



MONGOLS

MONGOLS, an Altaic people whose home lay in the east of the modern republic of Mongolia, and who, under the leadership of Temüjin (d. 624/1227; better known as [Čengiz Khan](#)), conquered an empire that embraced China, Central Asia, the south Russian steppe, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. The last Mongol emperor of China was expelled by the native Ming dynasty in 1368. A branch of Čengiz Khan's family, known as the Il-khans, ruled in Iran until 754/1353; and two of the dynasties which subsequently governed in the western regions of the Ilkh anate—the [Chobanids](#) and the Jalayerids—were also of Mongol stock, being descended from Mongol amirs in the Il-khans' service. The line of Čengiz Khan's descendants ruling in Central Asia, the [Chaghatayids](#), lasted until 1678. The Mongol state in the south Russian steppe, the 'Golden Horde', survived until 1502 or—in the shape of a successor state, the khanate of the Crimea—until the annexation by Catherine the Great in 1783.

Origins and early history. Possibly first mentioned in texts of the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907), the Mongols, like their nomadic and forest-dwelling neighbors, were subject during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries to the Khitan (Ḳetā; Ḳetā), a people of probably Mongolian stock who forged an extensive empire in eastern Asia and ruled over part of northern China as the Liao dynasty (1004-1125). But the Jurchen, a Manchurian people who expelled the Khitan and reigned as the Chin dynasty (1123-1234), abandoned their predecessors' forward policy in the steppe and reverted to the traditional Chinese tactics of "divide and rule" as a means of maintaining frontier security



against the steppe tribes. The resulting vacuum was one of the circumstances that would in time enable the Mongols to create a new hegemony in the steppe. Temüjin's early career was spent regrouping the scattered followers of his clan, the Borjigid, and then asserting his authority over neighboring Turco-Mongolian tribes such as the Tatars (Tatār), the Kereyid (Karāit), the Naiman (Nāimān), the Merkid (Markit) and the Önggüd (Ungkut). In about 1206 a tribal assembly proclaimed him ruler of "all those who dwell in felt tents," with the title Činggis (Čengiz) Khan. His campaigns of conquest were not confined within the steppe and forest regions but also extended into areas of sedentary culture. The Tangud (Xi-Xia; Hsi-Hsia) state in Gan-su (Kan-su) was reduced to tributary status in 1209, and from 1211 Mongol forces were engaged in almost continual warfare with the Chin dynasty in northern China. But Čengiz Khan's attention was already being drawn westward by the flight of defeated enemies into the dominions of the Qara- ("Black") Khitan, a state founded in Central Asian by Khitan fugitives in the previous century; in 1209 he received the submission of the Uighurs (Oyğur), a semi-sedentary Turkish people in the Tarim basin whose ruler was subordinated to the Qara-Khitan. The Qara-Khitan were reduced in about 1218, and in the same year the massacre by the K̄vārazmšāh's governor at Otrār of a group of merchants, acting as envoys on Čengiz Khan's behalf, furnished a pretext for his seven-year campaign against the Khwarazmian empire (615-621/1218-1224). Čengiz Khan's last military action was to destroy the Xi-Xia (1227). The conquest of the Chin was completed only in 1234, during the reign of his son Ögödei, and the overthrow of the Song (Sung) state in southern China was not completed until 1279 under his grandson Qubilai.

The effectiveness of the Mongol military machine can be ascribed to various causes. Although every adult male Mongol was a warrior, Mongol numbers are undoubtedly exaggerated in the majority of sources; the modest figure of 129,000 supplied by Rašid-al-Din (*Jāme' al-tawāriq*, ed. Rawšan and Musavi, I, p. 592, tr. Thackston, I, p. 272) for the entire Mongol army at Čengiz Khan's death carries greater weight. The discipline of these troops—a byword in Jovayni's day (ed. Qazvini, I, pp. 22-4, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 31-2)—is often adduced to account for their victories, and certainly maneuvers over vast distances were planned and executed with a remarkable precision (Sinor, 1975). But if the Mongols' discipline outstripped that of most of the armies they encountered, it is still unlikely to have exceeded that of the Jurchen-Chin forces. So, too, the much-praised decimal system, on which military organization was based, was not peculiar to the Mongols, having been a feature of the Khitan and Jurchen

armies. More plausible explanations of Mongol strength lie in the measures taken by Čengiz Khan to forge a state that transcended the old tribal allegiances. Not only did he eliminate the ruling elite of tribes that had resisted him and disperse these tribes among new military units, but even compliant tribal groups were placed under new commanders whose loyalty was to him alone. Such arrangements neutralized the centrifugal tendencies that had bedeviled earlier steppe empires, creating a unity that centered upon the conqueror's own dynasty. This stood in sharp contrast to the disunity of the Mongols' opponents, notably that which characterized the recently assembled and heterogeneous territories of the K̄vārazmšāh. The widespread defection to the Mongols of military units from the enemy's ranks played a vital role in the Mongol victories in China (De Rachewiltz, 1966). The deployment of large numbers of Chinese infantry and of Chinese siege technicians, in particular, was instrumental in the conquest of those parts of the country unsuited to traditional nomadic cavalry warfare. Lastly, it has been shown how, by the 1250s, the Mongol imperial government was able to mobilize immense human and material resources for the reduction of southwestern Asia (Allsen, 1987).

This same capacity to draw upon non-Mongol talent is visible also in the administrative sphere. In 1204 the nascent Mongol chancery adopted the Uighur script, and Čengiz Khan borrowed several of the administrative techniques employed by the states that came under Mongol control. His conquests put at his disposal a wide range of personnel—Khitan, Uighurs, Chinese and Muslims—who had served his enemies. Several of the defeated peoples also possessed imperial traditions of their own. At what state Čengiz Khan embraced an ideology of world dominion, based on a mandate from Eternal Heaven (*Tenggeri*), we do not know (De Rachewiltz, 1973): the earliest certain evidence, in the form of the ultimatums sent out by his successors to rulers who had not yet yielded, dates from 1247 (Voegelin, 1941). It has been proposed that belief in the mandate arose only when the Mongols realized that they were in fact conquering the world (Morgan, 1989, p. 200).

The conquest of Iran (For a more detailed survey of events there from 658/1260 to 754/1353, see IL-KHĀNS). Iran was subjugated in three stages. In the course of Čengiz Khan's seven-year campaign to the west, the Khwarazmian empire was overthrown and the cities of Transoxiana, Khorasan and Sistān were taken and usually sacked; wholesale massacres occurred at Marv and Nišāpur. Further west, however, Mongol operations were more cursory in nature. Here a division under the generals Jebe (Jaba) and Sübedei (Subādāy), sent in



pursuit of the K̄vārazmšāh ‘Ala’-al-Din Moḥammad, traversed northern Iran and the Caucasus before heading back eastward through the Caspian steppe to rejoin Čengiz Khan on his return march; Ray and Hamadan surrendered, and ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam was ravaged, but Esfahan held out until 635/1237. The second phase began in about 625/1228, with the dispatch of the general Čormaḡun (Čurmāḡun, q.v.) against Moḥammad’s son Jalāl-al-Din, who was trying to carve out a principality for himself in western Iran. Jalāl-al-Din was eliminated in 628/1231, and Čurmāḡun subjugated Georgia and Armenia (1238-9). Čurmāḡun and, from about 638/1241, Baiju (Bāyjū) effectively commanded only in the west; in Khorasan a series of military governors, beginning with Čin Temür (Čin Timur), ruled alongside a civil authority, headed successively by Kōrgüz (Kurguz) and Argūn Āqā, which introduced the census and oversaw the mustering of fiscal and military resources.

The dispatch of Čengiz Khan’s grandson Hülegü (Hulāgu) to Iran by his brother, the qaḡhan Mōngke (Mungkā), in 653/1255 inaugurated the third and final phase in the conquest. The strongholds of the Nezāri Isma‘ilis (“Assassins”) in the Alborz mountains were captured (654/1256); Baghdad and other cities in Iraq fell, and the Abbasid Caliphate was extinguished (656/1258). Hulāgu had advanced into Syria when the news of the qaḡhan’s death prompted him to withdraw to Azarbaijan, and the rump force he left in Palestine was overwhelmed by the Mamluks at ‘Ayn Jālūt in Galilee (658/1260). This relatively minor reverse coincided almost exactly with the collapse of the unitary Mongol empire, though without in any way contributing to it.

The disintegration of the Mongol empire. During his lifetime Čengiz Khan had allotted to his kinsfolk specific grazing-grounds, together with the nomadic troops and bodies of the subject people—the units called *ulus* (*olus*) in the sources. The largest of these went to his four sons by his chief wife, namely Juči (Juči), Čaḡadai (Čaḡatāy), Ögödei (Ugadāy) and Tolui (Tuluy, Tuli); Jovayni (ed. Qazvini, I, pp. 31-2, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 42-3) describes their territories as radiating out in an arc westward in proportion to seniority. Thus the portion of Juči, the eldest, extended “from Qayaliḡ and K̄vārazm to Saqsın and Bolḡār and as far on that side as the hooves of Mongol horses had trodden.” Juči predeceased his father and was succeeded by his son Batu (Bātu), the effective founder of the Mongol power centered on the Pontic and Caspian steppes and known in Russian history as the Golden Horde. Tensions had arisen among Čengiz Khan’s sons during his lifetime, and the accession of his third son Ugadāy may not have gone unchallenged. A five-year interregnum intervened

between his death and the election of his son Güyüg (Goyuk, q.v.), and Goyuk's death in turn was followed by a three years' interval prior to the enthronement of Tolui's eldest son, Mungkā. Opposition to the new sovereign's accession by the majority of the princes of the lines of Čaġatāy and Ugadāy was violently suppressed and punished with execution or exile and the redistribution of their resources. Mungkā's death in 657/1259 was followed by a full-blown civil war between his brothers Qubilai (Qubelāy) and Ariġ Böke (Ariġ Bukā) and their respective supporters among the princes, which ended only with the defeat and surrender of Ariġ Bukā in 662/1264. In the Caucasus a secondary conflict over territory in northwestern Iran broke out between Hulāgu, who supported Qubelāy, and their cousin Berke (Barka), ruler of the Mongols of the Golden Horde, who backed Ariġ Bukā. Hulāgu in Iran, and the Chaghatayids in Central Asia, seized the opportunity to appropriate the resources that should rightfully have been shared with their kinsmen under the supervision of the qaghan's officials. Qubelāy and his successors recognized the new status of Hulāgu and his line, the Il-khans, and the alliance between these two Toluid branches of the dynasty persisted well into the 14th century.

The empire thus splintered in about 1261-2 into four discrete and independent khanates, each still a formidable power in its own right: the dominions of the qaghan in China and Mongolia; the Chaghatayid khanate in Central Asia; the Golden Horde; and the Ilkhanate in Iran and Iraq. After 668/1270 the situation was further complicated by the rise of Ugadāy's grandson Qaidu (Qāydu), who brought the majority of the Chaghatayid princes under his authority and, as Qubelāy's most determined rival, obstructed the qaghan's attempts to expand into Central Asia until his death in 702/1303. A general reconciliation in 704/1304-5, in which the various Mongol khans once again recognized a single qaghan in the person of Qubelāy's successor Temür (Timur), was short-lived.

The effect of the empire's disintegration was to halt Mongol expansion, except on the Chinese frontier. The hostility of the Golden Horde largely tied down the Il-khans in Azarbaijan and northwestern Iran, where they tended to reside. To the east, the flight of Jochid troops into Afghanistan in significant numbers led to the creation of the Negüderi (Nikudāri) Mongols or Qarā'unās. This group, which owed allegiance to no khanate until it was largely brought under Chaghatayid control in the 1290s, obstructed any possibility of Ilkhanid expansion toward India.

The economic impact of the Mongol conquest on Iran. Since Čengiz Khan's



assault on the Khwarazmian empire was designed to avenge the murder of Mongol envoys, it was accompanied by considerable destruction. Towns which surrendered without a struggle fared better than those which resisted, particularly when the siege had claimed the lives of prominent Mongols: At Bāmiān in 618/1221, where Čengiz Khan's favorite grandson was killed, every living creature was massacred. The sources give extraordinary totals for those massacred in the towns of Khorasan (in Herat, 1,600,000 according to Sayfi, p. 60, or 2,400,000 according to Juzjāni, *Ṭabaqāt* II, p. 121; in Marv, over 1,300,000 according to Jovayni, ed. Qazvini, I, p. 128, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 163-4; in Nišāpur, 1,747,000 according to Sayfi, p. 73). Such figures cannot be taken at face value; yet they surely indicate slaughter on a scale unprecedented in the minds of contemporaries. Hulāgu's invasion was apparently less destructive, although one author gives the number killed in Baghdad as 800,000 (*Tāriḵ-e gozida*, ed. Navā'i, p. 589) and Hulāgu himself, in a letter to the French king which probably aimed to give an inflated impression of his own power, set the figure at 2,000,000 (Meyvaert, p. 256). But the slaughter in Iraq was still blamed in part for the low productivity of the region almost eighty years later (ʿOmari, p. 92).

In Iran, the economic dislocation resulting from the Mongol campaigns included not only the relatively short-term consequences of abandoned tillage but also the longer-term neglect of irrigation channels (*qanāts*). As nomads, the Mongols may not at first have appreciated, in any case, the economic usefulness of urban societies. There are indications that Ugaḏāy, exasperated by the activity of local rebels, envisaged turning Khorasan into grasslands (Jovayni, ed. Qazvini, II, p. 221, tr. Boyle, II, p. 485; Aubin, 1995, pp. 13-14), an expedient that had been proposed during his father's era for northern China (Morgan, 1982a, p.126). Since the conquest entailed the large-scale movement of Turco-Mongolian herdsmen into Iran, particularly into Azarbaijan and Khorasan, some agricultural regions would undoubtedly have been converted to pasture (Aubin, 1989). Southern Persia probably suffered less, since it was spared the passage of large Mongol armies and Mongol control here during the early decades was exercised indirectly through existing dynasties such as the Salghurids in Fārs (until 685/1286-7) and the Qutluḡ-ḵānids in Kerman (until 704/1305). But occasional recalcitrance on the part of local rulers provoked Mongol punitive campaigns; and during the Ilkhanid era Fārs and Kerman were also ravaged by the Nikudāri Mongols in 677/1278-9 and 680/1281-2, and by the Chaghatayids in 700/1300-1 (Aubin, 1969, pp. 85-6).

During the early decades of Mongol rule, economic recovery was further impeded by a rapacious fiscal policy. While the pre-Mongol Islamic taxes were retained, the population was additionally subjected to a poll tax (*qubčur*) and to *ad hoc* requisitions on the part of the Mongol governors; local inhabitants were also obliged to maintain the postal relay stations (Mongolian *jam*; Turkish *yam*) and to provide for passing envoys and others traveling on official business. Farming out the collection of taxes to merchants, members of the groups known as *ortaq*, gave rise to further oppression. These abuses were terminated by the reforms under the Il-khan Ġazan (*Ġāzān*), if we can believe Rašid-al-Din, although as that ruler's chief minister he is by no means a disinterested source.

The Mongols and Islam. For Juzjāni, who experienced at first hand the terrors of the Mongol assaults on Khorasan, the cataclysm seemed like a sequel to the Qara-Khitān conquests of the previous century. But the assertion of infidel rule over the entire eastern half of the Islamic world by military force, accompanied by the destruction of the Caliphate, clearly administered a far more profound shock to Muslim sensibilities than had the advent of the Qara-Khitān. In Iran, the new political dispensation may have encouraged spiritual withdrawal (Gronke, 1990). Non-Muslim military governors, and subsequently the Il-khans, admittedly presided over a bureaucracy staffed often by families that had furnished office-holders since the Saljuq period; one such family even provided the chief minister (*šāheh-divān*) of the Il-khanid empire in the person of Šams-al-Din Jovayni (d. 683/1284). But Muslims by no means enjoyed a monopoly of the highest bureaucratic posts: Arġun's vizier, Sa'd-al-Dawla (d. 690/1291), was a Jew.

More importantly, Muslims were subject not merely to taxes that had no sanction in the Šari'a, but also to the customary law of the steppe, as expressed through the precepts of Čengiz Khan and various enactments (Mongol *jasag*; Turkish *yasa*) that he issued (the view that these constituted some kind of written code has been challenged by Morgan, 1986b; cf. De Rachewiltz, 1993). Two *yasas*, prohibiting washing in running water during the summer and the slaughter of an animal by cutting its throat, were enforced even in Khorasan, according to Jovayni, who retails anecdotes concerning Muslims who contravened them (ed. Qazvini, I, pp. 161-3, 227, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 204-7, 272). But the main aim of these tales, seemingly, is to highlight Ugađāy's clemency in sparing the culprit (in contrast with the unyielding rigor of his brother Čaġatāy); and to what extent such laws can ever have impinged on Muslims



domiciled at a distance from the steppe is a moot question.

The Mongols' cultic practices, like those of other steppe peoples, belonged in the category usually (but misleadingly) termed "shamanism," involving reverence for ancestors and ceremonies aimed at propitiating malign spirits and the forces of nature. They believed, however, in the Heaven (Tenggeri) traditionally venerated by the nomadic peoples of Inner Asia, and their government was characterized by religious pluralism. The Mongols honored not only shamans, but holy men from all the religious groups with which they came into contact: Buddhist and Taoist monks, Muslim scholars and dervishes, and Christian monks and priests were exempt from forced labor and military service and from personal taxation, though they were taxed on the products of their economic activity. One consequence of the Mongols' sensitivity to religious matters was that in Iran Hulāgu and his successors left pious endowments (*waqf*, pl. *awqāf*) untouched ('Omari, p. 92). Individual Mongol rulers, princes, princesses and generals were sometimes credited with sympathy for one or another faith, but this is more likely to have reflected a syncretistic approach; and in any case, as Jovayni noticed (ed. Qazvini, I, pp. 18-19, tr. Boyle, I, p. 26), they continued to observe Čengiz Khan's *yasa* prohibiting favor toward one religion at the expense of any other. The motive behind a prince's patronage of a particular religious community was primarily to secure its prayers and to appropriate spiritual techniques that might enhance his own prosperity in this life. Nevertheless, reports of the Mongols' monotheism and favor towards eastern Christians, combined with the freedom to proselytize, fostered the idea that the nomads were ripe for conversion to Christianity and encouraged friars from Catholic Europe to create a network of houses along the main trade routes through the empire. Where Iran was concerned, such optimism was also nurtured by Ilkhanid diplomacy, which sought to induce Western powers to launch a crusade against the Mamluks. Indirectly, Islam also benefited from the Mongol campaigns of conquest. Jovayni (ed. Qazvini, I, pp. 9-10, 159, tr. Boyle, I, pp. 13-4, 201), writing in the immediate aftermath of Hulāgu's expedition, could comment that, as a result of the Mongol conquests, the faith had spread into regions where hitherto it had never penetrated. As early as 1248 a Western European observer had noticed the progress likewise made by Islam among the Mongol troops in the Near East (Simon de Saint-Quentin, p. 47). This did not necessarily arise from any initiative on the part of the rulers, as in the Pontic steppe, where Barka's adoption of Islam (prior to 651/1253) brought in its wake the conversion of large numbers of his nomadic subjects. The Il-khans

took longer to succumb. The first Muslim Il-khan, Tegüder (Aḥmad-Takudār, q.v.), reigned only briefly (681-683/1282-1284); the definitive conversion of the Ilkhanate came with the adoption of Islam by Ġāzān (694-703/1295-1304) on his accession. One impulse behind Ġāzān's decision was possibly the preponderance of Muslims in the ranks of his Mongol supporters (Melville, 1990, pp. 171-2).

The union of much of Asia under a single imperial government unquestionably facilitated long-distance commerce and travel. At an early juncture the enterprising journeys of Muslim merchants served to establish Persian as the *lingua franca* even in the easternmost reaches of the Mongol empire (Huang, 1986). The notion of a *pax Mongolica*, however, must be severely qualified for the era after 1261-2, when the different Mongol khanates were often at war. Following the outbreak of their conflict, Hulāgu and Barka in 662/1263-4 each ordered the massacre of groups of merchants in the other's service and confiscated their goods, with the result that trade came to a halt (*Tāriḳ-e Waṣṣāf*, p. 50); and by about 1290 the war between Qubelāy and Qāydu rendered the overland route through Central Asia less secure than the maritime route via southern India (Marco Polo, p. 89; Montecorvino, "Epistola II," p. 349, tr. Dawson, p. 226). On the other hand, the diplomatic links between the two Toluid courts in Iran and China drew the two countries into a more intimate relationship than hitherto, facilitating a wide range of cultural exchanges in the fields of medicine, agronomy, astronomy, and printing (Allsen, 2001). One important intermediary in this context was Bolad Cheng-xiang (Pulād Činksānk), who accompanied an embassy from Qubelāy to Arġun in 684/1285. He remained in Iran until his death in 712/1313 and was one of the principal sources of information for the *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ*, the voluminous historical encyclopaedia of Rašid-al-Din, a work that owes its geographical scope directly to the creation of the Mongol world-empire.

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