

History

Lesson 2

Enquiry: How did the Mongols create a world Empire?

The Expansion of the Mongol Empire

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The Mongolian conquest

Mongolian tribal leaders were only successful if they won battles against other tribes, and then shared the captured loot to his followers. In this sense, Genghis Khan was no different. He quickly realised that in order to stay in control of Mongolia, he would need to refocus the energies of the newly united Mongol tribes. He did this by waging war on the powerful kingdoms and empires that surrounded the steppe.



A terrifying army

What made Genghis so successful was his ability to use traditional Mongol fighting techniques. His army was made up of around 10,000 soldiers on horseback who were dedicated and loyal to Genghis himself. These soldiers were experts at firing a type of bow and poisoned arrow whilst riding a horse. The breed of horses they rode were known for their speed and strength. Often, each soldier would have up to 16 other horses, so when one horse was exhausted, the soldier could switch to a fresh one. This meant the Mongol armies could travel across huge distances without needing to stop and rest.



The continental empire

For many centuries, there had been powerful and advanced empires in China and central Asia, ruled by royal **dynasties**. People in these empires lived in cities larger than any that existed in Europe at the time. The cities had become very wealthy by trading expensive and luxury goods, like silk and spices. The rulers of these empires had spent their money on building palaces and temples where they could worship. For Genghis Khan and his **successors**, these empires were too tempting to ignore. While these Asian empires did have powerful armies, they were no match for the Mongol warriors who could attack quickly and ruthlessly.



“The Accursed One”

Within a few years, Genghis had destroyed cities across China and East Asia, conquering empires, including, most dramatically, **the Jin Dynasty**. Genghis Khan and the Mongols became increasingly feared: if a city refused to surrender, the Mongols would surround it, starve the people living there and then eventually destroy it. One of the most vicious examples of this was in 1215 when people living in the city of Beijing, now the capital of China, were killed after months of starvation.



The invasion of Khwarazm

Having taken control of huge parts of East Asia, the Mongols turned west. When a Mongol **ambassador** was killed by **the shah** of the **Khwarazm Empire** in 1218, Genghis reacted furiously. He sent an army of 100,000 men to invade the empire, and within a few years had defeated the shah. During the invasion of the Khwarazm Empire, the Mongols burned to the ground some of the region's richest and most powerful cities. Genghis became known as "the Accursed One" because of the destruction he caused. The Mongol reputation for destruction continued after Genghis' death. Famously, the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 shocked the medieval world because the city had played such an important role in world trade.



Glossary

A dynasty: a royal family

A successor: someone who takes over from someone

The Jin Dynasty: a royal family that controlled big parts of China for many years

An ambassador: someone who represents a country or person abroad

The shah: a king

The Khwarazm Empire: a powerful Muslim empire in the Middle East



Comprehension Questions

1. What made a Mongol leader successful?
2. What made Mongol soldiers so powerful?
3. Why did Genghis Khan invade China?
4. Why was Genghis Khan called “the Accursed One”?
5. Why did the Mongols cause so much destruction?

