

The Period of the Mongol Empire

Genghis Khan

The Mongol Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires that ever existed. It lasted for 185 years, and yet in that small time frame they were able to accomplish more than many other empires could ever hope to. At its height the empire stretched through lands in modern-day Korea, China, Russia, the Middle East, India, Eastern Europe and all the land in between. However the enormity of the Mongol Empire is what would ultimately destroy it.

The official beginning of the Mongol Empire began in the year 1206 When Temujin was declared Genghis Khan and was declared ruler of all the Mongols. Genghis Khan had been able to unite the Mongol people. This unified force could and would destroy almost every opposing force that tried to go against the Mongols. Genghis Khan improved his military organization. He created a body of law and introduced record keeping. He created a supreme officer of the law, which was the judge and jury.

The Mongols were a group of people that incorporated other cultures inventions into their own. This was greatly utilized by the Mongols; in fact the weapons and tactics that they used were borrowed from foreign civilizations to make their army stronger and more efficient. The Mongols were very tolerant of outside religions. The most surprising thing is that many of the religions hated each other and yet they fought with each other to expand the reach of the empire. There were many times when Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians were fighting along side one another despite their differences. This is one of the ways that the Mongols kept their captured lands in peace. The Mongols did not prohibit any religion and in fact they usually promoted it among the people.

The Mongol Empire is considered the force that unified China and Russia. Before the Mongol Empire both of these nations were fragmented kingdoms that were constantly at war. However, once the Mongols forced these people to join their kingdoms together to make governing easier for the Mongols. To make governing easier the Khan divided up the land into Khanates; a Khanate is comparable to a state or province, each with its own head of government.

1. Who was Temujin? What role did he play?
2. What were some of his accomplishments?
3. What were some unique characteristics of the Mongol Empire?
4. How did the Mongols govern their empire? What is a Khanate?

The Mongols Dominate Asia

The Mongols were ruthless, cruel and power hungry. They destroyed everything that stood in their way to build their empire. They were great creators and destructors. More than once did they burn a town to the ground and kill everyone. In fact that was the fate of the Russian cities of Moscow and Kiev.

The Mongol armies were extremely successful despite being greatly outnumbered by every army they ever encountered. Time and time again the Mongols destroyed the opposing force even when they were outnumbered six to one. This was mostly due to superior military tactics, their extreme discipline and their use of modern weapons. The Mongol armies were disciplined and extremely orderly despite the lack of communication. Their formation style was also different. They would deploy men in groups of ten, then ten of those for a hundred, and ten of those for a thousand, and finally ten of those giving them ten thousand men which was called a tuman.

A practice used by the Mongols to deter any traitors was if one man of the ten were to run away, the other nine men would be killed. With that policy the life of every man depended on each other. Each Mongol warrior also carried his own food. However, when that ran out they would cut open a vein of a horse and drink the blood to maintain their strength. That and cannibalism of the enemy was not uncommon among the Mongols. The Mongol leaders would eat the livers of the conquered leaders so they could capture the strength of that leader and add it to their own.

1. How did the Mongol military work?
2. What was a tuman?

The Mongol War Machine

The Mongol armies were known as the Mongol War Machine. It was devastating and destroyed everything in its path. They were excellent at deploying and inventing military strategies and they had one that destroyed many armies. They would send a small force near an enemy city and retreat as soon as the enemy force was spotted, the opposing force would then chase the Mongol warriors. The enemy would soon find themselves surrounded by the Mongols. The surrounding Mongol army begins to start fires so there is no room for the enemy to retreat allowing them to be killed by arrows from the Mongol archers.

Another strategy was that the Mongol army would find an opposing city and they would at first offer to spare the city if the citizens agreed to pay them tribute. The tribute would be one-tenth of everything in the city, including people.

Military strategies were abundant for the Mongol armies. The Mongol army would sometimes cut down trees and build a wall around an entire enemy city closing it off from food, resources and outside help. The walls would lead the city to starvation and finally the Mongols would bomb the city with stones and fire until they surrendered, they were all dead, or the Mongols got bored and entered the city to kill the enemy using hand to hand combat.

1. What were some military strategies of the Mongols?
2. How effective do you think these strategies were?

Tatar Qualities and Attributes

Although Tatar [or Mongol] troops had defeated those of the Russian princes in 1228 this had been only a reconnaissance in force and the Tatars had withdrawn without attempting to follow up the victory. They returned in 1236, however, and within less than four years brought all the Russian principalities under their dominion. Tatar control of the Russian lands lasted almost two and one-half centuries and had very important, far-reaching consequences. The following description of the Tatars was written in 1243.

“Concerning their manners and superstitions, of the disposition and stature of their bodies, of their country and manner of fighting etc., he protested the particulars following to be true: namely, that they were above all men, covetous, hasty, deceitful, and merciless...

They think that all things are created for themselves alone. They esteem it none offence to exercise cruelty against rebels. They are hardy and strong in the breast, lean and pale-faced, rough and hug-shouldered, their teeth long and thin, having thick and great thighs, and short legs, and yet being equal unto us in stature: for that length which is wanting in their legs, is supplied in the upper parts of their bodies...

Their country is desert and waste, from whence they have expelled beasts with their bows. The hides of beasts are used to shape light but yet impenetrable armor. They ride fast bound 'unto their horses, which are not very great in stature, but exceedingly strong, and maintained with little provisions. They used to fight constantly and valiantly with javelins, maces, battle-axes, and swords. But especially they are excellent archers, and cunning warriors with their bows...

Vanquished, they ask no favor, and -vanquishing, they show no compassion. They all persist in their purpose of subduing the whole world under their own subjection. Couriers, who being sent before upon light horses to prepare a place for the army to encamp in, will in the space of one night gallop three days journey.

And suddenly diffusing themselves over an entire province, they make such horrible slaughters, that the king or prince of the land invaded cannot find people sufficient to wage battle against them, and to withstand them. They deceive all people in time of peace, pretending that for a cause, which indeed is no cause.”

Source: Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Ten vols. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927. Vol. 1, pp. 91-93.

1. How does he describe their military techniques?
2. What are the Mongols like in battle?
3. Based on this reading how do most people view the Mongols?
4. What other views would be needed to give an entire picture of the Mongols?