

EBSCO Publishing Citation Format: MLA (Modern Language Assoc.):

NOTE: Review the instructions at http://support.ebsco.com/help/?int=ehost&lang=&feature_id=MLA and make any necessary corrections before using. **Pay special attention to personal names, capitalization, and dates.** Always consult your library resources for the exact formatting and punctuation guidelines.

Works Cited

Edwards, MikeStanfield, James L. "The Great Khans." *National Geographic* 191.2 (1997): 2. *MAS Ultra - School Edition*. Web. 24 Jan. 2012.

**THE GREAT KHANS
SONS OF GENGHIS**

Ruthless as the Mongols themselves, time has all but obliterated their once splendid capital of Karakorum. Today a stone tortoise announces that here, on the windblown steppe of central Mongolia, ruled a powerful dynasty of warrior kings. Forged from brutal conquests of China, Russia, and most of the Middle East, the 13th-century Mongol world was the largest land empire history has known. The paiza--an inscribed passport-medallion--allowed messengers to cross the empire's vast landscapes unimpeded. Though masters on land, the Mongols suffered great defeats at sea. Attempting to invade Japan, thousands died--some by drowning, others by fighting for a toehold on shore. A trophy from that battle, an embossed Mongol officer's helmet (left), is now a Japanese museum piece.

All empires from sunrise to sunset have been given to us, and we own them.

--GUYUK, THIRD GREAT KHAN OF THE MONGOLS

TO EUROPEANS of the 13th century they were the horde from hell: Tartars from Tartarus, that part of Hades where the wicked were punished. They had the heads of dogs, and they devoured the bodies of their victims.

Indeed, the Tartars, as Europeans called the Mongols, sometimes did eat the raw hearts or livers of slain foes, hoping to capture their spirits. Europeans knew little about these invaders from the east, and "Tartars" seemed an apt name for them. It sounded like Tatar, a name that was commonly applied to peoples of the Asian steppe. Genghis Khan had slaughtered a tribe of Tatars in his rise to power in Mongolia.

Mongolia? Where was that? Even to learned Europeans the distant realms of Asia were terra

incognita.

Dire warnings of the Mongols' approach reached Hungary's king, Bela IV, in 1236. Soon thousands of refugees poured into his kingdom, bringing news of the sacking of cities to the east.

For the genesis of the Mongol invasion of Europe we must leap 4,000 miles to Karakorum on Mongolia's steppe (map, pages 14-15). In a 20-year-long series of battles Genghis had brought the Merkits, Kereyits, and some 25 other Mongol tribes under his dominion, and by the time of his death in 1227 he had established Karakorum as his base. Now the mantle of power had passed to his son Ogodei, who would expand on Genghis's achievements, sending Mongol armies rampaging both east and west.

I arrived at Harhorin, a small town near the site of Karakorum, to chants and the clash of cymbals. This was not in my honor, however. Buddhist monks in wine-colored robes were bestowing an annual blessing on the home of my host, Baruuhan Orosin, a hotelier of sorts, who rents round, felt-walled gers to visitors. I was ushered into his residence: three gers joined together. Crowded into one were eight monks and a dozen of Orosin's kin.

Orosin ladled bitter koumiss, fermented mare's milk, the ubiquitous drink of Mongolia, into pintsize bowls. His wife, Amarjargal, a buxom woman in a blue silk dress, handed the bowls to the guests along with plates of boiled mutton. Then the monks noticed me and, one after the other, began passing their snuff flasks, smiling and gesturing that I should sniff a few grains.

As I was trying to juggle all this hospitality, the monks began to chant again, and Orosin filled copper cups with vodka, another popular Mongolian drink. Chanting gave way to singing, laughing, and shouting that continued long after I had retired to my ger next door. At last there was silence, save for the wailing of a dog that made the steppe seem achingly lonely.

For a brief time in the 13th century Karakorum was the most powerful city in the world. But besides sherds of roof tiles and porcelain, little remains today; Chinese invaders destroyed the capital in 1388, after the Mongol empire had waned.

Stretched out on a cot in my ger, I peopled the silent rubble. Karakorum was home to Uygurs from what is now western China, who were employed as scribes and administrators, and probably to masons from the kingdom of Xi Xia and smiths from Samarkand, captured by Genghis. Because the Mongols were tolerant of all faiths, there were Buddhist monks, Muslim imams, Mongol shamans, and Nestorian Christians, the early proselytizers in east Asia.

Ogodei took the title khagan, "khan of khans"--lord of lords, as we would say. Genghis had chosen Ogodei as his successor shortly before he died, probably believing that Ogodei was the most competent of the four sons by his principal wife. Ogodei lived riotously, enjoying--like my partying friends in the next ger--feasts and drink. He built an enormous palace and

commissioned a silver fountain adorned with animals, including an elephant, a tiger, and a horse, from which spouted koumiss, wine, and mead. According to Rashid ad-Din, a Persian who wrote about the Mongols, Ogodei took "pleasures in the company of beautiful ladies and moonfaced mistresses." But he was also his father's son, and soon after becoming khagan, Ogodei unleashed the army.

"Genghis never planned to create an empire," Larry Moses, a historian at Indiana University, believes. "But with Ogodei that changed. Genghis's sons had been granted territories of their own, and under Ogodei the Mongols began to enlarge them."

First, in 1230, troops reconquered Central Asia, the scene of so much destruction by Genghis himself, and then swept on to the modern lands of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. Rulers became vassals, paying tribute and supplying troops.

Even while those campaigns were under way, Ogodei led his cavalry against the Jin dynasty of northern China, whose territory Genghis had also plundered. The Mongol army was so formidable that it could fight on two fronts at once. In 1233 the Jin capital, Kaifeng, toppled, and a quarter of what is now China belonged to Karakorum. Some Mongols wanted to slaughter the Chinese and turn their land into pasture for horses. Ogodei, however, heeded a Chinese scholar who argued that if the people lived, and prospered, they could be taxed.

Thomas Allsen of Trenton State College in New Jersey, an expert on Mongol administration, has documented an array of taxes imposed on subject peoples. In China farmers were taxed according to the quality of their land and the number of oxen and tools they owned. There was also a head tax on adult males, payable in grain, and a household tax, payable in silk. Similar taxes were imposed elsewhere in the Mongol empire. Merchants were taxed on transactions. Special assessments, such as levies of flour or rice for the army, were not unusual, and newly conquered peoples could expect to hand over a tenth of their possessions.

Emboldened by success, in 1235 the Mongol nobles met at a kuriltai, or great assembly, and resolved to venture even farther afield. They would plunder the rich Southern Song empire and send yet another force westward--the army that reached Europe.

As Morris Rossabi, an Asia scholar at Columbia University and City University of New York, points out, "It wasn't a conscious decision to invade Europe. They didn't know exactly where they were heading. "Historians believe the campaign was intended to secure the flanks of the fiefdom of Batu, one of Genghis's grandsons. An undefined western territory had been granted to Batu's father, Jochi, Genghis's eldest son.

And who, brothers, fathers, and children, seeing this, God's infliction on the whole Russians Land, does not lament?

--CHRONICLE OF NOVGOROD

Sixty Thousand or more cavalrymen, along with bombardiers to work the mangonels, the giant catapults of siege warfare, started westward from Mongolia in 1236. A few months later this force reached the River Russian of Kazan.

Today a dam at Kazan makes a lake so wide I can't see the opposite bank. In fact, for most of its length Mother Volga is a series of stair-step reservoirs--and a sewer for industrial and human waste.

Beside the river--free-flowing then, of course--the Mongol horsemen fell upon the capital of the kingdom of Bulgar. Its rulers, kin of the Danube Bulgarians, ran a prosperous trade in amber, furs, and lumber. News of the Mongol attack horrified the Russian principalities farther west. The chronicler of Novgorod wrote that the "godless" invaders "slew all, both wives and children." Today the Bulgar capital is mostly rubble.

The Mongols probably wore looted Bulgar furs as they set out across the snowbound steppe toward Ryazan, 400 miles west. Princes of that city rode out to parley with the invaders. What tribute would the Mongols accept in exchange for sparing Ryazan? They demanded "a tenth of everything," even a tenth of the women and children, according to the Chronicle of Novgorod. "Only when none of us remain," the nobles answered defiantly. So the Mongols cut trees and surrounded Ryazan's walls with a stockade. Shielded from the defenders' arrows, mangonel crews bombarded the city with stones for five days. Then the Mongols poured in, engaging in an orgy of rape and pillage.

Russia at the time was a collection of principalities, so no great army opposed the invaders. Turning north, they reached Moscow, a minor town, and torched its wooden houses. Then they rode east to Vladimir, a prosperous trading city that supplied furs, fish, and iron products, including combination locks, to merchants of the Hanseatic League. (*)

I went the 135 miles from Moscow to Vladimir by highway. On the outskirts of the city rose a clutch of boxy apartment buildings, gray and depressing. But the old city core was low and graceful, pilastered, columned, and crowned with golden domes. A bulbous stone gatehouse stood athwart busy Moscow Street. In 1238 its gate was gold-sheathed--a touch of civic pride--and an earthen wall topped by a log stockade stretched from the gatehouse around the city. In February of that year the townsfolk peered in terror from the battlements as Mongol horsemen approached across the snowbound countryside.

I imagine standing with them. We see the invaders dismount and advance behind a shield of captives. Some Mongols rain arrows on us, others batter the gate with a great log. It makes a terrible noise like thunder. The mangonels hurl burning stuff that smells of sulfur and oil. Looking behind me, I see my house afire. Many of the other wooden houses are in flames too.

Our ruler, Prince Yuri, was slain when he went to seek help, so we cannot expect another

prince to aid us. We do what we can to drive away the heathens. (As devout Christians, we believe the Mongols are godless savages.) When they lean ladders against our wall and start to climb, we pour boiling water and resin on them. We throw down stones, anything. Many Mongols die, but others keep coming. Then our stockade catches fire, and the Mongols burst through the burning timbers.

I hide in a cellar. Some of my companions retreat into Assumption Cathedral, which is built like a fortress: a cube of stone with narrow windows. The Mongols fight their way in. Our poor Princess Agafya. And her daughter and grandchildren. Somehow the Mongols know that Prince Yuri's family is hiding in the loft. They set fires to smoke them out. Defiant to the end, Agafya suffocates with her kin.

The Mongols plunder whatever they want: the coveted locks made by our smiths, silver candlesticks, even the candles. They strip what's left of the golden gate. They take our wives and sisters.

Remarkably, some 760 years later Assumption Cathedral still stands in Vladimir. A marble slab in a wall marks the niche where the bodies of Princess Agafya and her family were interred.

The Mongols, like a brave lion falling upon its prey, pursued them, smiting and slaying...

--RASHID AD-DIN: DEFEAT OF THE HUNGARIANS

THE WAVE OF DESTRUCTION swept across Ukraine, consuming Kiev and Chernigov. Between assaults the Mongols paused for almost a year to fatten their horses and forge new arms. They probably collected fresh troops from among the Kipchaks and other Turkic tribes on the steppe.

Meanwhile scouts gathered intelligence in the west. Hungary's army was potentially huge--perhaps 100,000 troops if King Bela could rely on his quarrelsome barons to fight. In Poland a sizable army was garrisoned at Krakow and another at Legnica. When the Mongols set out again, in February 1241, their leader, Batu, spread his forces across a 600-mile front, intending to engage all of them in one great sweep.

Thirty thousand cavalry rode into Poland. A vanguard approached Krakow, then retreated--a favorite Mongol tactic. Polish troops came out in pursuit, only to blunder into the ambush. The defenseless city was torched on Palm Sunday.

Near Legnica, Duke Henry, one of Poland's four ruling princes, fell into a similar trap. His 30,000 men included a contingent of Teutonic Knights from the Baltic region, covered from head to toe in heavy steel mail. The Mongols appeared and retreated. The mounted knights rushed in pursuit, only to find themselves in the pall of a smoke screen. Blinded and encumbered by their metal sheathing, the knights fell to fast-charging wielders of mace and

lance. Henry's army was destroyed.

Hungary too felt the Mongol scourge, though you would never guess it from the look of Budapest today. The city endured other onslaughts--Turks invaded in the 1500s, and German and Soviet armies fought over it in World War II--but it has always risen anew. Now it has changed again from the charming but rather gloomy place I had known when it was under the Soviet Union's domination. The crenellated Fishermen's Bastion still invites lovers to stroll overlooking the Danube, but all around I see the trappings of capitalism: nightclubs, casinos, flashing neon, and billboards advertising American jeans.

Buda and Pest were separate cities, divided by the Danube, when Batu's scouts rode up to Pest, on the left bank, in March 1241. King Bela, meanwhile, was trying to coax his barons to face the danger. They had been feuding about power. The monarchy had declined under Bela's father, and Bela was attempting to reassert his authority, even confiscating baronial estates. Another dispute had boiled up over the hordes of Cuman steppe nomads who had poured into Hungary ahead of the Mongol advance. The barons resented Bela's offer of refuge to these foreigners.

Still, some of the nobles had come to Buda and Pest with their troops, and Batu, learning of the wall of Pest, probably concluded that a siege would be difficult, while open-field warfare might yield a decisive victory. So he ordered his soldiers to retreat. Encouraged by this, Bela's nobles fell into line and set out with their monarch in cautious pursuit.

I traced the armies' route from Budapest 135 miles northeast to the Muhi plain, tranquil farm country stippled with red-roofed villages and chestnut trees. On the little Sajo River a two-car ferry slid back and forth on a cable. Somewhere near this stream King Bela bivouacked and circled his camp with wagons. They came out to meet Batu's army, and for a time the Hungarians had the better of the fight. But then one wing of Batu's force got behind them. Surrounded, the Hungarians broke out and fell back to their tightly drawn camp.

For the Mongols the baffle became like a great hunt at home, when riders drove prey into a circle to be slaughtered. They poured arrows and flaming missiles into the packed mass, setting wagons and tents on fire. The Hungarians fled, only to be cut down. Before the day was done, 60,000 men of Bela's army had been killed. Bela managed to escape, but the Mongols sacked city after city, including both Buda and Pest.

On high hill 110 miles west of Buda, monks in the Benedictine abbey of Pannonhalma measured the approach of the dreaded horsemen by smoke plumes rising from villages and towns. The abbey had been standing on that hill for 245 years when the Mongols arrived.

To me, as I drove toward the abbey on a poplar-shaded lane, it resembled a great stone fortress, which is also how it appeared to the Mongols. I went inside and met Gaspar Csoka,

the abbey librarian, who withdrew a sheaf of yellowed records from a safe. He spread the documents on a table and began to tell me about Pannonhalma's 13th-century abbot, whose name was Uros. The records reveal a man of resolve who had spent years renovating the abbey church: "Not a man to surrender," said Csoka. "When the Mongols came, I'm sure Uros took part in the fight."

We went up to the rampart that circles the church. From there, Csoka believes, monks and peasants fired arrows at their Mongol besiegers, with old Uros--he was about 70--in the thick of it.

Apparently surprised by the spirited defense, the Mongols withdrew.

Batu's raiding parties crossed into Austria, almost reaching Vienna. Some historians speculate that the Mongols could have driven much deeper into Europe. But in 1242 a rider from Karakorum reached Batu with the news that Khagan Ogodei was dead (most likely from drink), and suddenly the Mongols were gone.

Batu probably withdrew because he expected his uncle's death to touch off a struggle for the throne. Larry Moses says Batu aspired to be khagan but knew that Ogodei's son, Guyuk, had been preordained. And Batu hated him. Still, Guyuk would have to be confirmed at a kuriltai of nobles, and if Batu, an honored khan, did not return to Karakorum to take part, the confirmation might be thwarted. Since he was heir to the Mongols' western lands, Batu decided to retire to southern Russia and build his own capital.

Sarai, as it was called, must have been spectacular, for Russian archaeologists have unearthed fine glazed tiles and even clay water pipes. Batu ruled from a huge ger. Legend says it was lined with gold brocade and inspired the name for Batu's Russian realm, Golden Horde. (The word "horde" comes from the Mongol ordu--camp or fiefdom.)

The Golden Horde allowed the Russian princes to administer their own territories but extracted taxes and troops in tribute. Russian historians call this the "Tatar yoke." If the levies were withheld, the Mongols burned the cities again or summoned the recalcitrant princes to Sarai, where some were killed. Prince Mikhail of Chernigov, for example, was kicked to death and beheaded for good measure.

The Mongols in Sarai were outnumbered by Kipchaks and other Turkic people of the steppe, who were soldiers, tax collectors, and slaves. Today their descendants are among the six million people who in Russia are still called Tatars.

The dynasty did not have a sitting monarch for quite a while. Within and without there was great tumult.

--CHINESE HISTORICAL TEXT

With Ogodei's death, and with Batu opposing the choice of Guyuk and refusing to return to Mongolia for a kuriltai, the descendants of Genghis were thrown into confusion. "If no acceptable candidate could be agreed upon, they simply fought it out and whoever won, won," says Thomas Allsen of Trenton State.

After Ogodei's death they did not fight with weapons, though that would come later. What transpired was rough-and-ready politicking, with deals and favors--fiefdoms, treasure, concubines--dispensed to princes and nobles in exchange for allegiance.

In the main, the house of Ogodei was arrayed against that of his brother Tolui. In each clan a powerful woman played the leading role. Although men took several wives and had concubines, one wife, usually the first, enjoyed high status and frequently took part in clan affairs.

In fact, Ogodei's widow Toregene ruled the empire for three years after his death, all the while scheming to win the throne for her son, Guyuk. Historians portray her as a vindictive woman with a penchant for sorcery. The other woman in the succession contest was Tolui's widow Sorghaghtani, described as politically savvy--a Christian who supported Islam with alms. Ultimately her candidate was her son Mongke.

Round one went to Toregene, who in 1246 saw Guyuk enthroned in a ger outside Karakorum. In attendance was a Franciscan friar, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who traveled deep into Asia 28 years before Marco Polo. He wrote that Mongol nobles and vassal rulers "brought to the new emperor an infinite quantity of gold, silver, precious stones and other valuables," and "general revelries... went on well into the night."

Giovanni was about 65 when he made his 15-month journey through devastated eastern Europe and across Mongol-held Central Asia to deliver a letter from Pope Innocent IV. The pope wanted assurance that Europe would not be invaded again and invited the Mongols to accept Christianity, but Guyuk gave no promise of restraint and rejected baptism. Instead, he said Innocent IV should lead a delegation of kings "to pay homage to me and to serve me."

Guyuk, another hard drinker, ruled only two years. Now a new succession struggle began. Guyuk's widow strove to win the khanship for her nephew Shiremun. But this time powerful nobles sided with Sorghaghtani, and Mongke was enthroned at a kuriltai in 1251. Even as the nobles celebrated, Shiremun and his supporters approached the ceremonial tent with arms, only to be discovered at the last minute and arrested.

Mongke exiled Shiremun to China, where he was later executed, and stained the far corners of the empire with the blood of suspect cousins and their collaborators. Some were murdered in darkly ingenious ways; two officials choked as their mouths were stuffed with stones, and Guyuk's widow was sewn in a carpet and drowned.

Mongke consolidated his grip on power by cloaking himself in Genghis Khan's mantle, proclaiming, "I follow the laws of my ancestors." This was certain to appeal in Karakorum, where people had begun to worship idols of Genghis.

He is still revered. Last spring before Mongolia's parliamentary elections, the Democratic Union Coalition aired TV commercials in which a Genghis look-alike declared that if Genghis Khan were alive, he'd be on the coalition's side. The coalition won decisively.

"I believe he really thought of his grandfather as his guide," Thomas Allsen says of Mongke. "I think he believed he must continue Genghis's policies." And that meant conquest.

Mangonel-men . . . with a stone missile would convert the eye of a needle into a passage for a camel.

--JUVAINI

MONGKE LAUNCHED CAMPAIGNS even more audacious than Genghis had imagined. He and his brother Kublai led renewed assaults on the Song dynasty in southern China. From their capital, Hangzhou, probably the world's largest city, with at least one million people, the Song ruled an empire rich in silk, jade, and porcelain. They printed books and sent trading ships to Java and India. Fertile lands along the Yangtze, Pearl, and other rivers fed 50 million people.

The Middle East was an equally tempting target, renowned for its carpets, calligraphy, and scholars, including mathematicians, astronomers, and physicians. So another brother, Hulagu, was sent west to capture Baghdad, Islam's greatest city, as well as lands along the Mediterranean.

In 1253 the Persian writer Ala-ad-Din Ata-Malik Juvaini recorded Hulagu's preparations for his Baghdad expedition. With the cavalry were a thousand expert artillerymen from China. The army swelled with troops from vassal states: Armenians, Georgians, Persians, Turks. By one estimate the force grew to 150,000 men, perhaps the largest one the Mongols ever put afield.

Hulagu veered into the Elburz Mountains to destroy the Assassins, a violent Islamic sect. Dagger-wielding fanatics, the Assassins had murdered many Islamic rulers who rejected their extremist tenets. They were said to strike while under the influence of hashish--hence the word "assassin," from the Arabic hashshashin, or hashish eaters.

Juvaini recorded that the mangonels hammered the eagles-nest fortress of the sect's grand master, Rukn ad-Din, until he surrendered. He asked to be allowed to travel to Mongke's court to seek clemency, and Hulagu agreed. But in Karakorum Rukn ad-Din was received coldly, and after he departed the city, Juvaini wrote, he was "kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword."

The Mongol juggernaut rolled on to Baghdad and the verdant lands along the Tigris. Genghis had always been fortunate in facing enemies weakened by internal problems, and in 1258 the Mongol luck held for Hulagu. Baghdad's ruler, Caliph Mustasim, was lethargic and insulated, and his chief minister was of doubtful loyalty. On the one occasion that the caliph's troops ventured forth, the Mongols broke a dike behind them, trapping them with floodwaters, and killed at least 12,000.

Hulagu's mangonels hurled palm-tree stumps against Baghdad (carts hauling stone missiles had not arrived), and after seven days the walls were breached. The Mongols poured in. The caliph's remaining soldiers were slaughtered, and there was civilian carnage reminiscent of Genghis's ravishing of Central Asia. Historians say that Christian Georgians and Armenians in Hulagu's army vented their hatred of Islam until Baghdad was filled with the stench of corpses. Some Persian writers put the toll as high as two million, an exaggeration, though it was certainly huge. "Many tens of thousands were killed," wrote a Chinese envoy who visited Baghdad a year after its capture. Baghdad never recovered its place as the hub of Islamic culture. As for the caliph, he and his sons were sewn in carpets and trampled to death by horses.

The Islamic world was in shock, as Europe had been when Batu scourged Hungary and Poland. The Mongols, who intended to stay, named Hulagu's territory, which included most of what is today Iraq and Iran, the Ilkhanate--"subordinate khanate." Soon Hulagu added Syria as well.

Christians in the Mongol army urged Hulagu to push on to capture Jerusalem, which was then in Muslim hands. Only one formidable foe, the Mamluk regime of Egypt, stood in the way, and Hulagu demanded its surrender. There was, however, another force present: crusaders who clung to Palestine's Mediterranean shore, also hoping to gain the Holy City. Would they side with the invaders from the east against the Muslims?

Before the question could be answered, history repeated itself. Hulagu learned that Khagan Mongke was dead, probably of dysentery, after a reign of eight years. Hulagu anticipated a succession struggle, and, as Batu had in Hungary, he withdrew, leaving only 10,000 troops to hold the empire's Mediterranean frontier.

Qutuz, the Mamluk sultan, was determined to drive the Mongols away and even invited the crusaders to join him in the campaign. The Christians spurned him but allowed the Mamluks to pass through their territory to attack the Mongol force.

At Ain Jalut in Galilee, where David is said to have killed Goliath, the Mongols were lured into the kind of trap they had so often sprung. Seeing the Mamluks retreat, they pursued, only to be surrounded and slaughtered. By Mongol standards this was no titanic clash--but it was a defeat. Where Goliath had reached his limit, the Mongols reached theirs.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man....

--SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, "KUBLA KHAN"

KUBLAI, then 44 years old, was leading an army on the banks of the Yangtze in Song territory when a rider brought news of Mongke's death. He soon heard, too, that his youngest brother, Arigh Boke, was maneuvering in Karakorum to become the new khagan. Kublai broke off the fight with the Song but instead of returning to Karakorum, where he believed his brother would take him prisoner, he withdrew to northern China.

When the Mongols captured this realm from the Jin, Kublai, as a grandson of Genghis, had been granted a share of the spoils: huge fiefdoms of land and peasants. He spent much of his life in China, surrounded by Confucian advisers and attending to the welfare of his peasants. He even built a capital there, complete with a dazzling palace. It stood in what today is China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and was called Shangdu--the "Xanadu" of Coleridge's poem.

In Karakorum, Arigh Boke no doubt bore down on Kublai's attachment to China--evidence that Kublai had forsaken his roots--as he campaigned to become khagan. But Kublai moved faster, proclaiming himself khagan at Shangdu in May 1260. Only a month later (perhaps after receiving news of Kublai's preemptive strike), Arigh Boke proclaimed himself khagan at Karakorum. Kublai set out for Mongolia, fought a series of battles with Arigh Boke, and won his submission in 1264. Kublai spared his brother but executed ten of his advisers.

Kublai claimed to rule all the lands where Mongols held sway, from Korea to Iraq and Russia. But in fact the empire had splintered. While Kublai attacked Arigh Boke, another clash had erupted in the west. Hulagu, lord of the Ilkhanate, and Berke, who had followed his brother Batu as ruler of the Golden Horde, warred over possession of the fine grasslands of Azerbaijan. Absorbed in their own affairs, the western chieftains paid only nominal homage to far-off Kublai. And soon their kin who ruled in Central Asia began to act independently as well.

The every-prince-for-himself greed of Genghis's sons and grandsons had already been exposed in the succession struggles; personal power and wealth were more important to them than any notion of greater Mongolia. Genghis, who had spent two decades unifying the Mongol tribes, must have screamed curses on his progeny from the grave.

FOR HIS PART Kublai concentrated on developing China. Following the tradition of his adopted land, he proclaimed himself founder of a Chinese dynasty, which he named Yuan--"origin" or "primal." Ever the builder, he began in 1267 to raise a new capital. The site he chose was more centrally located than Shangdu. He called it Daidu--"great capital." We know

it today as Beijing.

"No Kublai, no Beijing" was the history lesson offered to me by Chen Gaohua, a scholar specializing in the Yuan dynasty, as we ate lunch in a Beijing restaurant. Chen pointed out that although several earlier dynasties had ruled from the plain where Beijing stands, Kublai's city was much larger, enclosed by a wall 18 miles around. And after his short-lived Yuan dynasty was overthrown by the Ming dynasty in 1368, succeeding dynasties kept Beijing as the capital. Chen reached with his chopsticks for another slice of Peking duck and added, with a touch of hyperbole, "We are dining in this restaurant thanks to Kublai."

The Yuan dynasty wall encompassed what is now the heart of Beijing, crowded with shops and office and apartment towers. Within Kublai's city, too, is historic Tiananmen Square, where Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949--and where, in 1989, a pro-democracy demonstration was crushed by tanks.

I usually got up early in Beijing and took a walk. I passed old women sweeping the alleys with bundles of twigs and saw sidewalk eateries springing to life, the coal smoke of braziers mingling with the aroma of steamed buns. Not far from my hotel stretched the high wall of the Forbidden City, the Ming stronghold. A little beyond that was Beihai Park, where couples paddled in rented boats on a placid lake.

Kublai knew that lake; it was on the grounds of his palace--"the greatest palace that ever was," Marco Polo wrote, with a banquet hall for 6,000. There were quarters for each of Kublai's four wives as well as for his many concubines. Kublai, Polo claimed, fathered 22 sons by his wives. (There was no tally of daughters.)

Some Western historians have questioned whether Marco Polo ever traveled to China, suggesting that he based his descriptions on other chronicles. But Chinese historians find in his text obscure names and facts that ancient Chinese records corroborate. To Daidu, Polo said, "are brought articles of greater cost and rarity, and in greater abundance . . . than to any other city in the world." From India came spices and pearls, and "no day in the year passes that there do not enter the city 1,000 cart-loads of silk" from China's provinces.

While encouraging trade, Chinese historians declare, Kublai also devoted great energy to improving the lot of farmers. "Before Kublai, the Mongols thought of farmers as useless people," says Chen Gaohua. "But Kublai appreciated them. He knew how to rule a farming country." He created an agriculture ministry that distributed seeds and animals. Farmers were encouraged to band together in communes.

Kublai would surely have admired the slight man, wearing a blue Mao jacket, whom I met in the village of Doudian near Beijing. As Doudian's longtime leader, Zhang Zhenliang has revolutionized his village. I saw luxuriant fields of cabbage, emerald carpets of sprouting

wheat, and a river of golden corn spread out to dry on a roadside. All pointed to the benefits of good leadership and the use of tractors, fertilizers, and improved seeds. "Fifteen years ago it took 1,200 people to grow our food," Zhang said, "Today we need only 60." Villagers who once worked the land now have factory jobs, some producing clothing for export.

THOUGH KUBLAI usually heeded the humane tenets of his Confucian advisers, he ignored them when they urged pacifism. He knew that in the eyes of both Mongols and Chinese his prestige would be measured in large part by the wealth and territory he added to his realm.

The most tempting target was the fertile Southern Song empire. Possession of the Song lands had long been a Mongol goal, and many Chinese themselves hoped that the south could be reunited with the north. (They had been joined until the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 907.) As early as 1260, the year he proclaimed himself khagan, Kublai had sent an emissary to woo the Song rulers in their capital, Hangzhou. He hoped the rulers would become his vassals. Instead, his emissary was taken captive.

Skirmishes erupted, then full-scale battles. Kublai's troops besieged two key cities, Xiangyang and Fancheng, for nearly five years. On opposite banks of the Han River in what is now Hubei Province, they guarded the Yangtze Basin, the Song rice bowl. The large Song navy supplied the besieged cities and patrolled the rivers and the seacoast. To confront these fleets, the Mongols assembled a navy of their own. Many of Kublai's sailors and some of his commanders were Chinese, and Chinese and Koreans built his ships. One of Kublai's nephews, who ruled the Ilkhanate, sent engineers to build monster mangonels. The stones they hurled may have weighed as much as 200 pounds.

Fancheng, heavily damaged by these machines, fell in 1273, and its sister city, Xiangyang, surrendered. Kublai now put the army under the command of a lurk named Bayan, who had served the Mongols in the Middle East campaign. Bayan fought relentlessly toward Hangzhou, capturing it in 1276. Three years later the last Song holdouts were defeated. Kublai had reunited China. He ordered the army to treat the people gently, meaning to win them over, not wipe them out.

HANGZHOU is the southern terminus of the Grand Canal, an artery that, at my first glance, didn't seem deserving of the name. The water was the color of pea soup, and the canal was clotted with small boats from which laundry flapped like pennants. Their cargoes were basic: cement, sand, rolls of steel wire. I watched men unloading barges filled with bricks, carrying 40 at a time--a 120-pound load--in bamboo hods across their shoulders.

Begun centuries before Kublai's time, the canal was a grand endeavor. Dug by hand and gradually extended until it stretched more than a thousand miles, it was one of China's great construction projects. China's major rivers flow from west to east, so an interior north-south waterway meant that merchants could avoid sending their cargoes on the high seas, where

pirates were always a threat.

The Grand Canal was inaccessible from Daidu, a problem Kublai solved by putting three million laborers to work. Extended 135 miles, the canal ensured a supply of rice for the north, where--despite Kublai's encouragement of agriculture--famine was a certainty if crops failed.

Even with the completion of the canal, Kublai's final years were filled with frustration. Still intent on expanding his rule, in 1281 he sent an armada of 4,400 ships and nearly 150,000 troops against Japan. Unable to make headway on Kyushu, the Mongols reboarded their vessels and attacked a smaller island, Takashima. But before they had gained more than a foothold, a typhoon roared in, sinking nearly all of Kublai's fleet. In all, two-thirds of his troops perished, the worst loss in Mongol history.

In 1292 Kublai tried to reach even farther--to Java, 2,000 miles south of China. He had sent an emissary to demand tribute from Java's king. Instead, the offended monarch branded the emissary's face. Kublai dispatched 1,000 ships and 20,000 troops. But the army was ambushed and withdrew after losing 3,000 men.

THESE HUMILIATIONS ate away at Mongol prestige, just as the cost of them depleted Kublai's treasury. Nevertheless when Kublai died, in 1294 at the age of 79, he bequeathed a unified China that had known the benefits of benevolent leadership.

Morris Rossabi, whose biography of Kublai is the definitive work, says, "Kublai was like other Mongol rulers in that he was a conqueror. But he also was able to govern, and he governed very astutely."

The usual succession disputes plagued Kublai's descendants in the weakening Yuan dynasty. Weary of burdensome taxes, inept rule, and corruption, Chinese commoners overthrew the Yuan lords in 1368, compelling them to return to Mongolia.

In Baghdad the Mongol Ilkhanate did not survive even that long; the last of Hulagu's line died in 1335. In Central Asia a Turkic lord, Timur, or Tamerlane, forged a new empire with his capital at Samarkand. The last remnant of the withered Golden Horde was overrun by a Turkic khan in 1502.

The Ming rulers who forced the Mongols out of China immediately began building fortifications to prevent them from returning. Walls to bar invaders had existed in China for centuries, but none was so formidable as the one the Ming eventually constructed. Harnessing the labor of millions, they built and built, for 200 years.

Forty miles north of Beijing, I walked on the parapet on a frigid day, the wind clutching at my throat as I traced the 2,500-mile-long wall's trajectory across the distant mountains. In every lookout tower, in every Bowman's notch, fear is palpable: the fear that the Mongols struck in all

who defended against their thundering horsemen.

Though at times the Mongols were constructive, uniting Mongolia, uniting China, and building Beijing, and though they were audacious and brave, their record is overwhelmingly one of greed and cruelty, of cities devastated--Samarkand, Herat, Baghdad-- and nations subjugated. The Great Wall, as formidable in its way as the people it was built to keep out, is the Mongols' epitaph in stone.

THE MONGOL DYNASTY

Husband to several wives, Genghis Khan fathered many children. The four sons, by his principal wife, Borte, formed the limbs of his dynastic tree. The house of eldest son Jochi never of eldest son Jochi never produced a great khan, but it wielded great power. By his refusal to support Ogodei's line after the death of Guyuk, Jochi's son Batu forced a power shift to the Tolui house, thus opening the way for Mongke and Kublai. No images exist for Tolui, Berke, or Aright Boke. Except for the hatted great khans, all are shown with traditional shaved heads.

(*)See "The Hanseatic League, Europe's First Common Market," in the October 1994 issue.

FOUR KHANS BESTRIDE ASIA

By the time of Kublai Khan the Mongol world had consolidated into four near-autonomous khanates, each the personal fief of one of Genghis Khan's descendants. After the defeat of the Jin and then the Southern Song empire, Kublai initiated 89 years of Mongol rule over China under the auspices of his Yuan dynasty. From the Yuan capital at Daidu, he remained titular head over the entire Mongol empire and active ruler over China and the Mongol Homeland.

No match against the agile Mongols, European armies fall like sitting ducks during the battles of 1241-42. Showering their enemies with armor-piercing arrows, the Mongol cavalry then moves in to hack down the survivors with lance and hook.

EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

Mongol raiding parties reach the outskirts of Vienna in December 1241. The death of Ogodei back in Mongolia saves Europe from further attack.

RUSSIANS

Batu subdued Russia's feuding principalities by 1240. They remain vassals until Ivan III repels the Mongols in 1480.

Inspired by Persian astronomers, Kublai Khan commissions an observatory to be built in Daidu. There the armillary sphere was used to measure angles between celestial objects. Under Kublai's 34-year rule, China makes many great strides in science.

HORSES MEET ELEPHANTS

Their horses shy in terror when Mongols face a Burmese army mounted on 2,000 elephants.

Major battle Mongol military route Present-day city names in parentheses Present-day country boundaries and names in gray

JAPANESE CAMPAIGNS

Two failed attempts, in 1274 and 1281, to invade Japan frustrate Kublai Khan's desire to expand his empire beyond the seacoast.

MONGOLS IN JAVA

Two years before his death, Kublai Khan sends a fleet of 1,000 ships against the island kingdom of Java. Facing intrigue and ambush, the Mongols once again return in defeat.

PHOTO (COLOR): Survivor of Mongol wrath, the Cathedral of St. Sophia offered refuge for the people of Kiev during the invasion of their city by Batu, the grandson of Genghis and conqueror of Russia. Other Kievans found no such sanctuary. A silversmith's mold found with human remains under a sacked church testifies to its end as a tool to bring forth craft and delight.

PHOTO (COLOR): Reenacting a 750-year-old horror, a lone trumpeter sounds an alarm every hour on the hour from the tower of St. Mary's Church in Krakow, Poland. Tradition says the same call to arms was heard on Palm Sunday in 1241 to alert the townsfolk that Mongols were about to storm their walls. The trumpeter ends his clarion mid-note, evoking the moment at which a Mongol arrow struck his medieval predecessor in the throat.

PHOTO (COLOR): Ignorance of east Asia led Europeans into wild imaginings of monstrous creatures. From India in the 14th century a papal envoy wrote: "No such people do exist as nations, though there may be an individual monster here and there." Headless denizens inhabit the east in this 15th-century illustration of Marco Polo's travels.

PHOTO (COLOR): Bread was a novelty for the Mongols in Herat, Afghanistan. Bakers like Habibullah still produce the fiat loaves of unleavened nan that Hulagu and his army might have sampled when they passed through the city in 1256 on their way to subdue the Abbasid caliphate. Pastoralists, the Mongols disdained people who worked the soil. Their diet consisted almost totally of meat and dairy products--a menu that persists today.

PHOTO (COLOR): The sacking of Baghdad sent tremors through the Islamic world. Aided by vassal states, Hulagu's troops crushed the defending garrison in open combat, then proceeded to bombard the city with mangonels--like the one seen at lower left in a 14th-century illustration that depicts soldiers crossing a river by means of a pontoon bridge. Once inside, they wrapped the Abbasid caliph in a carpet and trampled him with horses. They plundered Islam's greatest city, killing anyone who resisted.

PHOTO (COLOR): The citadel at Aleppo looked down in stony defiance when the Mongols stormed through Syria in 1260. Behind its ramparts the elderly Turan Shah held out for more

than a month, long after the rest of the city had fallen. Out of respect for such fortitude, the invaders spared his life.

PHOTO (COLOR): Juiciest plum in southern China, the city of Hangzhou was treated like a trophy by Kublai Khan when he conquered it in 1276. Largest city in the world by some estimates, the Song capital teemed with at least one million people. Parks and pavilions grace a lakefront once fringed with palaces. Signaling the end of a long conquest, the seizure of Hangzhou followed a softening in Mongol behavior. Kublai spared the city's inhabitants, and the surrendering Song court was allowed to retain some of its wealth and privilege.

PHOTO (COLOR): Buddhist novices chant their prayers with a drum at a temple in the Mongolian village of Bayan-Ovoo, claimed by locals to be the birthplace of Genghis Khan. Mongols accepted alt religions, and Kublai allowed the unhindered practice of Buddhism when he founded China's Yuan dynasty.

PHOTO (COLOR): Chinese invention, a potter's wheel spins off a fresh creation under the hands of He Qiou Shen in the city of Jingdezhen. Predating the Mongols by a thousand years, the city's porcelain industry continues to turn out fine ceramics, like this kiln-ready teapot. Under Kublai Khan, exports of Chinese crafts flowered. To bring rice to the people of his northern capital, he extended China's Grand Canal, seen near Jining.

PHOTO (COLOR): One of history's great misadventures unfolds in a 13th-century Japanese scroll depicting the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan. Undaunted by an aborted attack in 1274--when a storm forced his fleet to retreat--Kublai Khan launched a much larger armada against the islands in 1281. Again nature intervened, this time with a typhoon so powerful that the Japanese called it kamikaze, or divine wind. Along with 4,000 ships, Kublai lost at least 10,000 men, both at sea and on shore. In the seven years between invasions Japan's warriors--seen attacking a Mongol fight, like the Mongols, as a team.

PHOTO (COLOR): Victim of Mongol imperialism, the Burmese city of Pagan was conquered after its king refused tribute to Kublai Khan. Following the Mongol invasion of 1287, the Buddhist "city of four million temples" was abandoned to snakes and scorpions.

PHOTO (COLOR): Elsewhere in Southeast Asia and on the island of Java, Kublai's generals fared less well. Unused to tropical warfare, they depleted the Yuan treasury in several failed campaigns. With Kublai's death in 1294 Mongol expansion came to an end.

PHOTO (COLOR): A virtual deity in his homeland, Genghis Khan inspires reverence at his memorial in northeast Mongolia. Condemned as an imperialist by the Soviets--whose own imperialism controlled Mongolian politics for 70 years--Genghis came from a time when conquest still earned grudging respect. Free now to write their own history, Mongolians resurrect the long-suppressed conqueror and hail him as a great unifier--the father of their

nation, and a spirit waiting to be reborn.

~~~~~

By Mike Edwards, Assistant Editor

Photographs by James L. Stanfield

Photographer Jim Stanfield covered the emergence of the Mongol empire under Genghis Khan for our December 1996 issue.

---

Copyright of National Geographic is the property of National Geographic Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.