CHAPTER 14

The Last Great Nomadic Changes: From Chinggis Khan to Timur

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The nomads of central Asia returned to center stage in world history during the 13th century. The Mongols ended or interrupted the great postclassical empires while extending the world network. Led by Chinggis Khan and his successors, they brought central Asia, China, Persia, Tibet, Iraq, Asia Minor, and southern Russia under their control and dominated most of Asia for one and a half centuries. The Mongols were the most formidable nomadic challenge to the sedentary civilizations since the first century C.E. The Mongols are often portrayed as barbarians and destructive conquerors, but generally in their vast possessions people lived in peace, enjoyed religious tolerance, and had a unified law code. Peaceful contacts over long distances opened. Mongol territory was a bridge between the civilizations of the East as products and ideas moved among civilized and nomadic peoples.

The Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan. The Mongols were nomadic herders of goats and sheep who lived off the products of their animals. Boys and girls learned to ride as soon as they could walk. The basic unit of social organization, the tribe, was divided into kin-related clans. Great confederations were organized for defensive and offensive operations. Men held dominant leadership positions; women held considerable influence within the family. Leaders were elected by free men. They gained their positions through displays of courage and diplomatic skills and maintained power as long as they were successful.

The Making of a Great Warrior: The Early Career of Chinggis Khan. Mongolian peoples established kingdoms in north China in the 4th and 10th centuries C.E. In the 12th century, Kublai Khan defeated a Qin army, but Mongol organization declined after his death. His grandson, Chinggis Khan, originally named Temujin, was a member of one of the clans disputing Mongol leadership at the end of the 12th century. Temujin gained strength among the Mongols through alliances with more powerful groups. After defeating his rivals, he was elected supreme ruler (khagan) of all Mongol tribes in 1206.

Building the Mongol War Machine. Mongol males were trained from youth to ride, hunt, and fight. Their powerful short bows, fired from horseback, were devastating weapons. The speed and mobility of Mongol armies made them the world’s best. The armies, divided into fighting units of 10,000 (tumens), included both heavy and light cavalry. Harsh discipline, enforced through a formal code, brought punishments and rewards for conduct. Another unit, employing spies, secured accurate information for campaigns. New weapons, including gunpowder and cannons, were used.

Conquest: The Mongol Empire under Chinggis Khan. Chinggis Khan set forth to conquer the known world. In 1207, the Mongols defeated the northwestern China Tangut kingdom of Xi Xia. They next attacked the Qin Empire established by the Jurchens. In these first campaigns, the Mongols developed new tactics for capturing fortified urban centers. Cities that resisted
were utterly destroyed; their inhabitants were killed or made slaves. Cities that submitted avoided this fate; tribute ensured safety.

First Assault on the Islamic World. After China, the Mongols moved westward. Victory over Khwarazm brought many Turkic horsemen into Chinggis Khan’s army. The Mongol leader spent the rest of his life fighting in China. The Xi Xia kingdom and the Qin empire were destroyed. At the death of Chinggis Khan in 1227, the Mongols ruled an empire stretching from Persia to the North China Sea.

Life under the Mongol Imperium. The Mongols were both fearsome warriors and astute, tolerant rulers. Chinggis Khan, though illiterate, was open to new ideas and wanted to create a peaceful empire. He established a new capital in the steppes at Karakorum and hired talented individuals from all conquered regions. Chinggis followed shamanistic Mongol beliefs but tolerated all religions. He used the knowledge of Muslim and Chinese bureaucrats to build an administrative structure for the empire. A script was devised for the Mongolian language, and a legal code helped end old quarrels. The Mongol conquests brought peace to much of Asia. In urban centers, artisans and scholars freely worked. Commerce flourished along secure trade routes.

The Death of Chinggis Khan and the Division of the Empire. When Chinggis died in 1227, the vast territories of the Mongols were divided among three sons and a grandson. His third son, Ogedei, a talented diplomat, was chosen as grand khan. He presided over further Mongol conquests for nearly a decade.

The Mongol Drive to the West. The armies of the Golden Horde moved westward. By the 13th century, Kiev was in decline and Russia was divided into many petty kingdoms. They were unable to unite before the Mongols (called Tatars or Tartars by Russians). Batu, Chinggis Khan’s grandson, invaded in 1236 and defeated Russian armies one by one. Resisting cities were razed. In 1240, Kiev was taken and ravaged. Novgorod was spared when its ruler, Alexander Nevskii, peacefully submitted, at least temporarily.

Russia in Bondage. The Russians became vassals of the khan of the Golden Horde, a domination lasting two and a half centuries. Russian princes paid tribute. Peasants had to meet demands from both their own princes and the Mongols. Many sought protection by becoming serfs. The decision inaugurated a major change in rural social structure: serfdom endured until the middle of the 19th century. Some cities, especially Moscow, benefited from the increased commercial possibilities brought by Mongol rule. It grew at the expense of nearby towns and profited as tribute collector for the khans. When the power of the Golden Horde declined, Moscow led Russian resistance to the Mongols. The Golden Horde was defeated at Kulikova in 1380. Later attacks by Timur broke the Mongol hold on Russia. Mongols remained active in the region through most of the 15th century, but from the end of the 14th century, Moscow was the center of political power in Russia. Although much of their effect was negative, the Mongol occupation was very important in Russian history. Their example influenced military and political organization. Most significantly, the Mongols isolated Russia from developments in western European civilization like the Renaissance and the Reformation.
Mongol Incursions and the Retreat from Europe. Christian western Europe initially had been pleased by Mongol successes against Islam. Many in the West thought the Mongol khan was Prester John. When the Mongols moved westward into Hungary, western Europeans had real reason for concern. However, Europe escaped more serious invasions when the death of Ogedei and the resulting succession struggle forced Batu to withdraw. Satisfied with their rich conquests in Asia and the Middle East, the Mongols did not return to Europe.

The Mongol Assault on the Islamic Heartland. Hulegu, a grandson of Chinggis Khan, moved westward against Mesopotamia and north Africa. Baghdad was destroyed in 1258. With the fall of the Abbasid dynasty, Islam had lost its central authority; consequently, much of its civilization was devastated. A major Mongol victory over the Seljuk Turks in 1243 opened Asia Minor to conquest by the Ottoman Turks. The Mongol advance halted in 1260 when the Mamluks of Egypt defeated the Mongols. Hulegu, faced with other threats to his rule, including the conversion of the khan of the Golden Horde to Islam, did not resume the campaign.

The Mongol Interlude in Chinese History. The Mongol advance into China resumed after Ogedei’s election. Kubilai Khan, another grandson of Chinggis Khan, during the middle of the 13th century led the Mongols against the Song. In 1271, Kubilai's dynasty became the Yuan. As his conquests continued, Kubilai attempted to preserve the distinction between Mongols and Chinese. Chinese were forbidden from learning the Mongol script and intermarriage was prohibited. Mongol religious ceremonies and customs were retained. Kubilai refused to reestablish exams for the civil service. Despite the measures protecting Mongol culture, Kubilai was fascinated by Chinese civilization. He adopted much from their culture into his court; the capital at Tatu (Beijing) was in Chinese style. A new social structure emerged in China. The Mongols were at the top; their nomadic and Islamic allies were nominally below them. Both groups dominated the highest levels of the administration. Beneath them came first the North Chinese, and then ethnic Chinese and peoples of the South.

Gender Roles and the Convergence of Mongol and Chinese Culture. Mongol women remained aloof from Confucian Chinese culture. They refused to adopt foot binding and retained rights to property and control in the household, as well as freedom of movement. Some Mongol women hunted and went to war. Chabi, wife of Kubilai, was an especially influential woman. The Mongol interlude in China was too brief, and Mongol numbers too small, to change Confucian patterns. The freedom of women declined under Kubilai’s successors.

Mongol Tolerance and Foreign Cultural Influence. The openness of Mongol rulers to outside ideas, and their patronage, drew scholars, artists, artisans, and office seekers from many regions. Muslim lands provided some of the most favored arrivals; they were included in the social order just below the Mongols. They brought much new knowledge into the Chinese world. Kubilai was interested in all religions; Buddhists, Nestorians and Latin Christians, Daoists, and Muslims were all present at court. He welcomed foreign visitors. The most famous was the Venetian Marco Polo.

In Depth: The Eclipse of the Nomadic War Machine. The incursions of small numbers of militarily skilled nomads into the civilized cores have had a major effect on world history. Nomads destroyed entire civilizations, stimulated great population movements, caused social
upheavals, and facilitated cultural and economic exchanges. The Mongol and Timurid invasions were the high point of nomadic success. During the 14th century, the effect of the Black Death on nomads gave sedentary peoples numerical superiority. Sedentary civilizations became better able to centralize political power and to mobilize resources for developing superior military organization. With the Industrial Revolution, sedentary dominance became permanent.

Social Policies and Scholar-Gentry Resistance. The ethnic Chinese, the vast majority of Kubilai’s subjects, were never reconciled to Mongol rule. The scholar-gentry regarded Mongols as uncouth barbarians with policies endangering Chinese traditions. The refusal to reinstate the examination system was especially resented. The Mongols also bolstered the position of artisans and merchants who previously had not received high status. Both prospered as the Mongols improved transportation and expanded the supply of paper money. The Mongols developed a substantial navy that helped conquest and increased commerce. Urban life flourished. Mongol patronage stimulated popular entertainment, especially musical drama, and awarded higher status to formerly despised actors and actresses. Kubilai’s policies initially favored the peasantry. Their land was protected from Mongol cavalymen turning it into pasture, and famine relief measures were introduced. Tax and labor burdens were reduced. A revolutionary change was formulated—but not enacted—for establishing elementary education at the village level.

The Fall of the House of Yuan. By the time of Kubilai’s death, the Yuan dynasty was weakening. Song loyalists in the South revolted. Mongol expeditions of 1274 and 1280 against Japan failed. Other Mongol forces were defeated in Vietnam and Java. Kubilai’s successors lacked talent, and the Yuan administration became corrupt. The suffering peasantry was called upon by the scholar-gentry to drive out the “barbarians.” By the 1350s, the dynasty was too weak to control all of China. Famines stimulated local risings. Secret societies dedicated to overthrowing the dynasty formed. Rival rebels fought each other. Many Mongols returned to central Asia. Finally, a peasant leader, Ju Yuanzhang, triumphed and founded the Ming dynasty.

Aftershock: The Brief Ride of Timur. Just when the peoples of Eurasia began to recover from the effects of Mongol expansion, a new leader, the Turk Timur-i Lang, brought new expansion. Timur, a highly cultured individual from a noble, land-owning clan, moved from his base at Samarkand to conquests in Persia, the Fertile Crescent, India, and southern Russia. Timur is remembered for the barbaric destruction of conquered lands—his campaigns outdid even the Mongols in their ferocity. His rule did not increase commercial expansion, cross-cultural exchanges, or internal peace. After his death in 1405, Timur’s empire fell apart, and the last great challenge of the steppe nomads to Eurasian civilizations ended.

Global Connections: The Mongol Linkages. The legacy of the Mongol period was both complex and durable. The Mongols brought the Muslim and European worlds new military knowledge, especially the use of gunpowder. Trade and cultural contact between different civilizations throughout Eurasia became much easier. The trading empires established in their dominions by Venetians and Genoese provided experience useful for later European expansion. An unintended consequence was the transmitting of the fleas carrying the bubonic plague—the Black Death—from China and central Asia to the Middle East and Europe.
CHAPTER 14

TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

- Mongol destruction of Baghdad
- Mongol conquest of Russia completed
- Chinggis Khan elected khagan
- Marco Polo journeys to central Asia
- Death of Timur-i Lang
- Fall of Yuan dynasty in China

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1206
1240
1258
1271
1368
1405

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TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one on a separate sheet of paper.

- Alexander Nevskii
- Baibars
- Berke
- Hulegu
- Ilkhan khanate
- Kara Khitai Empire
- Khagan
- Khwarazm Empire
- khanates
- Ming dynasty
- Mongols
- Muhammad Shah II
- Sarai
- White Lotus Society

- Battle of Kulikova
- Kubilai Khan
- Yuan
- Mamluks
- Batu
- Khwarazm Empire
- tumens
- Chinggis Khan
- Samarkand
- kuriltai
- Karakorum
- Ibn al-Athir
- Ju Yuanzhang

- King Bela
- Chabi
- Marco Polo
- Berke
- Prester John
- khanates
- Golden Horde
- kuriltai
- Timur-i Lang
- khagan
- Ogedei
- Baibars
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Karakorum
boundaries of early Mongol Empire
boundaries of divided Mongol Empire

Samarkand

Looking at the map, describe how the insertion of the Mongol Empire in regions that had previously been disorganized helped to connect the civilized centers of the postclassical world. What civilizations were on its frontiers?
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. During what period did the nomads of central Asia impact the other global civilizations of the Eastern Hemisphere in the postclassical era?
   
   A) 800 to 1000  
   B) 900 to 1100  
   C) 1100 to 1300  
   D) 1200 to 1400  
   E) 1300 to 1500

2. Which of the following statements concerning the nomadic society of the Mongols prior to the establishment of the empire is NOT accurate?
   
   A) The Mongols were primarily herders of cattle and horses.  
   B) The basic economic unit of the Mongols was the tribe.  
   C) Mongol leaders were selected by all free males for as long as they could hold power.  
   D) The Mongols were capable of forming tribal confederations in times of war.  
   E) The basic unit of Mongol society was the tribe.

3. In 1206, Chinggis Khan
   
   A) was born.  
   B) was sold into slavery following his capture by rival tribesmen.  
   C) was elected khagan (supreme ruler) of the Mongol tribes.  
   D) conquered Kiev.  
   E) died.

4. Karakorum was
   
   A) the consultative assembly of Mongol males used to elect leaders.  
   B) the name for Mongol rule in Russia.  
   C) one of Chinggis Khan’s sons who ruled the Golden Horde.  
   D) the battle in which the Mongols were defeated by the Russians.  
   E) the new capital constructed by Chinggis Khan for his empire.

5. Which of the following reforms was NOT established by Chinggis Khan to provide for a lasting peace in his domains?
   
   A) A script was devised for the Mongolian language to facilitate keeping records.  
   B) A legal code was promulgated to prevent feuds between Mongol clans.  
   C) Chinese and Islamic bureaucrats were strictly banned from service in the Mongol administration.  
   D) Farmers were taxed to support the Mongol courts and military expeditions.  
   E) He tolerated all religions in his empire.
6. The Mongol conquest of Russia is often associated with

A) the extreme political decentralization of Russia in subsequent centuries.
B) the dominance of St. Petersburg in Russian politics.
C) the desire of Russian princes to centralize their control and minimize the limitations placed on their power by the landed nobility.
D) lack of urbanization in much of eastern Europe.
E) the overthrow of the power base in Moscow.

7. Which of the following statements concerning the Mongol conquest of Song China is most accurate?

A) The Mongols were unable to establish political control over the Song dynasty.
B) Song China, because of its relative weakness, capitulated within two years after the initiation of the Mongol conquest.
C) The campaigns against the Song were interrupted by power struggles among the Mongols, but took slightly more than five years.
D) Due to the difficulty of the campaign, the Mongols abandoned the effort to conquer China.
E) Song China proved one of the toughest areas for the Mongols to conquer, taking from 1235 to 1279 to subdue.

8. What was the status of Mongolian women during the Yuan dynasty of China?

A) Mongolian women lost status as they fell under the social apparatus of the Confucian ideology.
B) Mongolian women suffered social and political isolation as Mongol men adopted the preference for women who had undergone foot binding.
C) Mongol women were increasingly prevented from participating in hunting and martial activities, although they retained some influence in the household.
D) Mongol women embraced the ideology of their new Chinese society.
E) Mongol women remained relatively independent, refused to adopt the practice of foot binding, and retained their rights in property.

9. What caused a decline in the military reputation of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China?

A) The failure of expeditions against the Japanese
B) The demolition of the Great Wall
C) The defeat of the Yuan at the hands of the Golden Horde
D) The invasion of northern China by the Korean Koryo dynasty
E) Infighting among various Mongol groups
10. Who was the Turkic nomadic leader who began a period of conquest beginning in the 1360s?

A) Muhamman Shah  
B) Ibn Pasha  
C) Timur-i Lang  
D) Ibn Khaldun  
E) Ibn Battuta

SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. The ________ was one of the four regional subdivisions of the Mongol Empire after the death of Chinggis Khan and covered much of what is today south-central Russia.

2. One of the four regional subdivisions of the Mongol Empire after Chinggis Khan’s death, the ________ khanate eventually conquered much of the Abbasid Empire.

3. Prince ________ saved the city of Novgorod from the Mongols by submitting to Mongol demands.

4. ________ was the name given to a mythical, rich, and powerful Christian monarch whose kingdom had supposedly been cut off from Europe by the Muslim conquests.

5. ________, ruler of the Ilkhan khanate, was responsible for the capture and destruction of Baghdad.

6. The Mongols were finally defeated in the Middle East by the armies of the ________, a slave dynasty of Egypt.

7. The influential wife of Kubilai Khan, ________, promoted the interests of Buddhists in China.

8. The most famous dramatic work of the Yuan period was ________, indicative of the continued literary vitality of China during Mongol rule.

9. Secret religious sects, such as the ________, were dedicated to the overthrow of the Yuan dynasty.

10. A man from an impoverished peasant family, ________, emerged to found the Ming dynasty.
TRUE/FALSE. Write “T” if the statement is true and “F” if the statement is false.

1. The Mongol armies incorporated the technological capability to make use of gunpowder and cannons.

2. Chinggis Khan was converted by Buddhist monks from China to the “Pure Lands” Buddhist interpretation.

3. The Mongol invasion of the Islamic heartland resulted in the defeat of the Ottoman Turks, paving the way for the creation of the Seljuk Empire.

4. The Mongol conquest of Song China was so difficult that it required more than 35 years to accomplish.

5. The more rapid recovery of the sedentary agricultural civilizations from the ravages of the Black Death is one of the most important reasons for the subsequent eclipse of nomadic cultures.

6. Chinggis Khan was commander of the Mongol forces responsible for the conquest of China and the founder of the Yuan dynasty.

7. Though the empire was divided after Chinggis Khan’s death in 1227, the four khanates that emerged in the struggles for succession ruled most of Asia.

8. The supreme ruler of the Mongol tribes was chosen by automatic, patrilineal succession.

9. Chinggis Khan refused to live in the cities of conquered peoples and built a new capital at Karakorum on the steppes.

10. Kubilai, the third son of Chinggis Khan, was elected Grand Khan of the Mongols after his father’s death.