

# The Mongol Conquests

## MAIN IDEA

**EMPIRE BUILDING** The Mongols, a nomadic people from the steppe, conquered settled societies across much of Asia.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Mongols built the largest unified land empire in world history.

## TERMS & NAMES

- pastoralist
- clan
- Genghis Khan
- Pax Mongolica

**SETTING THE STAGE** While the Chinese prospered during the Song Dynasty, a great people far to the north were also gaining strength. The Mongols of the Asian steppe lived their lives on the move. They prided themselves on their skill on horseback, their discipline, their ruthlessness, and their courage in battle. They also wanted the wealth and glory that came with conquering mighty empires. This desire soon exploded into violent conflict that transformed Asia and Europe forever.

## TAKING NOTES

**Following Chronological Order** Use a chart to list the series of events leading to the creation of the Mongol Empire.

Genghis Khan unites Mongols

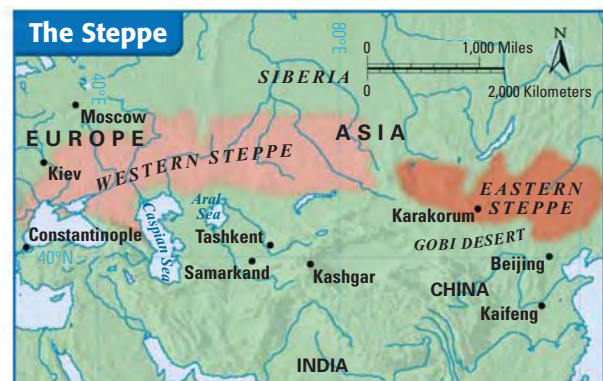
## Nomads of the Asian Steppe

A vast belt of dry grassland, called the steppe, stretches across the landmass of Eurasia. The significance of the steppe to neighboring civilizations was twofold. First, it served as a land trade route connecting the East and the West. Second, it was home to nomadic peoples who frequently swept down on their neighbors to plunder, loot, and conquer.

**Geography of the Steppe** There are two main expanses of the Eurasian steppe. The western steppe runs from Central Asia to eastern Europe. It was the original home of some of the ancient invaders you have read about, including the Hittites. The eastern steppe, covering the area of present-day Mongolia, was the first home of the Huns, the Turks, and the Mongols.

Very little rain falls on the steppe, but the dry, windswept plain supports short, hardy grasses. Seasonal temperature changes can be dramatic. Temperatures in Mongolia, for example, range from  $-57^{\circ}\text{F}$  in winter to  $96^{\circ}\text{F}$  in the summer. Rainfall is somewhat more plentiful and the climate milder in the west than in the east. For this reason, movements of people have historically tended to be toward the west and the south.

**The Nomadic Way of Life** Nomadic peoples were **pastoralists**—that is, they herded domesticated animals. They were constantly on the move, searching for good pasture to feed their herds. But they did not wander. Rather, they followed a familiar



seasonal pattern and returned on a regular basis to the same campsites. Keeping claim to land that was not permanently occupied was difficult. Battles frequently arose among nomadic groups over grassland and water rights.

Asian nomads practically lived on horseback as they followed their huge herds over the steppe. They depended on their animals for food, clothing, and housing. Their diet consisted of meat and mare's milk. They wore clothing made of skins and wool, and they lived in portable felt tents called yurts.

Steppe nomads traveled together in kinship groups called **clans**. The members of each clan claimed to be descended from a common ancestor. Different clans sometimes came together when they needed a large force to attack a common enemy or raid their settled neighbors.

**Steppe Nomads and Settled Societies** The differing ways of life of nomadic and settled peoples resulted in constant interaction between them. Often, they engaged in peaceful trade. The nomads exchanged horses, for example, for basic items they lacked, such as grain, metal, cloth, and tea. Nomads were accustomed to scarcity and hardship. They prided themselves on their toughness. However, they were sometimes tempted by the rich land and relative wealth of townspeople and took what they wanted by force. As a result, settled peoples lived in constant fear of raids.

Time and again in history, nomadic peoples rode out of the steppe to invade border towns and villages. When a state or empire was strong and organized, it could protect its frontier. If the state or empire became divided and weak, the nomads could increase their attacks and gain more plunder. Occasionally, a powerful nomadic group was able to conquer a whole empire and become its rulers. Over generations, these nomadic rulers often became part of the civilization they conquered. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Making Inferences**

**A** How might a strong, organized empire defend its frontier?

## The Rise of the Mongols

For centuries, the Mongol people had roamed the eastern steppe in loosely organized clans. It took a military and political genius to unite the Mongols into a force with a single purpose—conquest.

**Genghis Khan Unites the Mongols** Around 1200, a Mongol clan leader named Temujin sought to unify the Mongols under his leadership. He fought and defeated his rivals one by one. In 1206, Temujin accepted the title **Genghis Khan**, or “universal ruler” of the Mongol clans.

Over the next 21 years, Genghis led the Mongols in conquering much of Asia. His first goal was China. After invading the northern Jin Empire in 1211, however, his attention turned to the Islamic region west of Mongolia. Angered by the murder of Mongol traders and an ambassador at the hands of the Muslims, Genghis launched a campaign of terror across Central Asia. The Mongols destroyed one city after another—Utrar, Samarkand, Bukhara—and slaughtered many inhabitants. By 1225, Central Asia was under Mongol control.

### History Makers



#### Genghis Khan 1162?–1227

Temujin, according to legend, was born with a blood clot in his fist. In his lifetime, his hands were often covered with the blood of others.

When Temujin was about nine, the Tatars, a rival people, poisoned his father. For a time, he and his family lived in extreme poverty, abandoned by their clan. When in manhood he fought and defeated the Tatars, he slaughtered every male taller than a cart axle.

While driven by revenge, Genghis also loved conquest. He once remarked to his personal historian:

*Man's greatest good fortune is to chase and defeat his enemy, seize his total possessions, leave his married women weeping and wailing, [and] ride his [horse].*

**INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on Genghis Khan, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)



**Genghis the Conqueror** Several characteristics lay behind Genghis Khan's stunning success as a conqueror. First, he was a brilliant organizer. He assembled his Mongol warriors into a mighty fighting force (see below). Following the model of the Chinese military, Genghis grouped his warriors in armies of 10,000. These in turn were organized into 1,000-man brigades, 100-man companies, and 10-man squads. He put his most battle-proven and loyal men in command of these units.

Second, Genghis was a gifted strategist. He used various tricks to confuse his enemy. Sometimes, a small Mongol cavalry unit would attack, then pretend to gallop away in flight. The enemy usually gave chase. Then the rest of the Mongol army would appear suddenly and slaughter the surprised enemy forces.

Finally, Genghis Khan used cruelty as a weapon. He believed in terrifying his enemies into surrender. If a city refused to open its gates to him, he might kill the entire population when he finally captured the place. The terror the Mongols inspired spread ahead of their armies, which led many towns to surrender without a fight. As one Arab historian wrote, "In the countries that have not yet been overrun by them, everyone spends the night afraid that they may appear there too." **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**B** What were some of the tactics Genghis Khan used in war?

## The Mongol Empire

Genghis Khan died in 1227—not from violence, but from illness. His successors continued to expand his empire. In less than 50 years, the Mongols conquered territory from China to Poland. In so doing, they created the largest unified land empire in history. (See the map on page 334.)

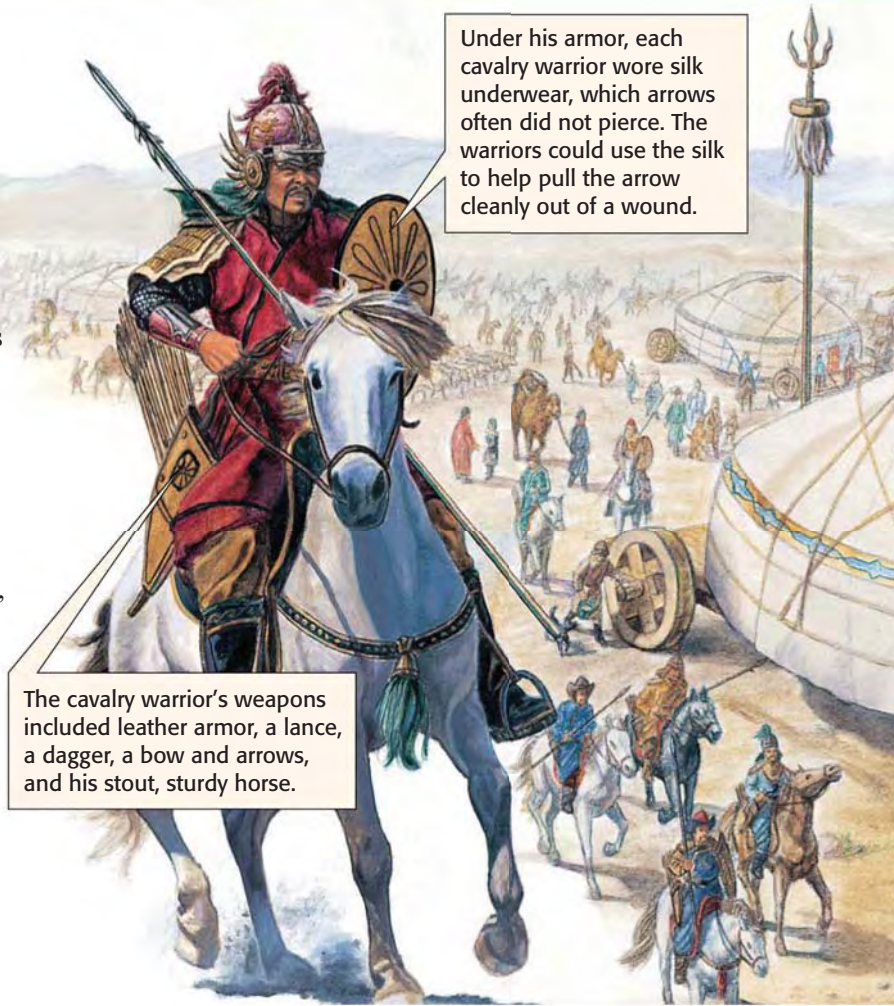
## History *in* Depth

**INTERACTIVE**

### A Mighty Fighting Force

Mongol soldiers were superb horsemen, having spent all their lives in the saddle. Annual game roundups gave young men the chance to practice skills they would use in battle and gave their leaders the opportunity to spot promising warriors. When on the move, each soldier was accompanied by three extra horses. By changing mounts, soldiers could stay in the saddle for up to ten days and nights at a time. When charging toward a target, they covered as much as 120 miles a day. If food was scarce, a Mongol soldier might make a small gash in the neck of one of his horses and sustain himself by drinking the blood.

A key to Mongol horsemanship was the stirrup, which was invented on the steppe in the second century B.C. Stirrups enabled a mounted warrior to stand, turn, and shoot arrows behind him.



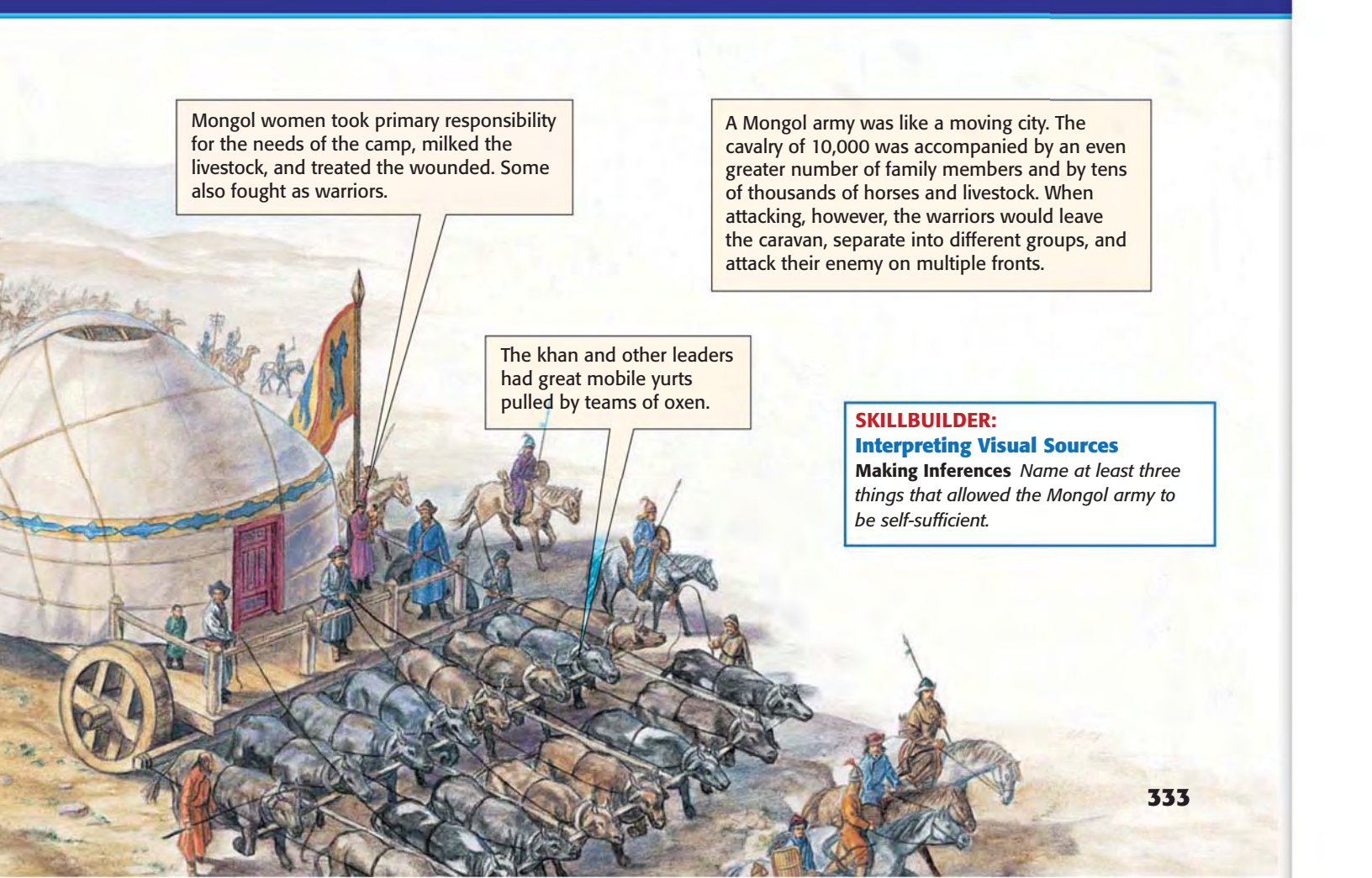
Under his armor, each cavalry warrior wore silk underwear, which arrows often did not pierce. The warriors could use the silk to help pull the arrow cleanly out of a wound.

The cavalry warrior's weapons included leather armor, a lance, a dagger, a bow and arrows, and his stout, sturdy horse.

**The Khanates** After Genghis's death, his sons and grandsons continued the campaign of conquest. Armies under their leadership drove south, east, and west out of inner Asia. They completed their conquest of northern China and invaded Korea. They leveled the Russian city of Kiev and reached the banks of the Adriatic Sea. The cities of Venice and Vienna were within their grasp. However, in the 1250s the Mongols halted their westward campaign and turned their attention to Persia. By 1260, the Mongols had divided their huge empire into four regions, or khanates. (See the map on page 334.) These were the Khanate of the Great Khan (Mongolia and China), the Khanate of Chagatai (Central Asia), the Ilkhanate (Persia), and the Khanate of the Golden Horde (Russia). A descendant of Genghis ruled each khanate.

**The Mongols as Rulers** Many of the areas invaded by the Mongols never recovered. The populations of some cities were wiped out. In addition, the Mongols destroyed ancient irrigation systems in areas such as the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. Thus, the land could no longer support resettlement. While ferocious in war, the Mongols were quite tolerant in peace. They rarely imposed their beliefs or way of life on those they conquered. Over time, some Mongol rulers even adopted aspects of the culture of the people they ruled. The Ilkhans and the Golden Horde, for example, became Muslims. Growing cultural differences among the khanates contributed to the eventual splitting up of the empire.

**The Mongol Peace** From the mid-1200s to the mid-1300s, the Mongols imposed stability and law and order across much of Eurasia. This period is sometimes called the **Pax Mongolica**, or Mongol Peace. The Mongols guaranteed safe passage for trade caravans, travelers, and missionaries from one end of the empire to another.



Mongol women took primary responsibility for the needs of the camp, milked the livestock, and treated the wounded. Some also fought as warriors.

A Mongol army was like a moving city. The cavalry of 10,000 was accompanied by an even greater number of family members and by tens of thousands of horses and livestock. When attacking, however, the warriors would leave the caravan, separate into different groups, and attack their enemy on multiple fronts.

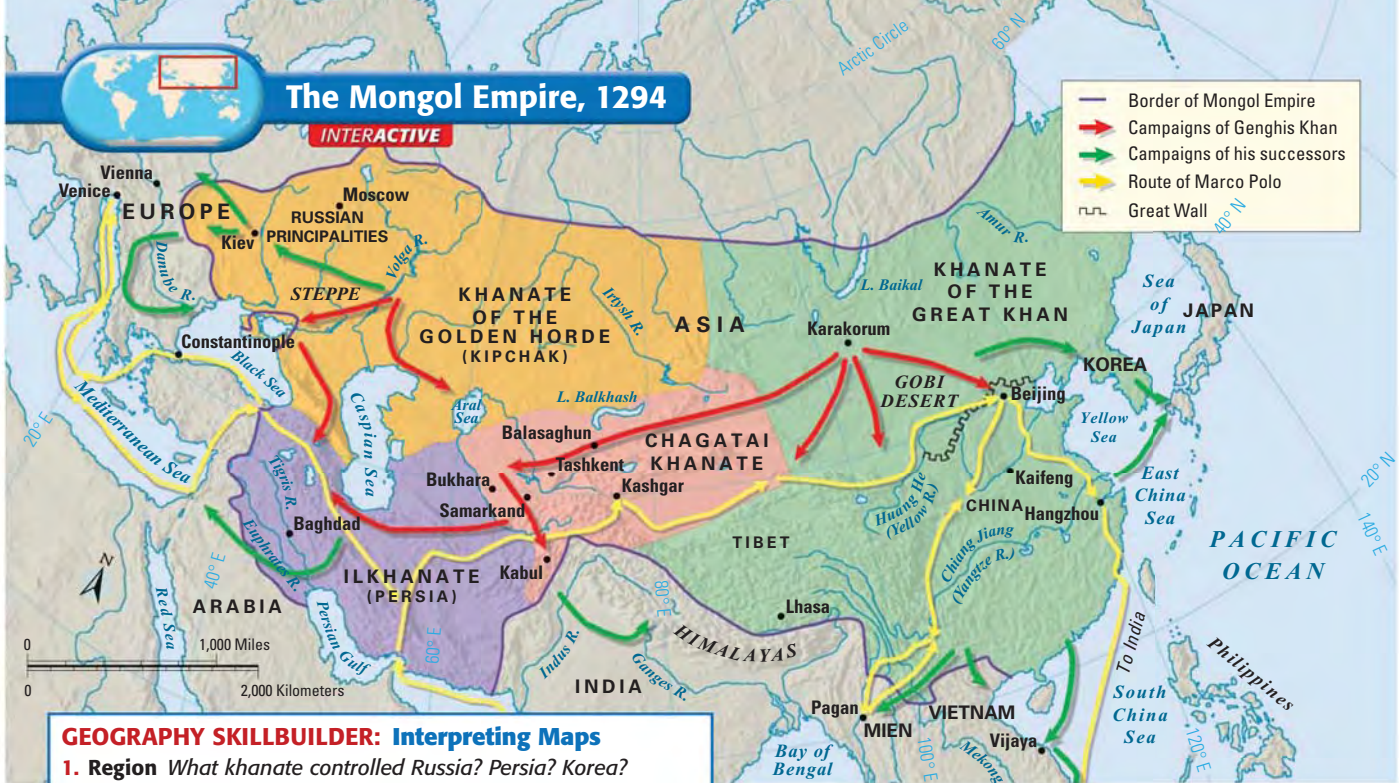
The khan and other leaders had great mobile yurts pulled by teams of oxen.

**SKILLBUILDER:**

**Interpreting Visual Sources**

**Making Inferences** Name at least three things that allowed the Mongol army to be self-sufficient.





**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps**

- Region** What khanate controlled Russia? Persia? Korea?
- Region** What parts of Asia did the Mongols fail to control?

Trade between Europe and Asia had never been more active. Ideas and inventions traveled along with the trade goods. Many Chinese innovations, such as gunpowder, reached Europe during this period.

Other things spread along with the goods and the ideas. Some historians speculate that the epidemic of bubonic plague that devastated Europe during the 1300s was first spread by the Mongols. (See Chapter 14.) The disease might have traveled along trade routes or have been passed to others by infected Mongol troops.

For a brief period of history, the nomadic Mongols were the lords of city-based civilizations across Asia, including China. As you will read in Section 3, China continued to thrive under Mongol rule.

**SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT**

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- pastoralist
- clan
- Genghis Khan
- Pax Mongolica

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. Which of the listed events do you think is the most important? Why?

Genghis Khan unites Mongols

**MAIN IDEAS**

3. In what ways did steppe nomads and the people of neighboring settled societies interact?
4. Why was terror an important weapon for Genghis Khan?
5. What happened to the Mongol Empire in the years after Genghis Khan's death?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **MAKING INFERENCES** What characteristics of their culture do you think contributed to the Mongols' military success? Explain your response.
7. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** What do you think drove Genghis Khan to conquer a great empire? Explain your answer.
8. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** "The Mongols were great conquerors but poor rulers." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Write a brief **essay** discussing the impact of interaction between the Mongols and the various cultures that they conquered.

**INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY INTERNET ACTIVITY**

Today, most Mongols live in the country of Mongolia. Use the Internet to find information on Mongolian ways of life. Then create an **illustrated report** comparing ways of life today and in Genghis Khan's time.

**INTERNET KEYWORD** Mongolia