
The Mongols: How Barbaric Were the “Barbarians”?

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A Document Based Question (DBQ)
World History

STUDENT GUIDE SHEET

The Mongols: How Barbaric Were the “Barbarians”?

Directions: In the 13th century CE the Mongols created the largest connected land mass empire in the history of the world. For centuries they have been remembered as a brutal tribe of nomadic barbarians who posed a serious threat to people and civilizations throughout Asia and Europe. But is there more to the story?

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It is suggested that you follow these steps:

1. Read the Background Essay.
2. Skim through the documents to get a sense of what they are about.
3. Read the documents slowly. In the margin or on a Document Analysis Sheet record the main idea of each document.
4. Organize the documents by analytical category. One or more may be a context document. The categories might be different aspects of Mongol life.
5. Within each category, decide whether, in your opinion, Mongol practice or belief was positive or negative. Be able to explain each opinion by citing concrete evidence.
6. Develop a summary answer to the question.

The Documents:

- Document A: Map of the Mongol Empire
- Document B: Military Duty
- Document C: Carpini on Army Organization and Discipline
- Document D: Carpini on Battle Tactics
- Document E: The Taking of Nishapur
- Document F: Painting: Burial Alive
- Document G: Karakorum
- Document H: Kubilai’s Reign in China
- Document I: Population in China
- Document J: Mongol Commerce in China and Persia
- Document K: Battuta’s Horses
- Document L: The Yams
- Document M: Mongke Khan on God
- Document N: Fragments on Law and Custom

The Mongols: How Barbaric Were the “Barbarians”?

Introduction

Eight hundred years ago, during the 13th Century, a small tribe from the grasslands of central Asia conquered much of the known world. Operating from the backs of horses, and sometimes using giant siege weapons, Mongol warriors swept across much of Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Their reach extended from Korea to Poland, and from Vietnam to Syria. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. Nothing quite like it has been seen since.

Telling the Mongol story and judging Mongol actions is a difficult thing to do. One reason is that they were an illiterate people and left few written materials behind. Another difficulty is language. Unraveling Mongol history from primary sources requires a knowledge of Uigher, Mongol, Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Russian and more. Thus we get a situation like this:

1. A Mongol general, speaking Uigher, tells a Chinese ambassador about a battle in Samarkand.
2. The Chinese ambassador retells the account to a visiting Persian chronicler.
3. Centuries later, the Persian chronicle is translated by a German researcher.
4. The German account is rendered into English by an Oxford historian.

It is very much like the old telephone game where a secret is passed from ear to ear around a circle; the message at the end may be different from the message at the beginning.

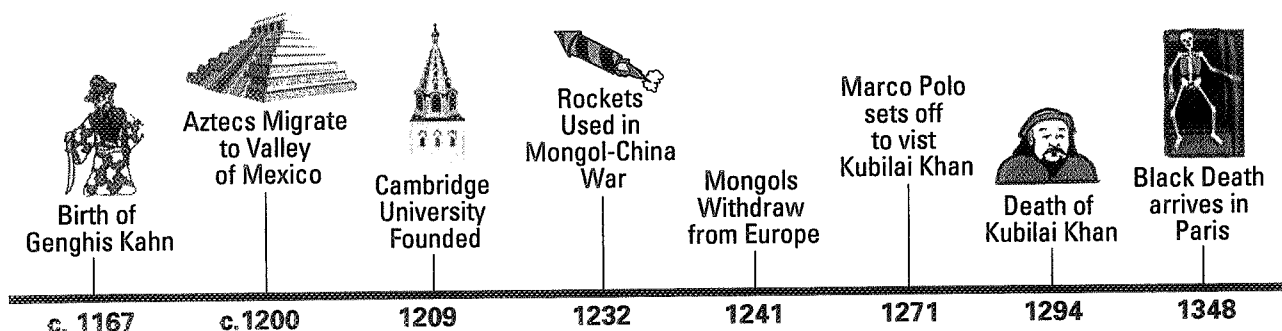
Despite these difficulties, the Mongols require our attention. Their reputation is not pretty. Much of the world called them “barbarians.” For the ancient Greeks, “barbaros” simply meant foreigner. By the 1200s, “barbarian” was a much more negative term referring to people who lived beyond the pale of civilization, people who were savage, evil.

Below is a short sketch of Mongol history. Four maps are provided to help keep the story straight. This background essay is followed by 14 documents. Your task is to use the background materials and the documents to assess the Mongols’ impact on the 13th and 14th Century world. Were they barbarians spreading death and destruction, or is there more to the story?

The Setting and the People

There is a region in east central Asia about the size of the American Great Plains. It is a vast plateau with short grasses, warm summers, and bitter cold winters. To the north stretch the forests of Siberia; to the south lies the barrenness of the Gobi Desert. And to the east and the west, mountains. Much of the year it is dry but enough rain falls in the warmer months to cover the Mongolian **steppes** with green and provide forage for sheep and horses. The land rolls and swells; occasional river valleys meander across the landscape.

On this land lived, and still live, the Mongol people. The Mongols were one of several nomadic peoples who competed with one another for pasture land and livestock. They had



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no mining, no metal working, no written language, no permanent homes. The Mongols lived in *yurts*, round felt-covered tents that could be moved whenever it was time to go to new pastures. Like other steppe peoples, the Mongols had little good to say about the settled societies on their far borders. They looked down on the Chinese because they were a farming people who worked on their knees. Life is better lived on a horse.

For Europeans of the early 13th century, Mongols were an unknown. When the Mongols suddenly appeared in Russia, and then on the outskirts of Vienna, it was as if they had mysteriously arisen from a crack in the ground. But the Mongols did have a history.

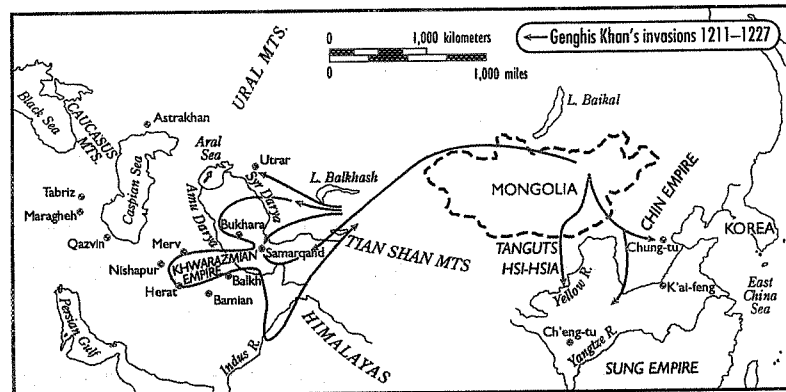
The Secret History of the Mongols is one of only two surviving early Mongol texts. It tells of a child named Temuchin who, in 1167, was born into a leading Mongol family. Temuchin's father was poisoned by a rival clan and the boy spent much of his teenage years caught up in clan rivalries and avenging his father's death. Temuchin's next twenty years were devoted to creating a series of alliances that for the first time in steppe history brought the nomadic clans of the region under one leadership. In 1206, Temuchin was given the title Genghis Khan at a *quriltai* (a kind of Mongol summit meeting). Had Genghis Khan stopped at this point, the outside world might never have heard of him. But this was not to be the case.

The First Wave: North China and Ancient Persia

In 1211 Genghis Khan launched an army of 200,000 men across the Gobi Desert. His target was the Chin armies of north China. Numerous Chinese cities fell, including the capital where Mongol slaughter was so great the streets were said to be greasy with human fat and flesh.

Mongol domination of northern China would last 150 years.

Genghis Khan returned to Mongolia in 1217. His attention now turned west. In quick succession the peoples of central Asia fell or



joined the Mongols – the Uighurs, the Kara-Khitai, the Merkits, the Kipchaks. The Mongol empire was spreading.

Genghis now found himself with a new and powerful western neighbor. This was the ancient Persian empire of Khwarazm. It included the modern states of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. An initial trade agreement suggested peace was possible, but then a Mongol caravan of 150 traders was murdered by one of the Khwarazm Shah's governors. This turned out to be a bad mistake. What followed was a Mongol onslaught that raked over the land of the Shah. Cities fell. Persian casualties were high.

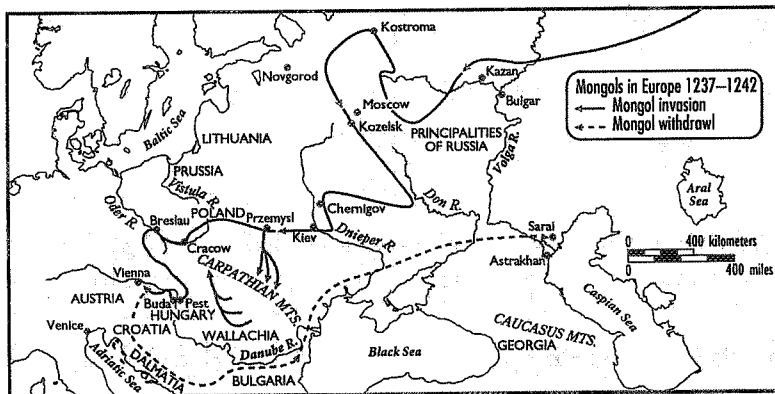
Genghis' generals next moved into southern Russia. Despite being outnumbered three to one, the Mongols handily defeated an army of 75,000 Russians. At this point, with his huge army of hundreds of thousands of horses, yurts, soldiers, families of soldiers, and war treasure, Genghis returned to Mongolia.

From Mongolia another campaign was launched against China. But conquest was taking its toll, and in the summer of 1227 at the age of 60, Genghis Khan died. In a procession that lasted many weeks the Khan's body was

carried back to Mongolia. Tradition says that he was buried with forty slave girls and forty horses, and that the ground was then trampled to remove any sign of his tomb.

The Second Wave: Russia and Eastern Europe

One of Genghis' four sons, Ogedei, became the next Great Khan. In 1235, Ogedei called another *quriltai*. Ogedei had recently ordered the



building of a Mongol capital called Karakorum and was feeling the itch for further conquest. After long debate with his brothers and generals the decision was made to invade Russia and eastern Europe. Ogedei predicted the campaign would take eighteen years, a momentous undertaking. An army of 50,000 horse soldiers, Persian and Chinese engineers strategically spared in earlier campaigns, and 20,000 draftees were ready to march. By the winter of 1237 this army stood poised on the frozen banks of the Volga River. Russia and Europe lay before them.

The next five years were to shake the western world. The first city to fall was Riazan on the eastern Russian frontier. After that came Kolumna, Suzdal, Vladimir, Kozelsk, Kiev and other cities in Russia; Lublin, Cracow in Poland; Liegnitz in Silesia; Buda and Pest in Hungary – the Mongols swept their way west. By May, 1242, Mongol intelligence patrols were just 60 miles from Vienna. And then the unexpected: the Mongols turned back! Word from Mongolia had apparently reached the front lines that the Great Khan Ogedei had died. Not understanding what had happened, western Europe held its breath and waited. The Mongol

withdrawal was marked by widespread destruction and slaughter. But the withdrawal was complete. The Mongols retrenched in Russia and never returned to Europe.

At about this time, in the 1240s, a small number of European visitors began to visit Mongolia and Mongol-controlled China. Some were sent by European monarchs or the Pope wanting to know more about Mongol plans. Others came on their own. They included Franciscan ambassador John of Plano Carpini, Friar William of Rubruck, and, several years later, the famous Marco Polo. These men joined the Persians and Chinese who were already residents or visitors at the Mongol court in Karakorum or in China. It is due to these travelers that we have some record of Mongol life

in the homeland and of the Mongol presence in China. Several of their accounts appear in the documents that follow.

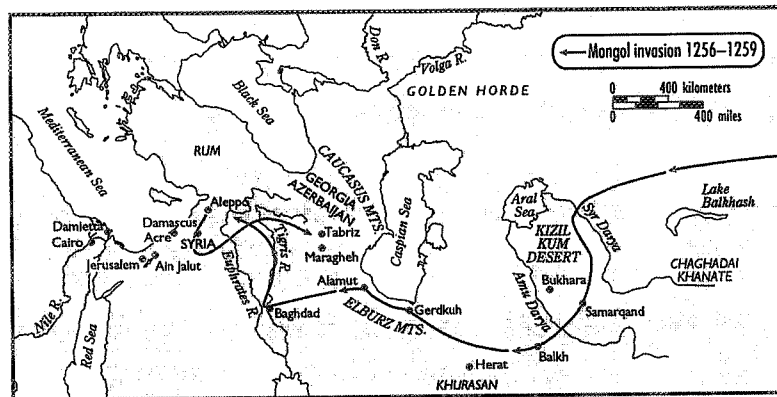
The Third Wave: The Middle East and South China

Ogedei was succeeded by Genghis' grandson Mongke. Mongke set his sights on still further conquest. Two targets were chosen, the middle east and southern China. Mongke decided that these were the world's most important trade and cultural centers and could not be left outside Mongol control. One historian calls it among "the most grandiose plans for world domination ever conceived." Europe, though it didn't know it at the time, was off the Mongol hook.

Again, a huge Mongol army was assembled on the steppes – thousands upon thousands of horses, numerous siege machines, one thousand Chinese engineering teams for fashioning roads and building bridges, vast stockpiles of grain. The massive army advanced into Persia on January 1, 1256. The first target was the Assassins, a sect that had terrorized Persians and threatened the Mongol Court in Karakorum. One by one Assassin strongholds in the Elbruz

Mountains either surrendered or were placed under siege. It took the Mongols two years before the Assassins were completely eradicated from Persia.

Next the Mongols moved 500 miles west to the walls of Baghdad. There, in February, 1258, this spiritual and cultural center of Islam fell. Mongol armies pushed into Syria and Palestine. They were joined by Christian troops from



Armenia and Georgia. It was a time of shifting alliances and these eastern Christians viewed the Mongol attack on the Middle East as a kind of crusade against Islam. But at this point, history strangely repeated itself. Just as the death of a Great Khan had stopped the Mongols as they approached Vienna in 1242, now the death of Mongke Khan in 1259 caused the Mongols to pull back from the walls of Jerusalem.

Pax Mongolica and Kubilai Khan

By this time the Mongol Empire consisted of four parts or **khanates** – the Russian khanate called the Golden Horde, the Persian khanate called the Ilkhans, the central Asian khanate, and the Khanate of the Great Khan which included both Mongolia and China. Mongke's death triggered a civil war among the four khanates. Out of these wars, Kubilai, a grandson of Genghis, laid claim to be the next Great Khan. However, Kubilai had been born and raised in China, and he was not trusted in central Asia. Nor was he ever really accepted as the Great Khan by the Mongols in Russia and Persia. Still, Kubilai maintained enough ties

with the khanates to achieve a measure of security across much of Asia. Historians have called this time **pax Mongolica** or “the Mongolian peace.”

Kubilai was probably the most cultured of all the Mongol rulers. He expanded his holdings in China by defeating the Sung Empire in southern China and established a new dynasty which he called the **Yuan**. For the first time in three hundred years, China was a united country, but now it was under Mongol control.

In his later years Kubilai weakened his empire with unsuccessful attempts to conquer Japan and Java. After Kubilai's death in 1294 the Mongols began to lose their grip across the entire empire. Mongol authority ended in Persia in 1335; there the Mongols had either returned to the homeland or

been absorbed into the Persian population. In China a rebellion drove the Mongols from power in 1368. In years after, Chinese chroniclers treated the Mongol period with general disgust although Mongol trade ties had opened China to the world as it had never been opened before. In Russia, after a century of diminishing influence, the Golden Horde breathed its final official breath in 1502. Russian historians were even more unkind than the Chinese; they wrote their history as if the Mongol conquest had never happened.

The Question

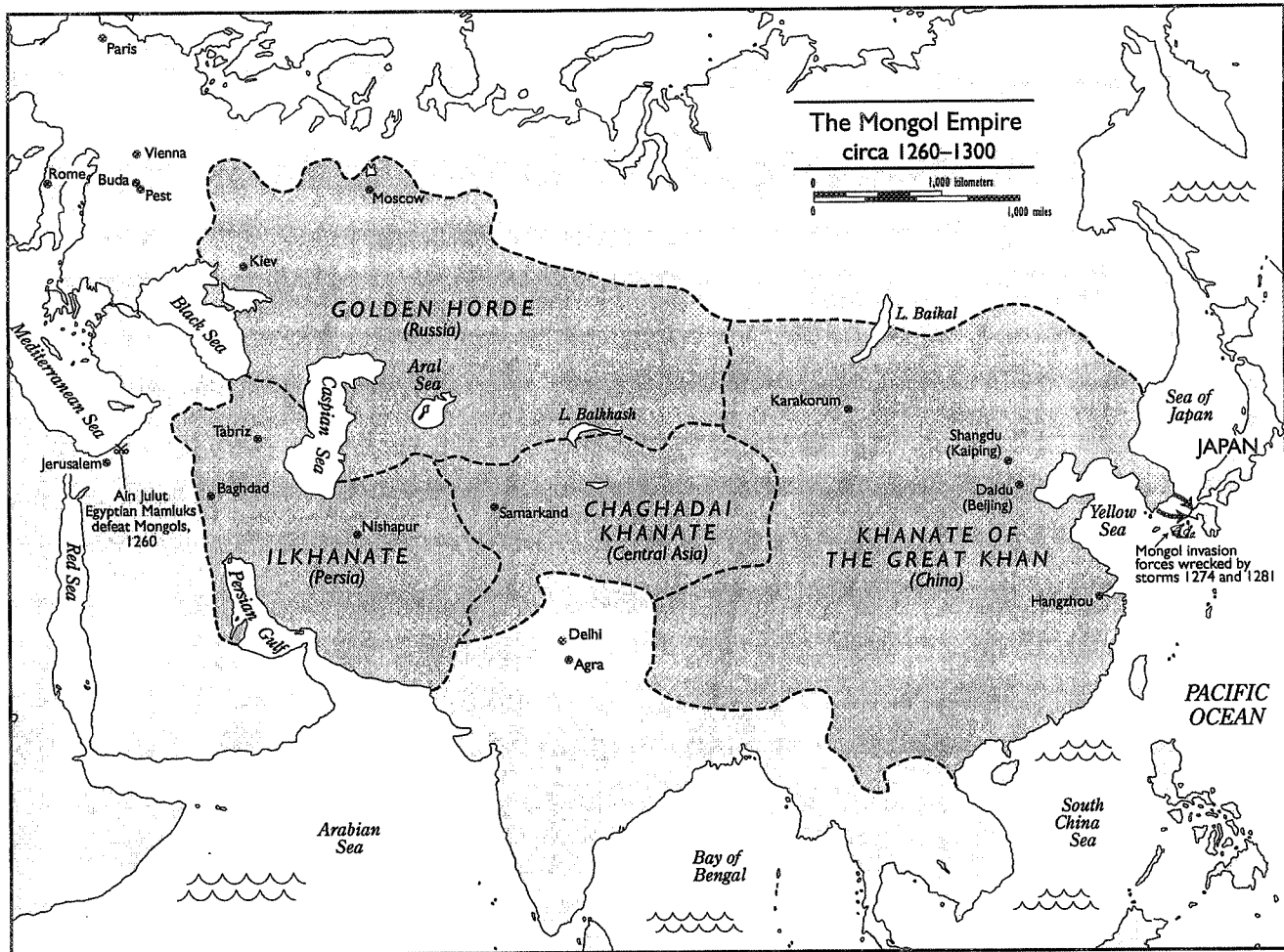
There is no debate among historians that the Mongols had their brutal side. But when the day of historical judgment comes and Mongol goods and bads are placed side by side on the balance scale, which way does that scale tip? Read the documents that follow and make your own judgment: *The Mongols: How barbaric were the “Barbarians”?*

Document A



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Source: Map created from various sources.



Size of World Conquests

Conquerors	Square Miles Conquered
1. Genghis Khan (1162-1227)	4,860,000
2. Alexander the Great (356 - 323 BCE)	2,180,000
3. Tamerlane (1336 -1405)	2,145,000
4. Cyrus the Great (600 - 529 BCE)	2,090,000
5. Attila (406 - 453)	1,450,000
6. Adolf Hitler (1889 -1945)	1,370,000
7. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 -1821)	720,000

Note: The area of the continental United States (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) is 3,036,885 square miles.

Document B

Source: Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East, From Genghis Khan to Kubilai Khan*, University of California Press, 1993. Reproduced with the permission of BBC Worldwide Limited. Copyright © Robert Marshall 1993.

Military Duty

- All men over the age of fourteen were expected to undertake military duty. Only physicians, undertakers and priests were exempt.
- Upon being summoned, the men were expected to leave their flocks, take with them four or five changes of horse, and travel to wherever their unit happened to be based. Wives and children were expected to follow, and if the army was abroad (on a campaign) the family traveled with the herds.
- A soldier's equipment began with a silk undershirt, a novelty learned from the Chinese. If he was unlucky enough to be hit by an arrow, although it might pierce the armour it was unlikely to penetrate the closely woven silk shirt. What tended to happen was that the silk was dragged into the wound with the arrow head.... By gently pulling the silk around the wound, the soldier or physician would turn the head of the arrow and remove it without ripping further flesh.
- Over the silk he wore a tunic, and if he was part of the heavy cavalry he was given a coat of mail and a cuirass (breastplate) made of leather-covered iron scales. Each soldier carried a leather-covered wicker shield and a helmet of either leather or iron, depending on his rank. He was armed with two composite bows and a large quiver containing no fewer than sixty arrows. Light cavalry carried a small sword and two or three javelins, while the heavy brigade carried a scimitar, a battle axe or a mace and a 12-foot lance.
- Soldiers were also equipped for travel. They were expected to carry on the horse clothing, cooking pots, dried meat, a water bottle, files for sharpening arrows, a needle and thread and other useful little items. The saddlebag itself was usually made from a cow's stomach which, being waterproof and inflatable, also proved a useful float when crossing rivers.

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Document C

Source: John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, in Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

Document Note: John of Plano Carpini was a Franciscan emissary of Pope Innocent IV and traveled to Karakorum between 1245 and 1247. It is believed he was the first European to visit the Mongols in their homeland.

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Genghis Khan ordained that the army should be organized in such a way that over ten men should beset one man and he is what we call a captain of ten; over ten of these should be placed one, named a captain of a hundred; at the head of ten captains of a hundred is placed a soldier known as a captain of a thousand, and over ten captains of a thousand is one man, and the word they use for this number (is tuman). Two or three chiefs are in command of the whole army, yet in such a way that one holds the supreme command.

When they are in battle, if one or two or three or even more out of a group of ten run away, all are put to death; and if a whole group of ten flees, the rest of the group of a hundred are all put to death, if they do not flee too. In a word, unless they retreat in a body, all who take flight are put to death. Likewise if one or two or more go forward boldly to the fight, then the rest of the ten are put to death if they do not follow and, if one or more of the ten are captured, their companions are put to death if they do not rescue them.

Document D

Source: John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, in Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

Carpini on Battle Tactics

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When ... they are going to join battle, they draw all the battle lines just as they are (about) to fight. The chiefs or princes of the army do not take part in the fighting but take up their stand some distance away facing the enemy, and they have beside them their children on horseback and their womenfolk and horses; and sometimes they make figures of men and set them on horses. They do this to give the impression that a great crowd of fighting men is assembled there.

They send a detachment of captives and men of other nationalities who are fighting with them to meet the enemy head-on, and some of the Tartars (Mongols) may perhaps accompany them. Other columns of stronger men they dispatch far off to the right and the left so that they are not seen by the enemy and in this way they surround them and close in and so the fighting begins from all sides. Sometimes when they are few in number they are thought by the enemy, who are surrounded, to be many, especially when the latter catch sight of the children, women, horses and dummy figures....

They reduce fortresses in the following manner. If the position of the fortress allows it, they surround

it, sometimes even fencing it round so that no one can enter or leave. They make a strong attack with engines (catapults for slinging large stones) and arrows and they do not leave off fighting by day or night, so that those inside the fortress get no sleep; the Tartars however get some rest, for they divide up their forces and they take it in turns to fight so that they do not get too tired. If they cannot capture it in this way they throw Greek fire (napalm); sometimes they even take the fat of the people they kill and, melting it, throw (catapult) it on to the houses, and wherever the fire falls on this fat it is almost inextinguishable.

While they are pitched before the fortification they speak enticing words to the inhabitants making them many promises to induce them to surrender into their hands. If they do surrender to them, they say: "Come out, so that we may count you according to our custom" and when they come out to them they seek out the artificers (artisans) among them and keep these, but the others, with the exception of those they wish to have as slaves, they kill with the axe....

Document E



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Source: Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, edited by UNESCO and Manchester University Press, © UNESCO 1997. Reprinted by permission.

In the spring of 618/1221, the people of Nishapur (a city in Persia) saw that the matter was serious ... and although they had three thousand crossbows in action on the wall and had set up three hundred mangonels and ballistas and laid in a correspondent quantity of missiles and naphtha, their feet were loosened and they lost heart....

By the Saturday night all the walls were covered with Mongols;... The Mongols now descended from the walls and began to slay and plunder.... They then drove all the survivors, men and women, out onto the plain; and ... it was commanded that the town should be laid waste in such a manner that the site could be ploughed upon; and that ... not even cats and dogs should be left alive....

They severed the heads of the slain from their bodies and heaped them up in piles, keeping those of the men separate from those of the women and children.

Note: Juvaini was a Persian chronicler who was in the employ of the Mongol Il-khan of Persia who served under the Mongols as the governor of Baghdad. He wrote this account about forty years after the destruction of Nishapur.

Reported Inhabitant Deaths From Varied Sources

Year	Place	Reported Deaths	Source
1220	Bukhara (Khwarazm)	30,000	Juvaini
1220	Samarkand (Khwarazm)	30,000	Persian chronicler
1221	Merv (Khwarazm)	700,000	Persian chronicler
1221	Nishapur (Khwarazm)	1,747,000	Persian chronicler
1223	Herat (Khwarazm)	1,600,000	Chronicler
1237	Riazan (Russia)	Few survivors	Russian chroniclers
1237	Kozelsk (Russia)	No survivors	Russian chroniclers
1258	Baghdad (Persia)	800,000 - 2,000,000	Persian chroniclers

Note: These casualty figures are found in George Marshall's *Storm from the East*. Despite very probable exaggeration, there is agreement among chroniclers of the time and historians of today that the number of deaths at Nishapur was staggering.

Document F

Source: Persian manuscript, "The Shah Namah" or "Book of Kings," c. 1300, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. In Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East, From Genghis Khan to Kubilai Khan*, University of California Press, 1993. Reproduced with the permission of BBC Worldwide Limited. Copyright © Robert Marshall 1993.

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A scene from a Persian manuscript c.1300, showing the execution of a prisoner by a Mongol soldier. Others are being buried alive upside-down.

Document J

Source: Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, Indiana University Press, 1985.
Reprinted by permission of Indiana University Press.

Mongol Commerce in China and Persia

The Mongols conquered nearly all of Asia and achieved what all Inner Asian steppe empires had dreamed of, control of the continental caravan routes from China to Persia. The enormous destructive cost of the Pax Mongolica cannot be denied, but the Mongol Empire made significant contributions to the political institutions, economic development, and cultural diversity of many lands. No history of the Mongol Empire ... which dwells only on Mongol destruction, can be satisfactory.

- In both China and Persia the Mongols had taken up residence among their new subjects, garrisoning cities and gradually blending to a degree with the (local) societies. As a result, their economic interests coincided with those of the native peoples, and the Mongols, after the destruction of the initial conquest, promoted diversified economic development.
- The (Mongol) Yuan emperors built canals to improve transportation and communication. In China agriculture and (craft) production ... continued unabated.
- The same was true in Persia, partly because Persian craft traditions were well-established, but also because the Ilkanids (Mongol rulers) were patrons of the arts.
- Persian viniculture (winemaking) ... thrived under the Mongols, who were great drinkers, even after their conversion.
- The Persian silk industry also benefitted from the Mongol conquest because of the contacts that opened up with China.
- Cities along the caravan routes, in Persia, Armenia-Georgia, Central Asia, and China, prospered as part of the tax-free customs zones protected by the Pax Mongolica.

Document N

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Document Note: There were two codes of conduct that guided Mongol life. One of these was the *yasa*, usually referred to as the Mongol law. The second was the *bilik*, which was a set of rules to live by.

On Hospitality

Source: Rashid ad-Din, *Collected Chronicles*.

When a husband goes hunting or to war, his wife must maintain the household, so that the messenger or guest who dismounts there finds all in order and the wife is able to provide him with good food and anything else he may require.

Source: John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*.

They show considerable respect to each other and are friendly together, and they willingly share their food with each other, although there is little of it.... When they are without food, eating nothing at all for one or two days, they do not easily show impatience, but they sing and make merry as if they had eaten well.

On Drinking

Source: Rashid ad-Din, *Collected Chronicles*.

If then there is no means to prevent drunkenness, a man may become drunk thrice a month; if he oversteps this limit he makes himself guilty of a punishable offense. If he is drunk only twice a month, that is better – if only once, that is more praiseworthy. What could be better than that he should not drink at all? But where shall we find a man who never drinks?

Source: John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*.

Drunkenness is considered an honorable thing by them and when anyone drinks too much, he is sick there and then, nor does this prevent him from drinking again....

On Adultery

Source: Yasa fragment, in Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*.

Whosoever commits adultery will be executed, whether or not they have previous convictions.

Source: Juvaini, trans. L.A. Khanlaryan in Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan*.

If a woman who is captured by a Mongol has a husband no one will enter into a relationship with her. If an Unbeliever (i.e. a Mongol) desires a married woman he will kill the husband and then have relations with the woman.

On Marriage

Source: John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*.

Each man has as many wives as he can keep, one a hundred, another fifty, another ten – one more, another less. It is the general custom of them to marry any of their relations, with the exception of their mother, daughter and sister by the same mother. They can however take in marriage their sisters who have only the same father, and even their father's wives after his death.... All other women they take as wives without any distinction and they buy them at a very high price from their parents.

Document G

Source: William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck*, translated by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey, edited by Christopher Dawson, London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

Document Note: Friar William of Rubruck was one of the first Europeans to visit the Mongol capital, Karakorum. He wrote this description in 1254.

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As for the city of Karacorum I can tell you that, not counting the (K)han's palace, it is not as large as the village of Saint Denis, and the monastery of Saint Denis is worth ten times more than that palace. There are two districts there: the Saracens' (Moslem's) quarter where the markets are.... The other district is that of the Cathayans (Chinese) who are all craftsmen.

Apart from these districts there are the large temples of the court scribes. There are twelve pagan (Buddhist) temples belonging to the different nations, two mosques in which the law of Mihamet (Muhammad) is proclaimed, and one church for the Christians at the far end of town. The town is surrounded by a mud wall and has four gates. At the east gate are sold millet and other grain, which is however seldom bought there; at the west sheep and goats are sold; at the south oxen and carts; at the north horses.

Document H

Source: Created from Morris Rossabi, *Kublai Khan: His Life and Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Kublai Khan's Rule in China: Selected Events

- 1260 Kubilai becomes Grand Khan of China
- 1261 Kubilai increasingly gives Moslems positions of authority in government
- 1262 Kubilai edict prohibits Mongol nomads from settling on Chinese farmers' land
- 1264 Kubilai grants tax exemption to Buddhist monasteries
- 1266 Kubilai orders construction of new capital city near modern-day Beijing
- 1266 Kubilai asks Marco Polo to bring 100 learned Christians with him on his next visit to China. Polo revisits China in 1275 but without Christians
- 1267 Persian astronomer Jamal al-Din arrives to head Kubilai's court astronomers
- 1271 Kubilai puts new legal system in place; reduces capital crimes by half
- 1270s Chinese theater blossoms during Kubilai's reign; evidence of over 600 plays written and performed in growing Chinese cities
- 1280 Mongols with joint Chinese, Korean and Mongol forces fail to conquer Japan; Kubilai no longer seen as invincible
- 1285 Envoys sent to India to attract skilled craftsmen and doctors; first of three visits
- 1294 Number of postal stations in China for servicing mail and trade reaches 1,400
- 1294 Death of Kubilai Khan

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Document I

Source: Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East, From Genghis Khan to Kubilai Khan*, University of California Press, 1993. Reproduced with the permission of BBC Worldwide Limited. Copyright © Robert Marshall 1993.

(The Mongols) had traded for centuries with border posts and had received, indirectly, gifts and money from the Chinese courts, but China was seen as a vast treasure house to be plundered. Perhaps the most chilling statistic that illustrates this stunning disregard for their sedentary (farming as opposed to nomadic) neighbors comes from their own records. A census taken by the Chin Empire in 1195 showed a population of fewer than 50 million people, yet when the Mongols took their first census of their newly won domain in 1235-6, they counted fewer than 9 million. Even assuming that enormous numbers of people may not have been counted because of the general state of chaos in northern China, this kind of discrepancy in the numbers suggests that Mongol policies of terrorism were akin to genocide.

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Document K

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Source: Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*, translated by Thomas Nivison Haining, 1991. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishing. (Italics added.)

The evidence of the chroniclers and travelers enables us to identify the striking changes wrought on Mongol morality by Genghis' Khan legislation. *Juvaini* comments that Genghis Khan rooted out...adultery and theft. "War, strife, bodily harm or murder do not exist, robbers and thieves on a grand scale are not to be found among them," remarks *Plano Carpini*, "and for this reason their houses and the carts in which they store their wealth have neither locks nor bolts." *Juzjani* writes that no one except the owner would dare pick up even a whip lying on the ground. *Ibn Battuta*, describing how during travels in Iraq two horses went astray during the night, reports that although the travelers left the country soon afterwards the horses were brought to them on their journey twenty days later. He also comments that although there were many pack animals in the Kipchak area, these could be left unattended because of the severity of (Mongol) laws against theft.

Document L

Source: Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Penguin Books, 1958.

Document Note: Marco Polo journeyed to China from 1271 to 1295. For 17 of these years, Polo served Kubilai Khan in various capacities, including ambassador.

LV

The Yams

Let us now turn to the system of post-horses by which the Great Khan sends his dispatches.

You must know that the city of Khan-balik (modern-day Beijing) is a centre from which many roads radiate to many provinces.... When one of the Great Khan's messengers sets out along any of these roads, he has only to go twenty-five miles and there he finds a posting station, which in their language is called a yam.... And at each of these posts the messengers find three or four hundred horses in readiness awaiting their command, and palatial lodgings such as I have described. And this holds throughout all the provinces and kingdoms of the Great Khan's empire.

By this means the Great Khan's messengers travel throughout his dominions... (M)ore than 200,000 horses are stabled at these posts for the special use of the messengers. Moreover, the posts themselves number more than 10,000, all furnished on the same lavish scale. The whole organization is so stupendous and so costly that it baffles speech and writing....

If it happens at any point that there is some river or lake over which the couriers and mounted messengers must pass, the neighboring cities keep three or four ferry-boats continually in readiness for this purpose.

...When the need arises for the Great Khan to receive immediate tidings (news) ... I assure you that the messengers ride 200 miles in a day, sometimes even 250. Let me explain how it is done.... They tighten their belts and swathe their heads and off they go with all the speed they can muster, till they reach the next post-house twenty-five miles away. As they draw near they sound a sort of horn which is audible at a great distance, so that horses can be got ready for them. On arrival they find two fresh horses, ready harnessed, fully rested, and in good running form. They mount there ... and off they go again.... And so it goes on till evening.

Note: The Great Khan is Kubilai Khan.

Document M

Source: William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck*, translated by a nun of Stanbrook Abbey, edited by Christopher Dawson, London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

Karakorum, Mongolia, May 30, 1254

LV

The next day he (Mongke Khan) sent his scribes to me, who said: "Our master sends us to you and he says: 'Here you are, Christians, Saracens (Muslims), and tuins (Rubruck would translate tuins as pagans; in fact, they were Buddhists), and each of you declares that his law is the best and his literature, that is his books, are the truest.' He therefore wishes you all to meet together and hold a conference and each one is to write down what he says so that he can know the truth."

(On the day following the exchange between the religious spokesmen Mongke Khan made this profession of faith to Rubruck:) "We Mongols believe that there is but one God, by Whom we live and by Whom we die and towards Him we have an upright heart. But just as God gave different fingers to the hand so has He given different ways to men."

- Notes:**
- Mongke Khan was the fourth Great Khan, the grandson of Genghis, and the brother of Kubilai, who would succeed Mongke upon his death in 1259.
 - Over the course of the next two centuries Mongol leaders often converted to the region's dominant religions – Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism.