

History

Enquiry: How did the Mongols create a world Empire?

The Pax Mongolica

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The empire breaks apart

After Genghis' death in 1227, his son, Ogodei, took over as the khan. Ogodei pushed the boundaries of the Mongol Empire even further. At its height, the Mongol Empire stretched across the length of Asia, making it the largest land empire to have ever existed. However by the end of the 13th century the Empire started to break apart. Eventually it was split into four different parts, each ruled by **descendants** of Genghis.



The Pax Mongolica

The expansion of the Mongol Empire had been a bloody affair, resulting in the deaths of millions and the destruction of many ancient towns and cities. However, once the empire was created, the lands controlled by the Khans became peaceful. This period became known as the Pax Mongolica, meaning the Mongolian Peace. This was because the Mongols turned an area which had included lots of rival kingdoms into one giant, **unified** area, that followed the same rules. This created **stability** for people to travel across the whole of Asia. This was especially positive for merchants who wanted to buy and sell goods.



A new Silk Road

For many hundreds of years, people had transported expensive, luxury goods across Asia. In Europe, rich people wanted things like Asian silk and spices. In Asia, rich people wanted European cloth and silverware. This meant that people could make lots of money by transporting these things to markets in Europe. For a long time, the traders had to travel through different kingdoms and empires that were often violent or unsafe. With the creation of the Mongol Empire, this problem was solved: Genghis and his descendants developed close relations with traders and made sure they could travel in peace all the way from Eastern China to the borders of Europe.



The Black Death

One unfortunate consequence of this unified world was that diseases could spread much faster than when the world was divided into **isolated** kingdoms. This was the case with the Black Death, which devastated the population in Europe from the middle of the 1340s. Historians believe that the disease originally came from southern China, having jumped from a species of rat to humans. It was then carried by traders along the Silk Road over the course of a few years.



The travels of Marco Polo

It wasn't just traders who travelled through the Mongol Empire. A man from Venice, called Marco Polo, made a huge journey across deserts and mountains to meet a Mongol leader in China, Kublai Khan. He eventually got there, and impressed Kublai so much that he worked for him as an ambassador for many years. When he got home, he wrote down all his experiences in a book. However, many people at the time (and today) suspect Marco Polo made a lot of it up!



Glossary

A descendant: somebody who is descended from somebody else

Isolated: being separated from others

To be unified: when something becomes whole

Stability: when something is not easily disturbed



Comprehension Questions

1. What happened to the Mongol Empire by the end of the 13th century?
2. What does Pax Mongolica mean?
3. What types of things were traded along the Silk Road?
4. Who was Marco Polo?
5. Why did the Black Death spread so far?

