The greatest long-term impact of the Mongol unification of much of central Eurasia was the
 - (A) introduction of new technologies.
 - (B) facilitation of trade.
 - (C) conversion of Mongols to Christianity.
 - (D) destruction of old states and the rise of new ones.
 - (E) spread of the Black Death from China to Europe and the Muslim world.

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9. Kubilai Khan's major concern in governing China was
- (A) creating integrated Chinese and military units.
 - (B) to avoid the Mongols being assimilated by Chinese culture and practices.
 - (C) the conversion of the Chinese to Islam.
 - (D) educating Mongol leaders and elites in Chinese Confucian culture.
 - (E) reestablishing the Confucian civil service exams and scholar-bureaucrats.
10. The transformation that most immediately weakened the power and influence of pastoral nomads over sedentary civilization was due to
- (A) the introduction of better-organized sedentary states.
 - (B) increased centralization of sedentary governments.
 - (C) the devastation of nomadic populations by the Black Death.
 - (D) newer technologies, especially weapons, used by sedentary civilizations.
 - (E) settling of farmers on the traditional lands of the nomads.

Free-Response Question

In the course of their expansion, did the Mongols abandon their nomadic lifestyle?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (D) is correct.** While primary sources concerning the Mongols are not rare, they frequently record the perspective of those peoples conquered by the Mongols.
- **2. (B) is correct.** While the Mongol advance included a great deal of destruction and slaughter, the Mongol realm was also typified by religious toleration and guarantees of stability for trade.
- **3. (E) is correct.** The Bantu are African peoples, while all of the others originated in central Asia.
- **4. (C) is correct.** The four khanates were: The Golden Horde centered on Russia, the Ilkhan Empire centered on Baghdad, the Djagatai Empire with its capital at Samarkand, and Kublai Khan's empire, essentially China.
- **5. (B) is correct.** The Russian armies were defeated in 1240, and Moscow was freed from paying any tribute to the Mongols in 1480.
- **6. (A) is correct.** Peasants, in fear of the Mongol assault, either fled or accepted a diminished status under their Russian lords.
- **7. (C) is correct.** Hulegu's armies destroyed Baghdad in 1258.
- **8. (E) is correct.** Mongol unification of the area brought the Black Death—endemic in central Asia—to areas where the disease was unknown. The result included the spread of the Black Death to Europe, where it caused massive loss of life.
- **9. (B) is correct.** Although Kubilai Khan and his wife Chabi were eager to learn from Chinese scholars and bureaucrats, Kublai sought to keep the Mongol ruling minority separate from the ethnic Chinese.

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- **10. (C) is correct.** The other answers all played a role in lessening the power of nomadic groups over sedentary peoples, but it was the Black Death that had the greatest short-term impact.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

In the course of their expansion, did the Mongols abandon their nomadic lifestyle?

Either answer is possible. Such rulers as Kublai Khan clearly adopted a sedentary style of rule, following Chinese precedents. He ruled from his capital city, and in most ways, reigned in the same manner as previous Chinese emperors. However, other Mongol rulers retained a more traditional lifestyle, even as they became more sedentary. Chinggis Khan made Karakorum his capital, but frequently moved as far as China to solidify his empire. His grandson Hulegu, ruler of the Ilkhan Empire, similarly remained mobile, though nominally ruling from Baghdad. The majority of the Mongol people retained their nomadic life. Evidence that no deep transformation took place can be found in modern steppe nomads, and in the fact that when the central rule of the khanates broke down, fragmentation ensued.

