

9



Mongol expansion (c. 1206–c. 1368)

Source 9.1 An artist's impression of the Mongol army on the move

Before you start

Main focus

The Mongols were nomadic warriors led by Genghis Khan, who rode out from the remote steppes of Central Asia to relentlessly conquer the greatest land empire that the world has ever known.

Why it's relevant today

The Mongols brought a long period of stable rule, which allowed for the interchange of beneficial knowledge, new technologies and important religions, as well as creating wealthy trading routes between Europe and Asia.

Inquiry questions

- Why did the Mongols become such a powerful conquering force in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries?
- How large did the Mongol land empire become?
- How did the Mongol leaders treat their conquered peoples?
- How did they govern their vast empire?
- What was the legacy of the Mongol empire?

Key terms

- dynasty
- *khan*
- *kuriltai*
- nomadic
- Pax Mongolica
- steppe
- tribute
- *yam*
- *Yassa*

Significant individuals

- Genghis Khan
- Kublai Khan
- Marco Polo
- Ogedai
- Sorghaghtani Beki

Let's begin

Genghis Khan and his descendants conquered the largest contiguous land empire the world has ever known, stretching from China across Central Asia to Eastern Europe, by 1300. The highly trained Mongol armies had a well-deserved reputation for ruthlessness and brutality towards their captives, and left towns and cities ransacked.

The conquered Mongol territories served as a bridge between the civilisations of Asia and Europe. Under Mongol rule there was a long period of relative peace and unity under a strict governing code. This enabled trade to flourish, the benefits of new technology and ideas to be shared, and many different cultures and religions to spread across a large region of the world. Rivalries and tensions between Genghis Khan's successors eventually weakened the empire and led to its decline.



Source 9.2 Miniature of steppe war between Mongols and Oghuz Turkic people



Source 9.3 Tiki Mongolian nomads with donkey



Source 9.4 Genghis Khan



Source 9.5 Miniature of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane)

Timeline

CHAPTER EVENTS

AD 1100

Temujin is born **c. 1167**

1200

Temujin takes title of Genghis **1206**
Khan or universal ruler

Kublai Khan is born; Genghis **1215**
Khan invades northern China

Genghis Khan crushes **1221**
Khwarezm empire

Genghis Khan dies **1227**

Ogadei becomes Great Khan **1229**

Mongols conquer Korea **1231**

Kiev is razed **1240**

Baghdad is destroyed **1258**

Kublai Khan becomes **1260**
Great Khan

Yuan dynasty rules China **1271**

Marco Polo reaches China **1275**

Kublai Khan dies **1294**

1300

Chinese revolts against **1355**
the Mongols occur

Yuan dynasty is overthrown; **1368**
Mongols flee China

WORLD EVENTS

c. 960 Song dynasty rules China

1215 Magna Carta is signed in
England

1276 Song dynasty falls in China
c. 1280 Ottoman Turks rise

1337 Hundred Years War begins in
Europe

1347 Black Death reaches Europe

1368 Ming dynasty rules China



Source 9.6 Typical dress of the Mongol and Cochin Chinese



Source 9.7 The Great Wall of China



Source 9.8 Silver gilt plaque from horse trapping, Black Sea



Source 9.9 Mongol warrior spearhead



Source 9.10 Map of the Eurasian steppe



The nomadic life of the Mongols and the rise of Temujin (Genghis Khan)

Before the rise of Mongol Empire, Central Asia had long been home to many **nomadic** tribes whose lifestyle was based on animal herding. They lived in a remote and sparsely populated region of semi-

desert and windswept grasslands known as the **steppe**. The term **Mongol** was the name given to one of the many different tribal groups that would eventually form the Mongol nation. The Mongols were natural warriors who were tough, mobile and resourceful on horseback. Their way of life contrasted greatly with the settled or **sedentary** peoples of other

Asian countries, such as China and Korea, where there were towns and cities, cultivated farm lands and highly developed cultures. The steppe nomads had lived an unchanging life for centuries, cut off from the rest of Asia. In the thirteenth century, this changed dramatically as Mongol warriors prepared to launch a massive assault beyond the steppes across Asia and into Eastern Europe.

nomads people who move from place to place

steppe a vast area of grasslands that spans much of Central Asia

Mongol the nation, people or culture of Mongolia

sedentary relating to an inactive or settled lifestyle

Nomadic lifestyle of the Mongols

The harsh and unpredictable environment of the steppe was not suited to farming. Bitter winter temperatures could drop as low as -30°C and remain below freezing for six or seven months. Sudden blizzards could strike at any time and the soil remained frozen for long periods. The short summers were hot with only low rainfall. The vast and forbidding Gobi Desert bordered the Mongol territory to the south, while rugged mountain chains ringed the western lands.

The Mongols were animal herders, caring for large flocks of sheep, goats, camels and cattle. Their most prized possessions were the short, stocky horses that were so vital to their way of life. Even children became skilled riders at an early age. Such a difficult environment meant that the Mongols had to constantly travel with their large herds from one pasture area to another, according to the seasons, in search of grass and water. They relied on the animals to provide them with meat and milk along with wool for rugs, clothing and saddle blankets. The Mongols traded

Source 9.11 Typical steppe landscape





Source 9.12 Gers in the onset of winter

with the settled farming peoples to the south for goods they needed, such as grain and cloth, in return for hides and animals.

The Mongol shelter was a circular tent known as a **ger** or *yurt* (see Source 9.12). Wool was pressed into felt and used for the outer covering of the ger. It could be quickly assembled on its wooden frame, then easily dismantled and transported, providing the mobility needed by nomadic pastoralists. The portable homestead was windproof in winter and cool in summer. Even today, these homes are still widely used by nomadic peoples in Central Asia.

The basic organising unit of Mongol society was the tribe. Each tribe was divided into clans, who camped and herded together on the steppe. Bound together by **kinship**, the clan was led by a chief or **khan**. In the event of enemy threat, or in preparation for a lightning raid on the settled farming communities, the clans could be joined into huge groupings known as confederations.

Women in Mongol society performed many domestic tasks, such as milking the herds, collecting animal dung for fuel and making felt for

the *gers*. They were influential within the family, fought as warriors on occasion and had a voice in tribal councils, but it was the men who dominated leadership of the clans.

Rise of Temujin

Temujin was born around 1167 into a warfaring tribe. His father, Yesugei, was a clan leader who was poisoned by rival chiefs when the boy was only nine years old. Temujin was taken prisoner, but escaped to the mountains for refuge. He vowed to take revenge on the clan that had enslaved him. Temujin was raised by his mother Hoelun, living a very harsh life in exile with few comforts and scarce food. His arranged marriage at age 15 was interrupted by the capture of his young wife Borte by the rival Merkit clan. Temujin led a campaign against the Merkit and rescued his wife. This bold and enterprising act drew many followers.

Temujin went on to defeat all remaining rival tribes (including the Naimans, Keraites and Tartars, who frequently raided and battled each other) and brought them under his control. His reputation as a military leader grew and he soon won further allies, as clan chiefs were keen to attach themselves to such a promising young steppe warrior.

ger the Mongolian word for 'home'; a tent-like structure suited to the nomadic lifestyle

kinship having a relationship by blood or marriage

khan an important leader of the Mongols



Source 9.13 Image of Genghis Khan by an unknown Chinese artist

Genghis Khan, universal ruler

Mongol leaders had to show the qualities and skills essential for survival in the steppe environment. Courage in battle and the ability to forge alliances between rivals and to attract followers were vital for a new leader. The lean and dangerous years in exile had taught Temujin to be practical, patient and cunning. He was courageous and daring in battle and had already demonstrated his strong leadership skills in uniting clans and tribal groups. The young Mongol leader had shown that he was ambitious, ruthless and disciplined, with superb

organisational ability and strategic brilliance. Temujin had no formal education but took a great interest in the arts and learning.

In 1206, at a **kuriltai** or massive assembly of all the Mongol chieftains, Temujin was proclaimed universal ruler of the Mongol tribes and took the new title of Genghis Khan. He had now been elected as the leader of nearly half a million tribesmen. This significant event marked the beginning of the Mongol Empire under his leadership.

kuriltai a gathering of Mongol leaders to make important decisions

Activity 9.1

- 1 Study sources 9.11 and 9.12 which show typical landscapes of Central Asia.
 - a Provide evidence to suggest that the steppes are a harsh environment.
 - b Explain how the Mongol peoples adapted to these harsh conditions.
- 2 Consider how the boy Temujin's early life might have shaped his character.
- 3 Discuss why Temujin adopted the new title of Genghis Khan.



The organisation of the Mongol army under Genghis Khan

Organisation and tactics

The military organisation that Genghis Khan established was the best armed and trained of the thirteenth century. A key feature of his highly disciplined army was easily managed units based on

for a soldier was to the leader and his Mongol identity rather than to his tribe. Commanders took charge of the training and discipline of the cavalry at each level. The leader of each *tumen* had a close relationship with Genghis Khan and promotions to leadership were given on the basis of ability.

All males aged from 15 to 60 were eligible for **conscription** into the army, which was considered a source of honour in the tribal tradition. If a warrior deserted his company, he could expect immediate execution as any form of disloyalty was not tolerated. The battle front appeared like a giant moving city as

cavalry soldiers who fight on horseback

the decimal system. Soldiers were organised into armies made up of fighting units called *tumens*, which consisted of 10 000 **cavalrymen**.

Each *tumen* was then further divided into units of 1000, 100 and 10 warriors. These units were made up of non-tribal groupings, so that the first loyalty

conscription compulsory enlistment for military service



Source 9.14 Mongol cavalrymen engage the enemy, from *Jami' al-tawarikh* by Rashid al-Din

HISTORICAL FACT

If supplies of food were not readily available, Mongols could survive for up to a month by drinking horse's milk or even cutting the horse's neck vein to drink its blood.

each *tumen* was accompanied by its herds of livestock, thousands of horses, family members and their *gers*.

Superior military tactics

[B]y nature they are good at riding and shooting. Therefore they took possession of the world through this advantage of bow and horse ...
[Chinese chronicler]

Source 9.15 From *All the Khan's Horses* by Morris Rossabi

The stocky Mongol horses were fast and flexible, which was a considerable advantage in combat, as soldiers were well equipped for speed and manoeuvrability. Each Mongol soldier maintained three or four horses, which could be changed regularly, allowing the cavalry to move over long distances at high speeds without exhausting their animals. The sturdy horses were able to cross rugged terrain and survive on little

feed. Warriors could spend up to a week in the saddle and cover distances as great as 140 kilometres per day. In their saddle bags were simple rations of dried meat and yoghurt.

The chief weapon used in combat was the Mongol bow, which was made of wood, horn and sinew. The short bow had a very powerful range of nearly half a kilometre and was far superior to any other European bow of this period. Quivers of assorted arrows were strapped to the backs of the archers in readiness for unleashing a rain of arrow fire on the enemy.

The light cavalry relied on the bow and arrow and they were extremely skilled at shooting accurately while mounted in the saddle. A sturdy stirrup, devised by the steppe nomads, enabled the rider to turn while on horseback and fire arrows in any direction, including backwards.

The heavy cavalry wore metal armour and carried long lances for close combat after the archers had brought the enemy into disarray. Each warrior carried a curved sword, a battle axe and a dagger, which was hung from the belt.



Source 9.16 Mongol soldiers using the bow, from *Jami' al-tawarikh* by Rashid al-Din

Mongol armour

Mongol armour was relatively light and made of iron scales, chain mail or even hard leather. Many of the horses were also protected by armour. The helmet was cone shaped, with the upper part made of iron plates. Heavy silk undershirts protected each soldier in the event of an arrow piercing the metal armour.

Technological weapons

The Mongols also adapted technological weapons for use in their warfare. War machines such as siege engines were constructed using the military talents of captive engineers from Persia and China. The siege engines could be transported on pack horses and assembled ready for an attack. The Mongols were skilled in using trebuchets and catapults, both of which could hurl heavy rocks and explosives against a city wall or fortress. Battering rams for bombarding walls, flaming arrows that spread fire inside the walls and smoke bombs were other effective means of attacking fortified positions.

Clever strategies

Clever strategies assisted the Mongols to gain a psychological advantage over their enemies. All campaigns were preceded by scouting parties, who used flags and signal fires to keep the main force informed of the enemy's movements. A separate messenger force carried urgent communications between the khan and his commanders. The messengers' bodies were tightly bandaged to allow them to remain in the saddle for days, as they switched from one horse to another to gain maximum speed. A special unit supplied the armies with maps based on the information provided by a network of spies and informers. During the intensely cold winters, the Mongol armies even used the frozen rivers as highways.

The Mongol attack would often come from a number of different directions before the fighting force united to begin the major strike. An ingenious battle tactic was the **feigned withdrawal**. With rapid arrow fire coming from the front lines, the troops at the rear

feigned withdrawal a faked retreat, designed to draw enemy forces out of formation



Source 9.17
Mongolian troop using a trebuchet in a siege, from *Jami' al-tawarikh* by Rashid al-Din

would quickly flank or encircle a city. The cavalry would attack the enemy forces, but then pretend to be defeated and retreat from the battle. When the enemy had let its guard down, the cavalry would suddenly re-emerge, wheeling around savagely on their opponents.

Fear as a tactic

The Mongols deliberately employed terror tactics in their warfare, building up a horrifying reputation as the ‘devil’s horsemen’ by their conquests. As one chronicler lamented:

In the countries that have not yet been overrun by them, everyone spends the night afraid that they may yet appear there too.

Source 9.18 Original quote from Islamic historian Ibn al-Athir

Invasions would be preceded by a delegation warning the city to surrender or suffer the consequences. Every town or city that resisted or refused to surrender was subject to destruction. This was widely publicised and was part of the element of terror conveyed throughout the empire. One man who escaped from the pillage of Bukhara in 1220 relayed the grim tidings:

They came, they sapped, they burnt, they slew, they plundered and they departed.

Source 9.19 Original quote from Persian historian Juvaini, c. 1250

Activity 9.2

- 1 Draw a diagram to illustrate how the army based its organisation on the decimal system.
- 2 Consider the aspects that made the Mongol army so successful. Build up a summary diagram of as many aspects as possible.
- 3 Imagine you are a soldier in Genghis Khan’s army. Describe what your life on a typical day’s campaign is like. Include the challenges and hardships you experience.

A merciless conquering force

As the Mongols swept out of the steppe lands into new territory, they were noted for their cruelty and wide-scale destruction in battle. They would first

tribute money paid by one state to another in acknowledgement of military submission

offer the enemy the opportunity to surrender and pay taxes (or **tribute**) rather than having their town or city plundered and destroyed. If the city refused to

surrender, the Mongols would mercilessly ransack it and slaughter its inhabitants.

His greatest pleasure in life was making war, defeating enemies, forcing their beloved to weep, riding on their horses, and embracing their wives and daughters.

Source 9.20 Genghis Khan was remembered for this philosophy

Times gone by ...

One of the earliest accounts of Mongol warfare comes from Giovanni de Plano Carpini, a Franciscan friar sent by the pope to learn more about Mongol intentions. He undertook a heroic journey across Asia, passing through Kiev in 1246 en route to the Mongol capital at Karakorum.

Batu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, had led a huge army into Russia, and destroyed the great walled city of Kiev in a winter invasion of 1240.

They attacked Russia, where they made great havoc, destroying cities and fortresses and slaughtering men; and they laid siege to Kiev, the capital of Russia; after they had besieged the city for a long time, they took it and put the inhabitants to death. When we were journeying through that land, we came across countless skulls and bones of dead men lying about on the ground. Kiev had been a very large and thickly populated town, but now it has been reduced to almost nothing, for there are at the present time scarce two hundred houses there and the inhabitants are kept in complete slavery. Going on from there, fighting as they went, the **Tartars** destroyed the whole of Russia.

Tartar the name given to the Mongols by the Russian peoples

Source 9.21 The destruction of Kiev

- 1 What effect do you think the vast number of killings perpetrated by Batu Khan's army in Kiev might have had on the rest of the Mongol campaign?
- 2 Research whether the Mongols did this to all the cities they conquered. If not, describe why other cities were treated differently.



Times gone by ...

One of the most catastrophic Mongol events recorded was the siege of Baghdad, which was undertaken by Hulagu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan. Baghdad was a wealthy and cultured city of the Islamic empire, headed by a **caliph**. Hulagu demanded that the city surrender, but the caliph refused. The attack began with siege engines and catapults, and the Mongols formed a pincer force around both sides of the city. The caliph's army was soon defeated. A week of massacre and destruction began. The following description was written by the Persian historian Abdullah Wassaf.

caliph a civil and religious leader of the Islamic world

They swept through the city like hungry falcons attacking a flight of doves, or like raging wolves attacking sheep, with loose reins and shameless faces, murdering and spreading terror ... beds and cushions made of gold and encrusted with jewels were cut to pieces with knives and torn to shreds. Those hiding behind the veils of the great Harem were dragged ... through the streets and alleys, each of them becoming a plaything ... as the population died at the hands of the invaders.

Source 9.22 The siege of Baghdad, 1258

- 1 How do you think the perspective of Abdullah Wassaf would be different from that of the Catholic friar Giovanni Carpini, if he described the same event?
- 2 Identify the kind of language Wassaf uses to portray the Mongols.
- 3 Research the city of Baghdad during the early thirteenth century. Describe what was lost in the Mongol attack, apart from the gold and jewels described by Wassaf.



Source 9.23 The caliph crosses the bridge over the Tigris to meet Hulagu Khan, Baghdad, 1258 (from a fifteenth-century illuminated Islamic manuscript)

Many other accounts detail the cruelty of the Mongols in their attack on Baghdad:

- The Grand Library of Baghdad with its precious documents and books on medicine and astronomy were destroyed.
- At least 90 000 fleeing citizens lost their lives.
- Magnificent old buildings such as mosques, palaces, treasuries and hospitals were looted and ruined.

- The network of irrigation canals that supported agriculture around the Tigris River was severely damaged and never repaired.

- The caliph was captured and trampled to death, along with most of his family.

As a result, Baghdad remained in ruins and depopulated for several centuries, although today it is the large capital city of modern Iraq.

HISTORICAL FACT

Survivors of the siege of Baghdad said that the waters of the Tigris ran black with ink from the huge quantities of books flung into the river, and red from the blood of philosophers and scientists who were killed.

Activity 9.3

- 1 Deduce what information the two primary sources on Kiev (Source 9.21) and Baghdad (Source 9.22) have in common.
- 2 Search for evidence to support the view that the Mongols were a merciless conquering force. How would their victims have suffered in these invasions?
- 3 Study Source 9.23, depicting the siege of Baghdad. What does it tell us about the methods of warfare used by the Mongols? What evidence suggests that Baghdad was a wealthy and cultured city?



The extent of Mongol expansion

Conquest under Genghis Khan 1206–27

By the time of his death in 1227, Genghis Khan controlled an empire that stretched from Persia and the Caspian Sea in the west to China and the Pacific Ocean in the east. It extended south to Tibet and north into Siberia. This represented an area of 26 million square kilometres, about four times the size of the Roman Empire.

In 1209, Genghis Khan turned his attention south to the lands of the Xixia, a state of north-west China, devastating buildings and written records and killing tens of thousands of civilians. In 1211, he led his armies across the Gobi Desert

against the Jin **dynasty** of northern China. A long campaign against the capital Zhongdu (Beijing) saw a ruthless conquest in 1215 and rich new resources gained.

dynasty a succession of rulers from the same family

Then Genghis Khan headed far across Central Asia and set out to demand the submission of the Khwarezm Empire, a wealthy kingdom to the west of the steppe in the region of modern-day Iran. He managed to conquer most of the great urban centres of the Islamic world. These included prosperous cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara, where the arts and sciences flourished and beautiful buildings abounded. Great atrocities were committed and the Khwarezm Empire was brutally destroyed.

Source 9.24 The Kalyan minaret of Bukhara (in modern-day Uzbekistan), dating from 1127. Genghis Khan was so impressed with the minaret that he decided not to destroy it. The highest structure in Central Asia, it was used as a watchtower and lighthouse for trade caravans. Today it is the only remnant of the pre-Mongol invasion in Bukhara.



Death of Genghis Khan

On his way back to Mongolia in 1227, Genghis Khan died following a fall from his horse, and was buried in an unknown location on the steppe. All those who knew of the burial place were killed and the resting place remains undiscovered to this day.

Before his death, he divided the empire among his sons and immediate family, warning against the dangers of quarrelling among themselves for the riches of the empire. He nominated Ogedai,

one of his four sons, to be his successor as the great khan. At the *kuriltai* following Genghis Khan's death, the great empire was divided into **khanates** or **khanates** areas or kingdoms under his sons and grandsons; these were later to become the four great *khanates*.

But Genghis Khan's death was by no means the end of the Mongol empire and its ongoing expansion.



Source 9.25 The Mongol empire in 1227 at the time of Genghis Khan's death

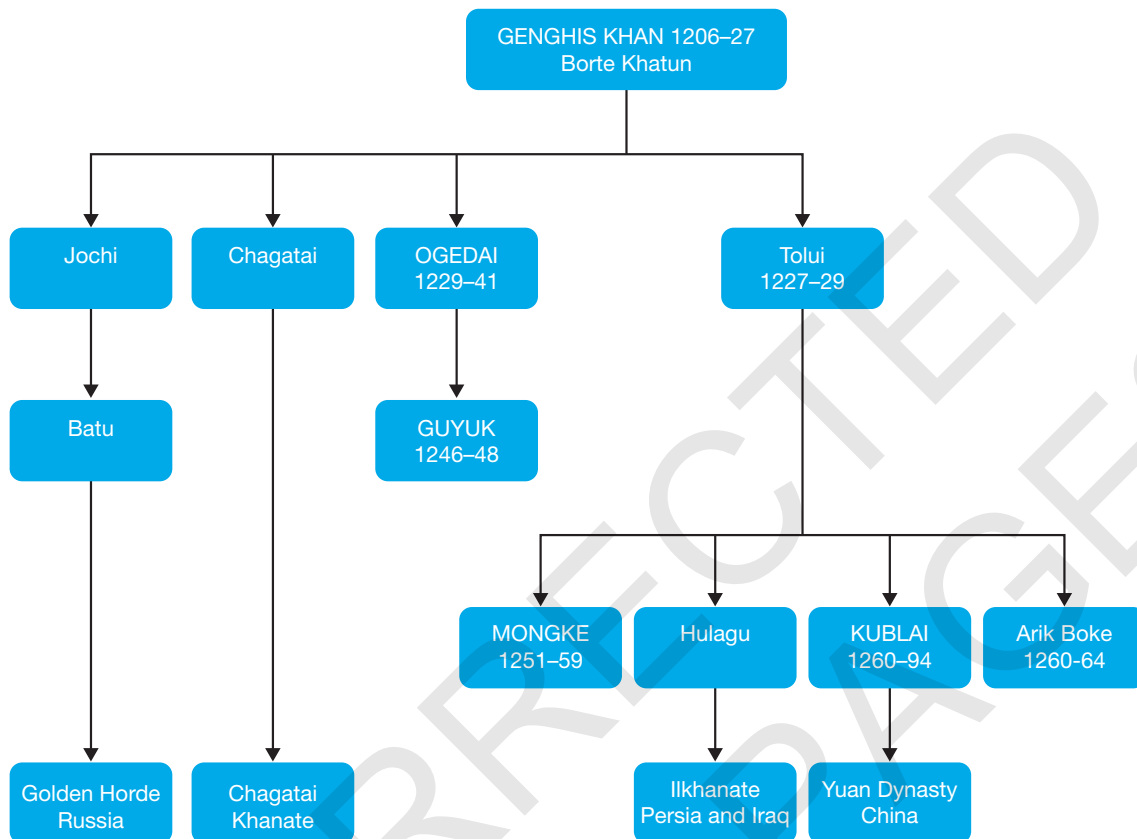
Expansion after Genghis Khan

Ogedai, 1229–41

During his twelve-year reign, Ogedai directed the Mongol armies into further campaigns and conquests. He presided over the greatest expansion of the Mongol empire. The Mongols invaded the steppe lands of Russia, Western Asia and Persia, and reached Eastern Europe under the military leaders who were the grandsons and descendants of Genghis Khan. Ogedai built a grand new capital at Karakorum on the Mongolian steppe, which was completed in 1238.



Source 9.26 The coronation of Ogedai, from *Jami'*



Source 9.27 Royal family tree of the Mongol empire (dates refer to length of reign, leaders in capital letters were Great Khans)

Research 9.1

Choose *one* of the following options to research in greater depth using ICT skills. Present your findings to the class.

- 1 A significant Mongol leader such as Batu Khan, Hulagu Khan or Mongke Khan.
or
- 2 An important Mongol battle such as the Battle of Mohi (1241), the Battle of Legnica (1241) or the Battle of Ain Jalut (1260).

Mongol expansion in the Middle East

Under Genghis Khan's descendants, the Mongols conquered either by force or through voluntary submission the areas we know today as Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. A lack of grazing lands handicapped the Mongols from expanding further south. In 1260, The Egyptian Mamluks prevented the Mongols from expanding further west, defeating them decisively in Syria.

Expansion in East Asia

The most significant campaign was to continue the invasion of China, destroying the Jin dynasty and ultimately overwhelming the Song Dynasty. The country of Korea (or Goryeo as it was known) was invaded in 1236 and made a subject state, as was Tibet. Unsuccessful attempts were made to conquer Japan and Vietnam.

Expansion in Europe

The Mongols were for a century or more Europe's most formidable and dangerous eastern neighbour. The Mongols invaded Russia, destroying the major cities of Eastern Europe such as Kiev, Ryazan and Vladimir. They stormed into Poland and the city of Krakow was burnt to the ground. The Hungarian army was crushed and the Mongol invasion is believed to have killed up to half of Hungary's two million people.

Control extended into the countries of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Romania, which became vassal (or subject) states, accepting Mongol rule and paying tribute to the *kbans*. The Mongols may perhaps have made further conquests in central Europe had it not been for one significant event: the news of Ogedai's death in 1241. As was customary, the leaders returned to Mongolia to elect a successor at the *kuriltai* at Karakorum. The Mongol army withdrew from central Europe, never to return in force again.

By 1260, the struggles over the leadership and succession had led to a gradual breakdown of the empire. The different branches of the family jostled for position, with feuds and wars breaking out between them. The domains were split into four separate territories or *khanates* and governed as independent realms by Ogedai's sons and grandsons, as follows (also see Sources 9.27 and 9.28).

- 1 Golden Horde: This influential western Mongol empire encompassed European Russia as far west as the Danube River and as far south as the Black Sea. It is likely that the Golden Horde gained its name from the golden tent used by the *kbans* and the Mongol word 'horde', meaning army camp. It was ruled by Batu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, from the splendid new capital Sarai. Turkish became the main language and Islam the official religion. Trade with the Mediterranean merchants was promoted.
- 2 Ilkhanate: An area of the Islamic world including Iran and Iraq, it was ruled by Hulagu, also a grandson of Genghis Khan, who was noted for conquering Baghdad.
- 3 Chagatai Khanate: A smaller area of north-west China and Central Asia in the region of Uzbekistan, it included the great cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. This was assigned to Genghis Khan's second son Chagatai.
- 4 Yuan dynasty (or Empire of the Great Khan): This *khanate* included China, Mongolia, Korea and Tibet, and was ruled by another grandson, Kublai Khan. Failed attempts were made to conquer Japan and the lands to the south of China.

Note this down

Using the graphic organiser below, make a list of the countries defeated by the Mongols.

Conquests in Europe	Conquests in the Middle East	Conquests in eastern Asia



Source 9.28 The Mongol Empire in 1294

Activity 9.4

Study Source 9.28 and answer the following questions:

- 1 Calculate the land distance from east to west that was under Mongol control by 1294.
- 2 Which of the *khanates* respectively controlled Russia, Korea and Persia?
- 3 What parts of Asia were *not* controlled by the Mongols?



Sorghaghtani Beki, mother of the great khans

Sorghaghtani Beki was Genghis Khan's daughter-in-law and the mother of four sons, all of whom became great *khans* of the Mongol empire. She was married to Tolui, Genghis Khan's youngest son, and raised each of their four sons—Mongke, Hulagu, Arik and Kublai – to be leaders who would inherit their grandfather's legacy. Although she herself was illiterate, she recognised the importance of a good education for each of her sons. Each son learnt a different language that the Mongols needed to administer their vast empire. She believed that it was important for the Mongols to build up the economies of their subject peoples in order to increase both production and taxes, so she encouraged the Chinese peasantry.

Although she was a Christian, Sorghaghtani practised religious toleration and gave support to all the major religions. She introduced Kublai to the ideas of Confucian scholars to help him understand and later rule China. This powerful and wise Mongol woman died in 1252.

Governing the conquered lands

Not all of the inhabitants of the conquered cities were put to death. Those towns that surrendered without a fight were usually spared the worst fate, but the people were still treated as slaves and required to pay heavy taxes or tribute payments to the Mongol *khans* as the price of their deliverance. Horsemen taken as prisoners were placed into the Mongol armies. Skilled people such as engineers and **artisans** were retained by the Mongols, but were not required to pay taxes as they were valued for their contributions. They were often resettled to other locations in the empire and lived miserable lives in the service of their Mongol masters. Objects fashioned from gold and silver, woven textiles and paintings were all highly prized by the Mongol upper classes, as they had no artisan class of their own.

artisan a skilled tradesperson

Teachers, lawyers, musicians and artists were also spared and exempted from paying taxes. Scholars who were learned in astronomy and medicine were often employed as advisors.

The Yassa

Genghis Khan devised a legal code in order to govern the empire. It set out rules to be observed for everyday life and imposed strict penalties, even death, on those who disregarded the code. The **Yassa** set out an orderly and systematic method of collecting taxes, along with rules governing conduct in battle, the treatment of slaves and the allocation of grazing lands. Theft or vandalising of property was strictly forbidden. Animals were not to be hunted in the breeding season. The Mongol nobility were expected to share much of the same hardship as ordinary individuals. The **Yassa** also forbade the abduction of women, and **decreed** that men should be occupied only with hunting or war. Horse stealing and defection from the army were both offences punishable by death.

This traditional set of laws was inscribed on scrolls, seen only by the *khan* or his closest advisors, but the rules were well known and followed by the people. In this way, Genghis Khan was able to maintain strict discipline, safety and sound organisation across his empire.

Pax Mongolica

Across their unified empire, the Mongols were able to guarantee the safety and security of travellers and promote strong links between the various parts of the empire. They achieved this through the **Pax Mongolica**, or Mongol peace. They were very supportive of trade and commerce, and maintained good road networks such as the **Silk Road** for the merchant caravan trains that criss-crossed Central Asia. This was most important in allowing goods, ideas and new knowledge to be transmitted across a wide region of the world.

Yassa a code of laws that helped to govern the Mongol empire

decree a rule or law issued by a central authority

Pax Mongolica a long period of relative peace and stability across Central Asia

Silk Road a network of trade routes that linked Asia with Europe and the Mediterranean world

HISTORICAL FACT

According to legend, a woman carrying a sack of gold could travel safely from one end of the empire to the other.



Source 9.29 A mountain pass on the Silk Road in western China

Religious tolerance

The Mongols were quite tolerant of different religions in their empire, although the majority of Mongols were shamanistic in belief (that is, they worshipped nature spirits). Tax benefits were offered to religious leaders – including members of Buddhist, Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths – to help to win their support. All groups were able to worship without fear of persecution throughout the empire. There were few existing places of worship because of the nomadic lifestyle. Under Ogedai, however, mosques, churches and temples were built in Karakorum. Three of the four *khanates* eventually favoured Islam over other faiths. The Mongols were also receptive

to foreigners and envoys from popes, artisans, mathematicians and astronomers were welcomed at Karakorum.

The *yam*

The Mongols created an extensive postal relay system along the trade routes stretching over the vast empire. This was known as the *yam* and was used by merchants, travellers and especially the messengers who frequently journeyed between China, the Middle East and Europe. The *yam* helped maintain fast transfer of important information from one part of the empire to another. Well-guarded relay

yam an efficient mail system using fast horse relay in the Mongol Empire

posts were set up at regular intervals along the major trade routes and were stocked with supplies of food, horses and lodging. Riders changed horses at these posts, which were approximately 40 km apart, or else they relayed the mail on to a new rider. The Mongol riders were able to cover exceptional distances of up to 200 kilometres per day.

Activity 9.5

- 1 Explain why animals weren't allowed to be hunted in the breeding season.
- 2 Identify three classes of people that were exempt from taxation under Mongol rule. Why do you think these classes of people did not have to pay tax?
- 3 Discuss why the Mongol religious policies could be seen as unusual.

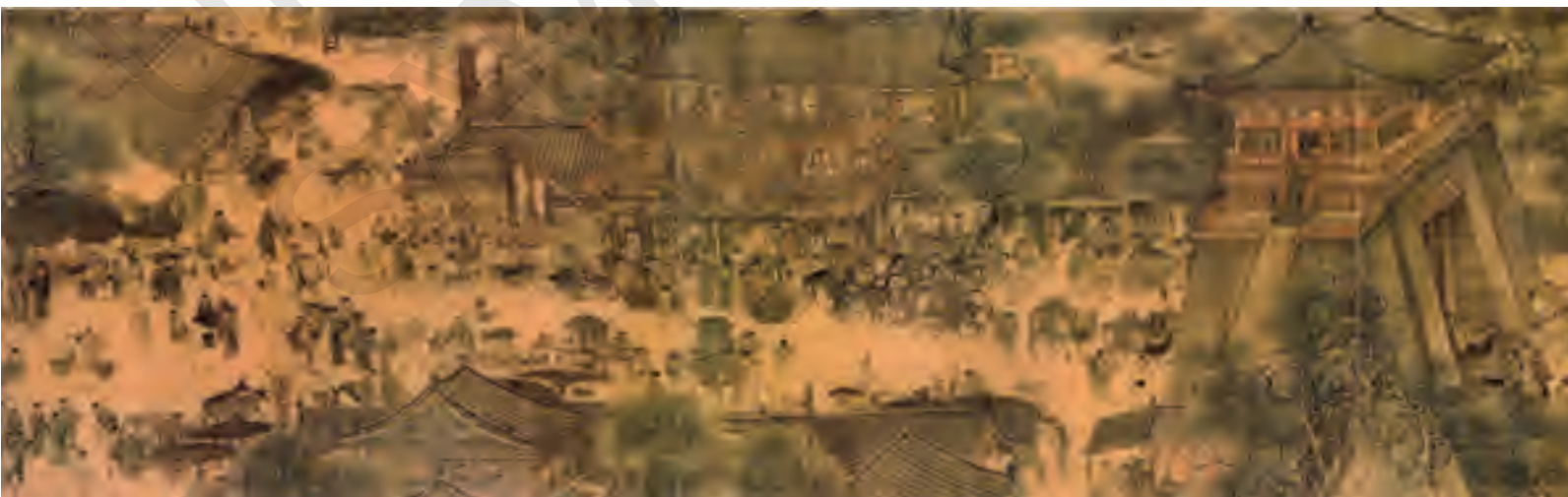
Mongol rule in China

China before the Mongol conquest

China was an advanced civilisation. Under the Song dynasty of the thirteenth century, science, technology, literature and the arts flourished. It was a sedentary society of peasant farmers who grew crops such as rice and tea and cultivated silk worms. China's population and its economy were growing rapidly, with an estimated population of

90 million at the time. More people were living in the cities, which were very large by the standards of this period.

However, China was not a united country, with the northern Jin and Xia dynasties and the southern Song dynasty in conflict with each other. China had always faced threats of invasion from the nomadic animal herders to the north. The Mongols were hard to defeat and the Chinese resorted to maintaining an uneasy peace with them by annual payments of silk and money. The Chinese regarded the Mongols as uncultured



Source 9.30 A portion of the 5.3 metre Qingming scroll, depicting city life in Kaifeng during the twelfth century

and barbaric. The Great Wall was built over many centuries to prevent raids and invasions from these warring tribes.

The upper levels of government were run by well-educated scholar officials who were chosen through competitive written examinations. China was organised into provinces, which were further divided into districts for administration by local officials. Paper money had replaced the cumbersome metal coins used by the merchants for trade. Fine porcelain and silk cloth were highly prized, even although merchants and craftsmen had a relatively low status in Chinese society.

Kublai Khan establishes a powerful empire in China

Kublai Khan became the Great Khan of the Mongol empire in 1260. He was determined to complete the conquest of China, begun by his grandfather Genghis Khan, by defeating the southern Song dynasty. Despite fierce resistance, the last Song ruler was finally overthrown and in 1271 Kublai Khan declared himself emperor of the new Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). This was the first non-Chinese dynasty to rule the whole of China.

Kublai Khan had a deep fascination with Chinese civilisation but also wanted to retain much of his traditional Mongol identity. He resided in a lavish Chinese-style palace in his newly built



Source 9.31 Portrait of Kublai Khan painted in the Chinese style

capital of Daidu (present-day Beijing), laid out with Chinese-influenced buildings. It was also known as Khanbalik: the city of the emperor. Kublai Khan adopted a largely Chinese lifestyle. He also built a magnificent summer palace at Shangdu (or Xanadu).

[He is] the most powerful of men, in subjects, lands and treasures, that there is on Earth or ever was, from the time of our first father Adam to this day.

Source 9.32 Italian explorer Marco Polo describes Kublai Khan in extravagant terms

Yet he preserved the distinction between Mongol and Chinese people by forbidding marriage between them and encouraging traditional customs. Mongol women refused the Chinese practice of foot-binding, and maintained

the hunts, feasts and ceremonies they enjoyed in Mongolia. It was even said that the Khan had steppe grass sown in the courtyard of the imperial palace to remind him of his Mongolian homeland.

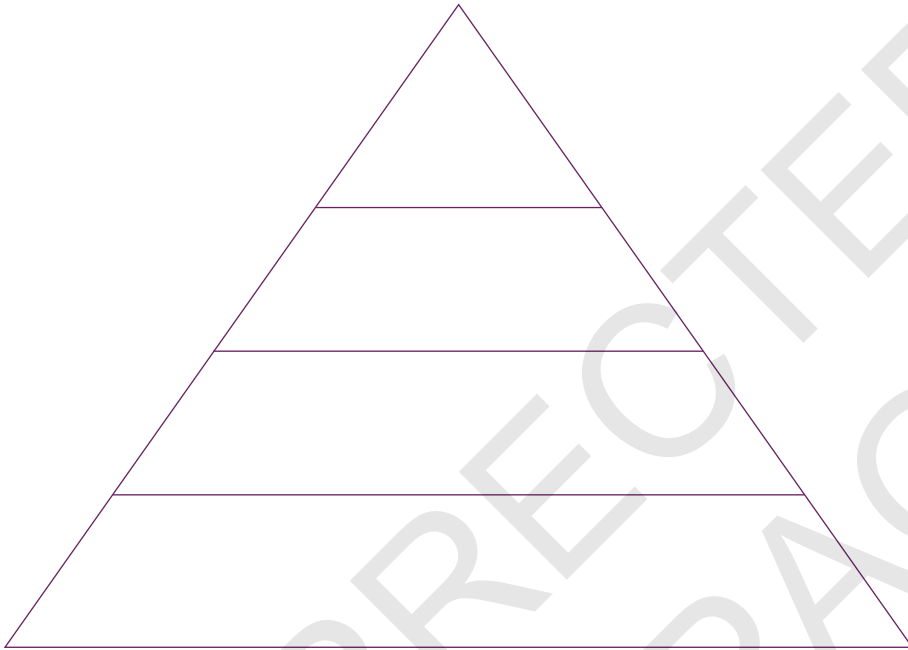
The Chinese subjects resented Mongol rule, regarding the leaders as insensitive to Chinese culture and likely to endanger Chinese traditions. Kublai Khan recruited many foreign advisors to assist him in ruling China, chosen from all over the empire. The Chinese scholar officials were replaced in the top positions in the government, and the civil service examinations were eliminated. A different social structure developed that was headed by the Mongols. The new advisors directly below them served in key positions as government administrators and tax collectors. Beneath these were the northern Chinese, followed by the southern Chinese at the bottom of the rung, whose power was limited to holding minor government positions.



Source 9.33 Kublai Khan on a hunting expedition with the empress; note the Mongolian furs worn over silk robes

 *Note this down*

Using the graphic organiser below, outline the social hierarchy in China during the Yuan dynasty.



Source 9.34 The arts flourished during the Yuan dynasty, including fine porcelain

Generous patron of the arts

Kublai drew artists, scholars and musicians to his court. The artisan class enjoyed an improved social status, tax benefits and freedom from unpaid labour. Works of art in jade, bronze and porcelain flourished. The blue and white porcelain for which the later Ming dynasty was so famous began to be produced during the Yuan dynasty. Paintings by artists such as Zhao Mengfu were greatly admired and he was given artistic freedom and rewarded by the Mongols. Popular entertainments such as plays and musical dramas were written for the court and upper classes. A new script was devised for the Mongolian language by Tibetan scholar Phagpa to help keep records and to overcome the difficulty of many different languages across the empire.

HISTORICAL
FACT

The communication system under Kublai Khan consisted of an extraordinary 1400 postal stations, which used 50 000 horses along with many thousands of oxen, mules, carts and boats.

Building programs

Apart from the new capital and the luxurious summer palace, Kublai Khan began many other ambitious building projects. These included extending the Grand Canal to Beijing, which made shipping grain from the south much easier, and completing an extensive postal station network. Labour for these projects was recruited from the peasantry, which was a source of anger to them. The Mongols further developed the navy, creating the Mongol war fleets that were used in the costly failed invasions of Japan (see Chapter 7).

Peasants

The peasants were burdened with heavy taxes, although Kublai Khan's administration did support the peasantry with many practical measures. These included providing granaries for surplus grain so famine could be avoided, and preventing the Mongol cavalry from turning croplands into pastures for their animals. All peasant households

were organised into cooperative clusters of fifty houses under a village leader. The purpose was to guide farming practices, assist with flood control and improve silk production. Basic literacy for peasant children was provided and public schools were set up.

Foreign trade

Under Kublai Khan, the Mongols continued their policy of supporting merchants and encouraging trade. China became the most productive trading and manufacturing centre of the era. Merchants brought all manner of luxury items and useful goods to the Mongol court via the Silk Road routes. They rarely travelled the entire distance overland, instead trading the goods at regular intervals from one middleman to another. Merchants were given tax exemptions and allowed to use the relay stations of the empire. Kublai Khan expanded the use of paper money and invited foreign merchants from Europe, Persia and India to visit China.

Activity 9.6

- 1 Identify when Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty.
- 2 Name two ways in which the Yuan dynasty encouraged the growth of trade.
- 3 List some of the benefits that the separation of Mongol and Chinese people had for the Yuan dynasty. Analyse the effect of this policy on the longevity of the dynasty.

Marco Polo – adventurer and traveller

Many travellers, envoys and missionaries did make the challenging journey to China during the relative safety of the Pax Mongolica period. One of the most renowned was Marco Polo, who set out from Venice as a 17-year-old boy in 1271, accompanying his father and uncle. He spent seventeen years in China in the service of Kublai Khan. His accounts documented his epic journey, which took three years traversing the Silk Roads of Central Asia, crossing the Gobi Desert and travelling throughout much of China.

Marco Polo marvelled at the use of paper money made from mulberry bark, and was overawed by the size and splendour of China's cities. He was curious about the burning of black stones (or coal) and praised the efficiency of the postal system.

Marco Polo made a long sea voyage back to Venice where the story of his travels was written in prison after he was captured during a war against the rival city of Genoa. It was through the eyes of Marco Polo and his accounts that Europeans first learned about the civilisations to the east.



Source 9.35 A portrait of Marco Polo, who said: 'I only wrote half of what I saw.'



Source 9.36 According to Polo, the Gobi Desert consisted entirely of mountains of sand and valleys with nothing at all to eat

Times gone by ...

Marco Polo's exotic tales of Kublai Khan's palace and Chinese life would intrigue Europeans for centuries, although there were doubts cast by many on the truth of these fabulous accounts.

There is at this place a very fine marble palace, the rooms of which are all gilt and painted with figures of men and beasts and birds, and with a variety of trees and flowers, all executed with such exquisite art that you regard them with delight and astonishment.

Round this Palace a wall is built, enclosing a compass of 16 miles, and inside the park are fountains and rivers and brooks, and beautiful meadows, with all kinds of wild animals (excluding such as are of ferocious nature) which the Emperor has procured and placed there to supply food for his gerfalcons and hawks. The khan himself goes every week to see his birds sitting in mew [cages] and sometimes rides through the park with a leopard behind him on his horse's croup [hindquarters]: and then if he sees any animal that takes his fancy, he slips his leopard at it, and the game when taken is made over to feed the hawks in mew. This he does for diversion.

Source 9.37 Polo's description of Kublai Khan's summer palace and hunting ground at Shangdu

- Do you think Marco Polo is an accurate and reliable source of historical knowledge? Identify three biases you should be wary of when reading his account.

China after the Mongol era

In the last years of Kublai Khan's reign, the dynasty was beginning to weaken. His building projects had been enormously costly and the public works projects in irrigation and flood control could no longer be sustained. The Yellow River flooded disastrously, causing a decline in agriculture and the economy. The failed naval campaigns to conquer Japan were financially ruinous, weakening the Mongol forces and undermining their reputation. The luxurious lifestyle of the Yuan court created resentment among the heavily taxed peasants. In addition, subsequent Mongol emperors following Kublai Khan's death in 1294 were less able rulers.

In the south, rebel forces were gathering and beginning to drive the Mongols out. The Yuan dynasty was finally overthrown in 1368 and the Mongols fled north to their homelands. The dynasty had lasted less than a century. Zhu Yuanzhang, a rebel peasant leader, became the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, which was to rule China for the next three centuries (1368–1644).

The Ming rulers rejected many of the Mongol influences, restored the civil service examinations and placed Chinese people back in positions of government. The new script fell into disuse. The merchants were expelled and Kublai Khan's summer palace was torched by the Ming army. China's trade declined, the overland routes withered and paper money was abandoned. China became a closed society, and was virtually isolated from the rest of the world for many hundreds of years.

Research 9.2

- 1 Investigate the reasons for the unsuccessful invasions of Japan during the Yuan dynasty.
or
- 2 Use your research skills to discover more about the journeys that travellers and merchants such as Marco Polo undertook.

Activity 9.7

- 1 Explain what enabled Marco Polo to travel such an extraordinary distance across Asia.
- 2 Discuss why his journey is of such interest to historians today.
- 3 Analyse how Mongol rule during the Yuan dynasty affected the lives of the Chinese people.
- 4 Design a portion of a scroll that illustrates life in the imperial palace during the Yuan dynasty.



Note this down

Using the graphic organiser below, analyse the effect that the Yuan dynasty had on China.

China before the Mongols	China during Mongol reign	China after the Mongols
		Civil service examinations were restored

Decline of the Mongol Empire

Like many dynasties, personal ambition and rivalry began to take root among the descendants of Genghis Khan. The weaknesses were foreshadowed after Ogedai's death when succession disputes became commonplace. Kublai Khan and his brother Arik-Boke both competed for title of *khan* after Mongke's death. Hulagu of the Ilkhanate and Berke of the Golden

Horde were at civil war with each other. These bitter internal divisions meant that the once-united empire under Genghis Khan began to fragment.

High death tolls due to the outbreak of the plague also weakened the empire and interfered with trade along the silk routes. The Mongols were defeated and humiliated as they tried to invade new territories in Japan and Southeast Asia. The fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 signified the end of Mongol supremacy across Asia.



The consequences of Mongol expansion

The terror unleashed by the Mongol invasions cannot be overstated: a wasteland of the cultured cities of Central Asia were left in the wake of the Mongols. Civic and religious leaders were massacred, innocent women and children were put to the sword, and enemy soldiers butchered. Ancient irrigation systems were destroyed, and large areas depopulated, many of which never recovered. Researchers estimate the death toll from Mongol conquests to be at least 30 million people.

By contrast, new learning and knowledge benefited East and West alike. Chinese innovations such as printing, paper currency, the compass and

gunpowder reached Europe. Persian knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and science was brought to China, while Chinese books on medicine and agriculture travelled to the West. The knowledge of world geography expanded and travellers' stories sparked interest in the exploration of a sea route to China.

The Mongol peace and code of law provided a long period of stability. This enabled safe passage for merchant caravans, artisans and missionaries who could travel freely.

Trade between Europe, the Middle East and Asia was promoted. Chinese produce like silk,

jade, tea and porcelain were in great demand in Europe. Carpets and weapons travelled from the Middle East. Spices, silver, fine cloth, horses and new plants and foods moved eastwards along the trading routes from Europe. The trade routes brought great wealth to the traders and the caravan cities.

Tolerance and openness to new ideas meant that cultural exchanges increased and the distribution of the major religions became much more widespread in this period. Buddhist, Christian and Islamic faiths spread along the trade routes, as did styles of music, art and dance.

An unintended consequence of Mongol expansion was the spread of the bubonic plague to Europe and North Africa. Flea-infested rats

carrying the plague travelled with the soldiers and horses across Central Asia to Europe. The dreaded **Black Death** became the

Black Death the great outbreak of bubonic plague in the fourteenth century

greatest killer of all in the fourteenth century (see Chapter 10).

Never again were nomadic tribes able to assert their dominance over large regions and threaten sedentary civilisations. The Mongol conquests were 'the last and the most dreadful of all the nomadic assaults on civilisation'.

The advent of powerful guns and improved fortifications, the rise of new dynasties (such as the Ottomans of Turkey), the dawn of sea conquest and the growth of new trading powers were all about to change the face of global history. In the space of two hundred years, the Mongol empire grew and fell.

China eventually took over much of Mongolia and it remained part of China until the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. Today Mongolia occupies a similar region of Central Asia as it did in Genghis Khan's time.

HISTORICAL FACT

In Mongolia today Genghis Khan is regarded as a national hero. His name can be found on buildings and on products such as sweets, banknotes and liquor. Even the international airport is named after him! Genghis Khan sits astride a horse on top of an enormous statue near the capital city of Ulan Bator. Many of his descendants still herd cattle on the Mongolian steppes in the traditional nomadic lifestyle, just as they did in Genghis Khan's time.



Activity 9.8



Source 9.38 Two camels (A and B)

- 1 On camel A show examples of goods and knowledge that came on trade routes from the east to Europe.
- 2 On camel B show examples of the goods and knowledge that came from the west to China.



Source 9.39 Statue of Genhis Khan in Ulan Bator, Mongolia

Chapter summary

- The harsh steppe grasslands of Central Asia were home to many nomadic tribes who were noted for their superb horsemanship, courage and toughness.
- The organising genius of Genghis Khan transformed warring Mongol tribes into a unified and highly disciplined military machine.
- The Mongols set out on relentless conquests under Genghis Khan and his descendants that saw them invade China, Persia, Russia and Eastern Europe during the thirteenth century, creating the largest contiguous land empire in history.
- Noted for their cruelty and ruthlessness, the Mongols slaughtered those who did not surrender willingly and plundered their towns and cities.
- Mongol reign brought a long period of relative peace and trade, a strict governing code, religious tolerance, new technologies, and the beneficial transfer of culture and ideas across Asia, the Middle East and Europe.
- Under the Yuan dynasty of Kublai Khan, China became a united country in which trade, culture and technology flourished.
- Power struggles and leadership disputes began to weaken Mongol supremacy and the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 marked the end of the Mongol empire.

End-of-chapter questions

Multiple choice

- As a young boy Genghis Khan was known as:
 - Timur
 - Temujin
 - Tartar
 - Tumen
- The period of the greatest expansion of the Mongol empire took place under which of the following leaders?
 - Kublai Khan
 - Genghis Khan
 - Batu
 - Ogedai
- The Yassa was:
 - the fermented mare's milk consumed by Mongol people
 - a form of torture that the Mongols inflicted on their captives
 - the name used by the Chinese to describe their Mongol rulers
 - a code of laws used to help govern the Mongol empire
- Which statement about the Mongol empire is incorrect?
 - The empire is commonly referred to as the largest continental empire in history.
 - The Mongol shipping fleet assisted in extending the boundaries of the empire.
 - The Mongol army relied on its skilled horseman and cunning battle tactics.
 - Trade and commerce were actively promoted by the Mongols along the Silk Road.
- Kublai Khan became emperor of which Chinese dynasty?
 - the Yuan
 - the Ming
 - the Song
 - the Manchu

Short answer

- 1 The Mongols have been described as ‘the devil’s horsemen’. Do you think this is an appropriate term?
- 2 What was the Pax Mongolica? Why was it important in promoting trade and the flow of ideas across Asia?
- 3 Suggest four qualities of Genghis Khan that made him such a notable leader.
- 4 Explain the benefits the rule of Kublai Khan brought to China.
- 5 Outline the factors that led to the decline of the Mongolian empire by the mid-fourteenth century.

Source analysis

Study Sources 9.40 and 9.41 and answer the following questions:

- 1 What is taking place outside the walls of Vladimir (an important city in Russia) in Source 9.40?
- 2 Explain why the second image of Vladimir (Source 9.41) is so different.
- 3 Do the two images together provide useful source materials for historians? Can they give an accurate picture of Mongol conquest?

Extended response

Do you consider that the expansion of the Mongol empire had a negative or a positive impact on the peoples of Asia and Eastern Europe? In a short essay, present a well-planned argument that sets out your main points and supports your position.



Source 9.40 Mongols outside the walls of Vladimir, 1239



Source 9.41 Returning to Vladimir, 1239