



Genghis Khan: a history

*An information pack for the **St John's Inspire Programme Summer Schools**,*

St John's College, Oxford

Introduction

In around 1162, in the Onon River region of northern Mongolia, a son is born to Yesügei, chief of the Borjigin clan and his wife Ö'elun. He is named Temüjin and he supposedly began life clutching a blood clot in his right fist – this was interpreted as a sign that he was destined to rule the World. Note that, especially in the early period of his life, the dates of key events in Genghis Khan's life are approximate.

This pack contains information about the following aspects of Genghis Khan's life:

- Early life: the steps leading from Temüjin's birth to him becoming Genghis Khan
- The Structure of the Mongol Army and their Tactics
- The Campaigns of Genghis Khan
- The three Ls: Law, Literacy and Logistics

Choose one of these topics, and learn more about your chosen aspect using the information in this pack, alongside the links to videos and other articles provided. The information on each aspect will include a **historical source**. A historical source (source) is something that informs us about history – it might be a book, journal entry, receipt, or object. Historians study sources, and use this to make conclusions about features of the past, such as how people lived, or how key decisions were made. It is important to note that sources are also a part of history – the person who wrote or created the source was influenced by their culture at the time. Therefore, the information that a particular source gives us can be open to interpretation.

Using the information provided, make notes on key information about your chosen aspect. You should use bullet points and pictures, to make brief notes that are meaningful to you. Remember to include comments on the source you have studied, and what conclusions you have drawn from it.



The **Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue** in Mongolia is made of stainless steel. Although this is a statue of Genghis Khan, we don't actually know what he looked like. During his life time, Genghis Khan forbade the production of any images of his likeness. The most well-known pictures of him date from after his death and come to us mostly from Chinese, Persian and Turkish artists, so he is not depicted as a Mongol. Some accounts refer to him having eyes like a cat... so they might have been green?

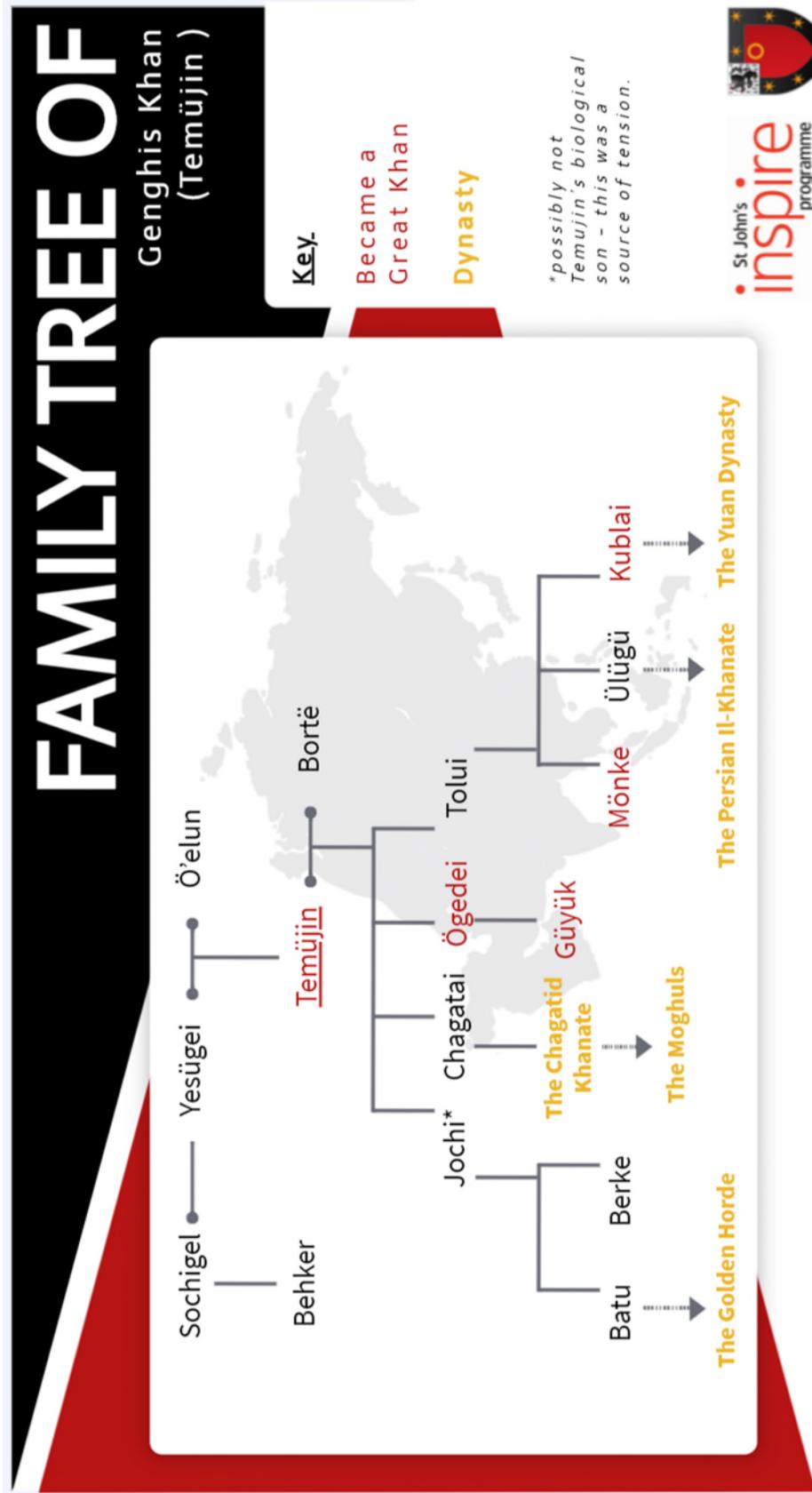
Challenge: how high is the **Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue**?

The statue points towards Genghis Khan's birthplace. No one knows where Genghis Khan is buried, as he asked to be buried without markings, as was the custom of his tribe. Many believe that he was buried close to his birthplace, however, according to legend, anyone who was part of the funeral procession was killed to prevent them revealing his burial location!



Early Life of Genghis Khan

Family Tree





A Difficult Childhood

When Temüjin was born, there was no united Mongol nation; there were many separate clans. Many clans followed a nomadic way of life, grazing their herds across the extensive grass lands of the region. Conflict between, and even within, clans was common. Temüjin's father, Yesügei of the Borjigin clan, hoped to unite some of the clans. With this goal in mind, he agreed a future marriage between his son Temüjin, and Börte, the daughter of noble from another clan. Temüjin was 9 years old at the time.

Days after arranging this future marriage, Yesügei died. Some sources report that his death was caused by poison, while accepting hospitality from the Tatars on his way home. The Tatars were members of the Tatar confederation: a major tribal group in the Mongol Plateau, which is an expanse of land in Central Asia, divided between modern Mongolia, China and Russia.

Temüjin attempted to succeed his father, however, due to his age he was seen as too weak to lead. Temüjin, his mother (Ö'elun), and Yesügei's other children were driven out of the clan and forced to live as refugees in dangerous conditions. During this time, Temüjin killed one of his brothers, Behter, because he was caught hoarding food for himself rather than sharing with the rest of the family.

These years of Temüjin's life informed some of his later values:

- the importance of hospitality
- the importance of unity
- the role of strong women, such as his mother

Enslavement and Escape

At the age of 15 Temüjin was captured and enslaved by the Tayichi'ud clan. This was especially galling as the Tayichi'uds had once been allies of Yesügei, Temüjin's father. Temüjin was able to persuade two guards to help him escape. These guards were Jelme and Bo'orchu: Temüjin later rewarded them richly.

This episode of Temüjin's life informed some of his later values:

- the importance of loyalty
- Temüjin's attitude to slavery: Genghis Khan later made it illegal for a Mongol to own another Mongol as a slave (however, it was permitted to have non-Mongol slaves)

Marriage – and the tradition of 'wife stealing'

One way to try and create some stability and forge alliances among the Mongol clans was through marriage. Ö'elun, Temüjin's mother, was keen to contract an advantageous marriage for her son with a bride from her own people, so from his childhood he was betrothed to Bortë. Due to Temüjin's banishment the marriage was not able to take place until around 1178.

During the wedding celebrations, the Merkit Clan attacked and Bortë was kidnapped. Wife stealing was a common means of striking at an enemy in the Mongol lands. Indeed, Temüjin's own mother Ö'elun had been 'stolen' (from the Merkit clan) by Yesügei.



Temüjin was left bereft by the abduction of his bride and his campaign to rescue her proved significant not just for the Mongol clans but the whole world.

This episode of Temüjin's life informed some of his later values:

- His love and respect for Bortë – although he goes on to have other wives and armies of concubines, Bortë always comes first. He later makes her his 'Supreme Empress' and often sought her advice. Only her children were his heirs.

Rescue and Alliances

In order to rescue Bortë, Temüjin needed to form alliances. This was due to his weak position, after escaping from the Tayichi'uds.

He approached Toghril of the Keraites (an old ally of Yesügei's) and his old childhood friend Jamukha. As children Jamukha and Temüjin had sworn a vow of 'Anda', so they are 'blood-brothers'. Toghril and Jamukha came through with a force of 20,000 warriors. The Merkit clan were defeated easily, and Temüjin was reunited with Bortë.

This episode of Temüjin's life was important in the following ways:

- This episode clearly demonstrates the importance of alliances and the need for the Mongol Clans to unite if they are to be successful
- The important Mongol shaman (holy man) Teb-Tengri declares this victory to be a sign that Heaven has set the world aside for Temüjin.

A Falling Out and a Defeat

Following the defeat of the Merkits, it looked as though the two 'blood-brothers' might build their power together. However, gradually conflict emerges between Jamukha and Temüjin. While Jamukha preferred to advance those from the traditional Mongol nobility, Temüjin was keen to promote talent from wherever he found it. Indeed, some of Temüjin's most successful warriors came from far from typical backgrounds and even from the ranks of former enemies (eg. Subutai and Jebe).

Jamukha became increasingly jealous of Temüjin, especially after he was made Khan of the Mongols in 1186, and in 1187 he attacked with a force of over 30,000 men and defeated Temüjin at the battle of Dalan Balzhut. Jamukha caused outrage when he ordered the boiling alive of over 70 captives.

For the next 10 or so years there are almost no surviving records of events, but we do know from later accounts that Dalan Balzhut and its aftermath had the following consequences:

- Temüjin vowed never to be defeated again
- The boiling of captives alienated other clans from Jamukha

The Road to 1206

The next milestone we will examine is in 1197. Still allied with Toghril, Temüjin and Toghril have united with the Jin Chinese in their campaign against the Tatars. This profited Temüjin and Toghril greatly, especially as the Tatars were long standing rivals of the Mongols. Temüjin won a number of victories and used his gains wisely. Anyone from among the conquered who were willing to give



their services and loyalty to Temüjin were welcomed, protected and rewarded. In this way he won over many former rivals gaining talent, loyalty and an ever more powerful army.

By 1201, Jamukha returned and began to pose a serious challenge to his one-time blood brother. After a number of battles, Jamukha was eventually handed over to Temüjin by his own men.

Source 1, below, tells you what happened at this reunion.

The Great Quiriltai, 1206

In the year of the Tiger the Mongol clans called a great meeting, or Quiriltai, at which Temüjin was given the title 'Universal Ruler' or GENGHIS KHAN. With the united Mongol clans and 'imported' talent from among those he had recently conquered, notably the Tartars, Genghis was now able to begin his campaign of world conquest under the banner of the Nine Tails.



Source 1: Temüjin and Jamukha meet for the last time

'*The Secret History of the Mongols*' is the most important source we have about the Mongols written by the Mongols themselves. It was written shortly after the death of Ghenghis Khan (Temüjin) in 1227 as a private/secret history made for Temüjin's family but we know about it from Chinese translations made in the 14th century.

Using the Source

We are going to look at what '*The Secret History of the Mongols*' says about Temüjin's feud with Jamukha.

When he was young, Temüjin had a close friend, Jamukha. They went through a ceremony to make themselves 'blood brothers': anda. For many years Temüjin and Jamukha fought alongside each other.

However, as Temüjin became more successful the 'blood brothers' fell out and split up. Jamukha led a group of Mongols away from Temüjin's camp and this group went to war against Temüjin and even won a big battle against him.

Eventually, some Mongols in Jamukha's group turned against him and, according to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, this is what happened next.

From '*The Secret History of the Mongols*', translated by Igor de Rachewiltz (Open Access)

'his five companions laid hands on Jamuqa [Jamukha] and, seizing him, brought him to Činggis Qa'an [Genghis Khan]'...

...'Činggis Qa'an said, 'How could we let men live who have raised their hands against their rightful lord? To whom can such men be companions? Cut down to the offspring of their offspring these people who have raised their hands against their rightful lord!'

So he ordered, and had the people who had laid hands on Jamuqa cut down in his very presence.

Činggis Qa'an then said, 'Tell Jamuqa: "Now the two of us are united. Let us be companions!'

...'After Činggis Qa'an had spoken, Jamuqa said'...

...'Now my sworn friend the Qan shows favour to me and says, "Let us be companions!" But when it was the time for being companions, I was not one. Now, sworn friend, You have pacified all our people, You have unified all other peoples, and the qan's throne has been assigned to you. Now that the world is at your disposal, of what use would I be as a companion to you? On the contrary, O my sworn friend, I would intrude into your dreams in the dark night, I would trouble your heart in the bright day, I would be a louse in your collar, I would be a thorn in the inner lapel of your coat. 'I had many paternal grandmothers. When I became disloyal to my sworn friend I made a mistake. Now, in this life – that of the sworn friend and me – my fame has indeed passed from sunrise to sunset. You, sworn friend, had a wise mother. You were born a hero, and as you had younger brothers, valiant companions and seventy-three geldings, you, my sworn friend, excelled me. As for me, I lost my parents when I was small and had no younger brothers. My wife is a prattler, my companions untrustworthy.

Because of this I was excelled by my sworn friend, whose destiny was ordained by Heaven. If you want to show favour to me, let me die swiftly and your heart will be at rest. And if you condescend to have me put to death, let them kill me without shedding blood. When I lie dead, my bones buried in a high place, for ever and ever I shall protect you and be a blessing to the offspring of your offspring.'...



...'To these words of his Činggis Qa'an said'...

...'Now, when I say, 'Let us be companions!', you refuse; when I offered to spare your life, you declined." Tell him that. Say to him: "Now, according to your request, you shall die without your blood being shed."' He ordered that Jamuqa be put to death without his blood being shed and that his body should not be abandoned in the open, but be given a fitting burial.'...

Source Questions

These questions are for you to think about – there is no 'right answer'! As with any work in our Summer School, we encourage you to Share with us!

All pupils who share their work with us before August 31 2021 will be entered into a prize draw! Each winning entry will be awarded a £10 Amazon voucher, and may be featured on Inspire Digital. For more information, see the 'Share with us' section on our webpage.

1. What do you think the Source tells you about the values of the Mongol people (what they thought was important)?
2. What does it tell you about Temüjin himself?
3. How reliable do you think the source is? (*Hint: think about when it was written and whom it was written for*)



Army Tactics of Genghis Khan

Video research

Click the two links below to watch the videos about the army tactics of the Mongol army. While you watch the videos, think about the following questions:

- What new tactics are being used?
- What factors underpin their success?
- Why is 'horse power' key?

[Video 1: Structure of the Mongol Army DOCUMENTARY, Kings and Generals](#)

[Video 2: How the Mongols Defeated their enemies, Kings and Generals](#)



Source 2: Mongol attitudes toward food and supplies

Using the Sources

Here, there are two sources which describe the attitudes towards food and supplies in the Mongol Army. Read the extracts from both sources, considering what they each tell you - are there any differences?

From *'The Complete History'*, by *Ali ibn al-Athir* (an Arab or Kurdish Historian: 1160 - 1233) (Open Access)

...'Moreover, they need no commissariat [army kitchen], nor the conveyance of supplies, for they have with them sheep, cows, horses, and the like quadrupeds, the flesh of which they eat, naught else. As for their beasts which they ride, these dig into the earth with their hoofs and eat the roots of plants, knowing naught of barley. And so, when they alight anywhere, they have need of nothing from without.'...

From *'The History of the Mongols'*, by *Giovanni da Pian del Carpine* (a medieval Italian diplomat, archbishop and explorer: ca 1180 - 1252) (Open Access)

...'They regard anything which can be eaten as food: ... dogs, wolves, foxes, and horses, and when in difficulty, they eat human flesh.'...

...'They even eat the afterbirth which comes out of a mare with the foal. Furthermore, we saw them eat lice. They would say, "Why should I not eat them when they eat my children and drink their blood?" We actually saw them eat mice.'...

...'It is a great sin among them if any food or drink is allowed in any way to go to waste; they are not permitted to give bones to dogs unless the marrow is first extracted.'...



Source Questions

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1. What do the two sources tell us about the Mongol diet?
2. What factors do you think limit their intake of vegetables and cereal?
3. *Ali ibn al-Athir* makes especial reference to the feeding habits of Mongol horses. Why are these significant and what advantages do they give?
4. What do *Giovanni da Pian del Carpine*’s comments tell us about Mongol attitudes to food?
5. How do you think these habits could have helped the Mongol army in their campaigns and what advantages, if any do they give?



Campaigns of Genghis Khan

Read through the campaigns of Genghis Khan below, then, read the source material and answer the questions.

Western Xia, 1205 - 10

In 1210 the new leader of the Jin Chinese sent envoys to Genghis Khan demanding submission. Genghis Khan did not submit!

Genghis sought advice from Heaven, before launching a daring three-pronged attack against the Jin. He easily overcame the Great Wall and turned his attention to the Jin heartlands.

Jin China had a highly developed economy with a well-established agricultural and industrial base. The Mongols, being nomadic, had neither, but they saw the advantages of the goods produced in these lands and the knowledge involved in their production. The campaign against the Jin gave the Mongols a major boost in terms of:

- Valuable loot – in particular silk.
- The ability to trade goods from raids.
- Skills, particularly regarding the use of gunpowder and metal working techniques from 'turned' or bribed captives'.

Zhongdu, 1215

Satisfied with the tribute and agreement for the Jin capital (Zhongdu) to act as a vassal state, Genghis Khan and his army returned to Mongolia.

However, the newly instated 'Golden Khan' governing over Jin moved his capital to the south, which Genghis Khan saw as a betrayal.

In 1215 Genghis returned to Zhongdu, and sieged the city, so people began to starve. People already felt betrayed by the Golden Khan, and so they submitted.

Genghis returned to Mongolia, and allowed his subordinates to sack (raid and plunder) the city. Thousands of citizens were massacred, which illustrated just how harshly captured cities that had shown resistance were treated.

Kara Khitai, 1217 - 18

Kara Khitai (also known as Western Liao) was a dynastic empire in Central Asia.

In 1204, the Mongol army defeated the Naimans, a Mongol tribe. Upon defeat, their leader, Kuchlug, fled west to Kara Khitai where he was welcomed and later married the Khan's daughter.

Kuchlug seized power from the Kara Khitai leader, eventually taking direct control of the area. Kuchlug sieged a vassal city of the Mongols, killing a man married to a descendant of Genghis in the process.



Genghis Khan sent assistance, and after a brilliant campaign by Genghis' top generals, Jebe and Subutai, Kuchlug was defeated. The process was made easier by Kuchlug's lack of popularity, due to his religious intolerance.

Khwarazm, 1219 - 1221

Following westward expansion, the Mongol Empire shared a border with the Khwarezmid Empire, governed by Shah, Ala ad-Din Muhammad II.

Genghis Khan was keen to protect trade routes throughout Central Asia. Therefore, he forged an agreement with the Shah to allow peaceful passage of trading caravans. This breaks down when a party of Mongol traders are captured and accused of spying in the city of Otrar. Envoys are sent to negotiate but they are killed and one of their severed heads is sent back to Genghis.

In doing this, Shah Muhammed II broke the rules of the free trade agreement, and the full force of the Mongol fury was unleashed upon Khwarazm: many cities are captured and looted, including Khwarazm.

Genghis was particularly angry that the custom of hospitality was offended, as Genghis highly valued hospitality due to the way in which his father was killed.

Bukhara, 1220

As part of his campaign against the Khwarezmid Empire, Genghis Khan moved to take Bukhara in 1220. The siege on Bukhara lasted only 15 days, before the citizens surrendered.

One of the most famous images we have of Genghis Khan is a Persian depiction of him giving his famous "Wrath of God" address to the wealthy citizens of Bukhara, after his victory.

This address is also described in the source - read Source 3, below, to find out more.

Jalal al-Din Mingburni, son of Shah Muhammad II, fled Eastwards and was pursued by the Mongol army all the way to the Indus Valley.

Some initial success by Jalal against his pursuers led some Khwarezmid cities which had submitted to the Mongols to go back on their agreements. These cities were sacked, and the citizens slaughtered.

Jalal's father, Muhammad II, fled to an island in the Caspian Sea and died of pneumonia in abject poverty.

Nishapur, 1221

In the western Khwarezmid province of Khorasan (present day Iran), was the city of Nishapur. As rumours spread that Jalal al-Din was preparing to fight the Mongols, Nishapur (alongside other cities in the region) rebelled against the Mongols.

Genghis Khan sent his youngest son Tolui to subdue this region. During the battle at Nishapur a son in law of Genghis Khan was killed. He asked his daughter how she would like the matter resolved. His



daughter demanded that every living thing in the city be killed (including the animals), and Tolui followed through on her demand.

After this horrific demonstration, the nearby city of Herat surrendered without a fight.

Return to Mongolia

During the campaign against the Khwarezmid Empire, a battle at the city of Urgench occurred. This was the most difficult battle of the Mongol Invasion. Finally, Genghis' third son, Ögedei, was able to take the city. After this battle, Ögedei was named as the successor to Genghis Khan.

This had important ramifications for the future of the Mongol Empire. Genghis had four sons by Bortë (he had many children from other wives, but only sons by Bortë were recognised as potential heirs). All four sons were powerful warriors with a loyal following of their own.

However, Genghis' oldest son, Jochi, was conceived during a time when Bortë had been kidnapped. Genghis chose to acknowledge Jochi, (had he not, Genghis would have had to reject Bortë too), but there were questions over Jochi's true parentage.

In the spring of 1223, Genghis Khan returned to Mongolia. En route, the army raided cities in both Afghanistan and Northern India.

Europe, 1222 - 1225

Subutai was a Mongol general, and a brilliant military strategist who worked with both Genghis Khan and his son Ögedei. In the early 1220's, Subutai conceived of a plan to move the Mongol Empire into Europe.

First, Subutai and Jebe (another general) invaded the Kingdom of Georgia. Georgia was raided and plundered, but not conquered. The objective was to cut through Georgia to the Caucasus Mountains, which were believed to be impossible to traverse.

In one of the most daring military ventures in history, Subutai and Jebe ventured into the Caucasus Mountains and beyond. One by one the Caucasian, Kievan and Russian princes fell. The result was that Mongol power became established in what is now Russia.

Subutai and Jebe succeeded in their mission - later in history, both Napoleon and Hitler would fail to complete the same task.

Mongol power remained in this region until the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th Century.

[Click this link to watch a video about the expedition of Subutai and Jebe.](#)

Western Xia (II), 1225 – 27

Although a vassal state of the Mongol Empire, Western Xia, did not provide any assistance in the Mongol invasion of the Khwarezmid Empire. This was despite Genghis Khan instructing them to send



troops. Instead, Western Xia began to look towards the remaining Jin for alliances against the Mongols.

In vengeance, Genghis attacked Western Xia. The Western Xia army was unable to travel from the capital, Yinchuan, through a desert to meet the Mongol army. This allowed the Mongol army to progress easily. In each city, they gained prisoners, weapons, defectors and food which allowed them to progress to the next. Finally arriving at the capital, Yinchuan surrendered after a 6 month siege. Peace negotiations were made, but despite this, Genghis had the entire family of the ruler executed.

At the taking of Yinchuan in 1227 Genghis Khan died. The way in which he died is not known exactly - his death was kept a secret, to prevent it impacting on ongoing campaigns.

His last words were:

"With Heaven's aid I have conquered for you a great empire. But my life has been too short to achieve the conquest of the World. That task I leave to you."

Succession

After hearing that Ögedei had been named as successor, Jochi never forgave his father. Jochi withdrew to the North, and did not assist in future battles. Genghis Khan was even considering marching against his rebellious son, before he died.

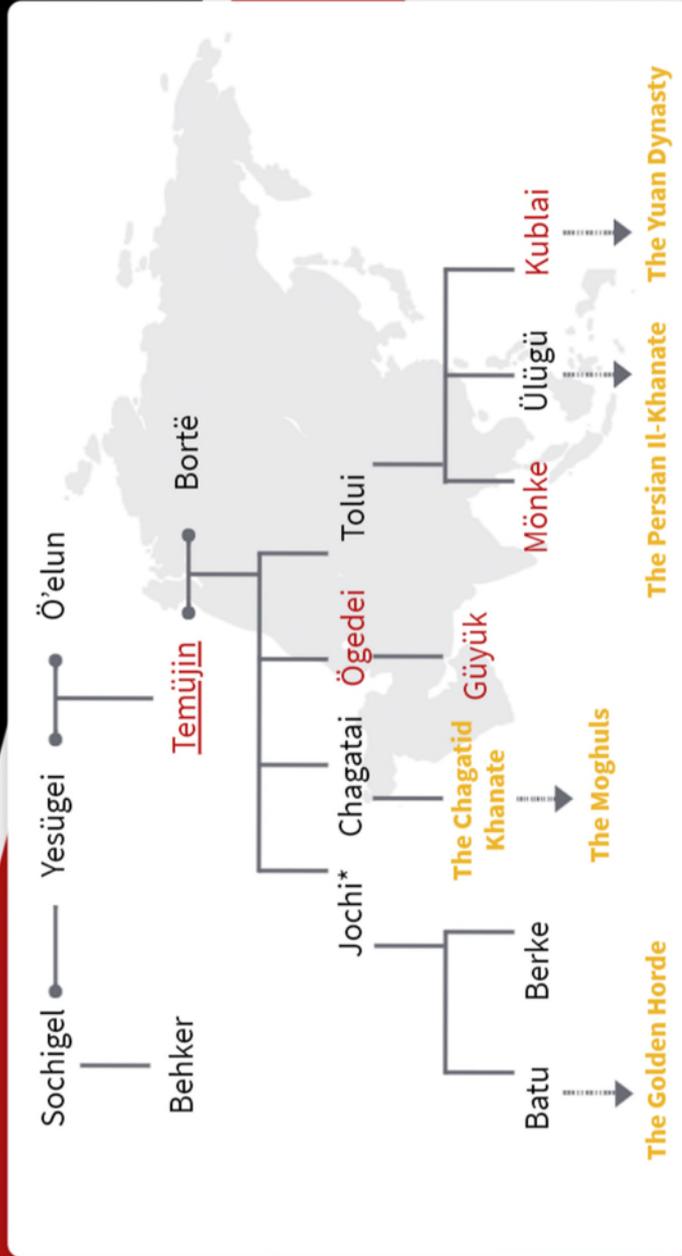
Jochi's son Batu went on to found the Golden Horde Dynasty. However, his descendants continued to hold Jochi's grudge. When a son of Tolui (Genghis Khan's youngest son) needed assistance after a significant Mongol defeat, instead Berke (another son of Jochi) attacked his cousin, leading to Mongol battling Mongol for the first time.

Jochi's descendants were not the only ones who founded dynasties: Kublai, son of Tolui, goes on to found the Yuan dynasty of China; descendants of Chagatai (son of Genghis) found the Chagatid Khanate, and later the Moghuls of India; and the descendants of Genghis Khan's grandson Ülügü become the Il-Khans of Persia.



FAMILY TREE OF

Genghis Khan
(Temüjin)



Key.

Became a
Great Khan

Dynasty

*possibly not
Temüjin's biological
son - this was a
source of tension.





Source 3: Genghis Khan's most famous quote

'*The History of the World Conqueror*' was written by *Atâ-Malek Juvayni* (1226–1283), a Persian historian. It is an account of the Mongol invasion of his homeland Iran, and it was based on accounts from survivors.

Using the Source

This is an account of the speech given by Genghis Khan in the city of Bukhara. It concludes with the most famous quote attributed to Genghis Khan. A famous Persian painting, in which Genghis Khan appears in Bukhara as the 'wrath of God', depicts the same moment.

From '*The History of the World Conqueror*', written by *Atâ-Malek Juvayni*

.....

On the following day when from the reflection of the sun the plain seemed to be a tray filled with blood, the people of Bokhara opened their gates and closed the door of strife and battle. The imams and notables came on a deputation to Genghis Khan, who entered to inspect the town and citadel. He rode into the Friday mosque and pulled up before the maqsura, whereupon his son Tolui dismounted and ascended the pulpit. Genghis Khan asked those present whether this was the place of the Sultan; they replied that it was the house of God. Then he too got down from his horse, and mounting two of three steps of the pulpit he exclaimed: "The countryside is empty of fodder; fill our horses' bellies." Whereupon they opened all the magazines in the town and began carrying off the grain. And they brought the cases in which the Korans were kept out into the courtyard of the mosque, where they cast the Korans right and left and turned the cases into mangers for their horses. After which they circulated cups of wine and sent for the singing-girls of the town to sing and dance for them; while the Mongols raised their voices to the tunes of their own songs. Meanwhile the imams, sheikhs and sayyids, doctors and scholars of the age kept watch over their horses in the stable under the supervision of the equerries, and executed their commands. After an hour or two Genghis Khan arose to return to his camp, and as the multitude that had been gathered there moved away, the leaves of the Koran were trampled in the dirt beneath their own feet and their horses' hoofs.

.....

When Genghis Khan left the town, he went to the festival musalla and mounted the pulpit; and the people having been assembled, he asked which were the wealthy amongst them. Two hundred and eighty persons were led before him. He then began a speech, in which, after describing the resistance and treachery of the Sultan, he addressed them as follows:

"O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you."



Source Questions

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1. What is Genghis Khan’s immediate concern upon arrival in Bukhara? Why is this significant?
2. What impression of Bukhara emerges from this account?
3. What do you think is the writer’s impression of Genghis Khan?
4. What are the ‘great sins’ to which he refers?
5. Which events in his life to date do you think could have led Genghis Khan to think in this way?



The Three 'L's

"It is easy to conquer the World from the back of the horse. The hard part comes when you dismount and try to govern". (Genghis Khan)

Law

The laws of the Mongolian Empire were the Yassa, a series of wartime decrees. The Yassa were oral laws, meaning they weren't written down - no Mongolian text with the comprehensive set of laws has even been found. The laws were often kept secret and never made public - this may have enabled the laws to be modified or applied selectively.

Read Source 4, below, to find out more about the Yassa

Literacy

Until 1206 the Mongol tribes had yet to adopt literacy. Genghis Khan's contact with the Chinese world shows him how important and useful written records could be. Genghis and his people were introduced to a version of the Uighur script by captives, and this was adapted to suit the Mongolian languages.

From 1946 the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet was introduced and it still in common use in modern Mongolia, however, the Mongolian government has announced plans to be fully reverted to the Uighur script by 2025.

[Click this link to read an article about the history of the Mongolian script.](#)

Logistics

Anyone whose territory extends across one third of the known World needs an efficient and rapid communications system. This is important for the transport of goods, people and above all messages. But how can this be done without aircraft, railways or telecommunications?

600 years before the Pony Express of the American West, the Mongols introduce the Yam system. Relays of mounted messengers could carry messages up to 125 miles a day galloping from staging post to staging post across the Empire. The most important messengers would carry a metal 'passport' or gerege with the following inscription:

"By the name of Genghis Khan endowed by the Eternal Blue Heaven, this man is empowered to act with the same freedom as I should exercise had I come in person".

[Click this link to watch a video about Mongol Logistics and the Yam system.](#)

The horse riding skills of these riders is still commemorated today, in a series of tough long-distance horse races!

[Click this link to watch a video with an example of these races.](#)



Source 4: Mongol Law: 'Yassa'

A number of sources give us clues about the 'Yassa' - the collection of Mongol laws. However, the origins of the laws are shrouded in mystery and secrecy. Harold Lamb's biography of Genghis Khan, ***Genghis Khan: The Emperor of All Men***, highlights a translation of the Yassa made by the 17th Century French historian, *François Pétis de la Croix*. This is by no means a complete list, rather a collection of fragments compiled from the work of a number of different chroniclers, but it is possibly the best that we have. Some of these laws are listed below.

A collection of 'Yassa' laws, translated by *François Pétis de la Croix*

- It is ordered to believe that there is only one God, creator of heaven and earth, who alone gives life and death, riches and poverty as pleases Him—and who has over everything an absolute power.
- He [GK] ordered that all religions were to be respected and that no preference was to be shown to any of them. All this he commanded in order that it might be agreeable to Heaven.
- Leaders of a religion, lawyers, physicians, scholars, preachers, monks, persons who are dedicated to religious practice, physicians and those who bathe the bodies of the dead are to be freed from public charges.
- It is forbidden under penalty of death that anyone, whoever he be, shall be proclaimed emperor [Great Khan] unless he has been elected previously by the princes, khans, officers, and other Mongol nobles in a general council.
- It is forbidden to make peace with a monarch, a prince or a people who has not submitted.
- The moment that a campaign begins, each soldier must receive his arms from the hand of the officer who has them in charge. The soldier must keep them in good order and have them inspected by his officer before a battle. He ordered his successors to personally examine the troops and their armament before going to battle, to supply the troops with everything they needed for the campaign and to survey everything even to needle and thread. If any of the soldiers lacked a necessary thing, that soldier was to be punished.
- It is forbidden, under death penalty, to pillage the enemy before the general commanding gives permission, but after that permission is given, the soldier must have the same opportunity as the officer and must be allowed to keep what he has carried off if he has paid his share to the receiver for the emperor [Great Khan].
- He ordered that soldiers be punished for negligence and hunters who let an animal escape during a community hunt he ordered to be beaten with sticks and, in some cases, to be put to death.
- To keep the men of the army exercised, a great hunt shall be held every winter. On that account, it is forbidden for any man of the empire to kill from March to October deer, bucks, roe-bucks, hares, wild ass and some birds.
- Every man who does not go to war must work for the empire without reward for a certain time.
- The man in whose possession a stolen horse is found must return it to its owner and add nine horses of the same kind. If he is unable to pay the fine, his children must be taken instead of the horses, and if he has no children, he himself shall be slaughtered like a sheep. For lesser thefts the punishment shall be, according to the value of the thing stolen, a number of blows of a staff-seven, seventeen, twenty-seven, up to seven hundred. The bodily punishment may be avoided by paying nine times the worth of the thing stolen.



- No subject of the empire may take a Mongol for servant or slave. Every man, except in rare cases, must join the army.
- Whoever gives food or clothing to a captive without the permission of his captor is to be put to death.
- Whoever finds a runaway slave or captive and does not return him to the person to whom he belongs is to be put to death.
- The women should attend to the care of property, buying and selling at their pleasure. Men should occupy themselves only with hunting and war.
- An adulterer is to be put to death without any regard as to whether he is married or not.
- Whoever intentionally lies or practices sorcery, or spies upon the behaviour of others or intervenes between the two parties in a quarrel to help the one against the other is also to be put to death.
- Officers and chieftains who fail in their duty or do not come at the summons of the Great Khan are to be slain, especially in remote districts. If their offense is less grave, they must come in person before the Khan. When the wayfarer passes by a group of people eating, he must eat with them without asking for permission, and they must not forbid him in that.
- It was forbidden to show preference to a sect, or to put emphasis on a word. When talking to someone, do not speak to them with a title, calling them by their name. That applies to even the Great Khan himself.
- At the beginning of each year, all of the people must present their daughters to the Great Khan so that he may choose some of them for himself and his children. Also, minors not higher than a cart wheel may not be killed in war.
- Also, abduction of women and sexual assault and or abuse of women are punishable by death.
- In cases of murder one could ransom himself by paying fines: for a Mohammedan - 40 golden coins; and for a Chinese - one donkey.



Source Questions

These questions are for you to think about – there is no ‘right answer’! As with any work in our Summer School, we encourage you to Share with us!

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What do the laws in the source tell you about Mongol attitudes to:

1. Religion
2. The organisation of the army and how war should be carried out
3. Family life and relations between men and women
4. Slavery
5. Crime and Punishment