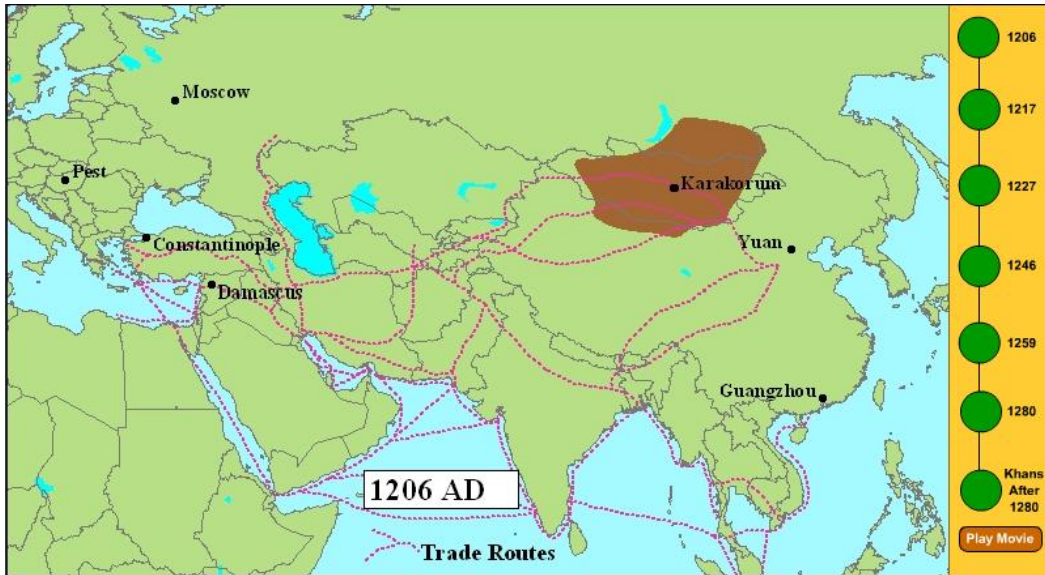


The Mongol Conquest

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

Work with the person sitting next to you to analyze the maps below and answer the following questions.



The extent of Mongol territory 1206.



The extent of Mongol Conquests 1294.

1. What continent is the Mongol Empire located? _____

2. What happened to Mongol territory between the years 1206-1294?

3. In what century did the Mongols expand their territory into an empire?

Southern Asia



4. What modern-day countries are included in the extent of Mongol conquests at the height of the Mongol Empire? (1294)

DOCUMENT 1 – All the Khan’s Horses

Chinggis Khan and his descendants could not have conquered, and ruled the largest land empire in world history without their diminutive but extremely hardy steeds. Mongols held these horses in highest regard and accorded them great spiritual significance. Before setting forth on military expeditions, for example, commanders would scatter mare's milk on the earth to insure victory. In rituals, horses were sacrificed to provide "transport" to heaven.

The Mongols prized their horses primarily for combat because the horses were fast and flexible, and Chinggis Khan was the first leader to capitalize fully on these strengths. After hit-and-run raids, for example, his horsemen could race back and quickly disappear into their native steppes.

Enemy armies from the sedentary agricultural societies to the south frequently had to abandon their pursuit because they were not accustomed to long rides on horseback and thus could not move as quickly. Nor could these farmer-soldiers leave their fields for extended periods to chase after the Mongols.

The Mongols had developed a composite bow made out of sinew and horn and were skilled at shooting it while riding, which gave them the upper hand against ordinary foot soldiers. A wood-and-leather saddle, which was rubbed with sheep's fat to prevent cracking and shrinkage, allowed the horses to bear the weight of their riders for long periods and also permitted the riders to retain a firm seat. Their saddlebags contained cooking pots, dried meat, yogurt, water bottles, and others essentials for lengthy expeditions. Finally, a sturdy stirrup enabled horsemen to be steadier and thus more accurate in shooting when mounted. A Chinese chronicler recognized the horse's value to the Mongols, observing that "by nature they (the Mongols) are good at riding and shooting. Therefore they took possession of the world through this advantage of bow and horse."

Chinggis Khan understood the importance of horses and insisted that his troops be solicitous of their steeds. A cavalryman normally had three or four, so that each was, at one time or another, given a respite [break] from bearing the weight of the rider during a lengthy journey. Before combat, leather coverings were placed on the head of each horse and its body was covered with armor. After combat, Mongol horses could traverse the most rugged terrain and survive on little fodder.

According to Marco Polo, the horse also provided sustenance to its rider on long strips during which all the food had been consumed. On such occasions, the rider would cut the horse's veins and drink the blood that spurted forth. Marco Polo reported, perhaps with some exaggeration, that a horseman could, by nourishing himself on his horse's blood, "ride quite ten days marches without eating any cooked food and without lighting a fire." And because its milk offered additional sustenance during extended military campaigns, a cavalryman usually preferred a mare as mount. The milk was often fermented to produce kumiss, or araq, a potent alcoholic drink liberally consumed by the Mongols. In short, as one commander stated. "If the horse dies, I die; if it lives, I survive."

DOCUMENT 1 QUESTIONS

Each group member must answer these questions in their notes. Be ready to share your answers with the class.

1. Why did horses play such an important role in the success of the Mongols? Use specific examples.

Militarily

Socially

2. Why couldn't other societies utilize horses the same way the Mongols could?

3. What things did cavalry riders take with them on long journeys? Why?

DOCUMENT 2 - The Battle of the Kalka River / Mongol Archers and Heavy Cavalry

The battle of the Kalka River

Mobility and surprise characterized the military expeditions led by Chinggis Khan and his commanders, and the horse was crucial for such tactics and strategy. Horses could, without exaggeration, be referred to as the intercontinental ballistic missiles of the thirteenth century. The battle of the Kalka River (now renamed the Kalmyus River) in southern Russia is a good example of the kind of campaign Chinggis Khan waged to gain territory and of the key role of the horse. After his relatively easy conquest of Central Asia from 1219 to 1220, Chinggis Khan had dispatched about 30,000 troops led by Jebe and Subedei, two of his ablest commanders, to conduct an exploratory foray to the west. In an initial engagement, the Mongols, appearing to retreat, lured a much larger detachment of Georgian cavalry on a chase. When the Mongols sensed that the Georgian horses were exhausted, they headed to where they kept reserve horses, quickly switched to them, and charged at the bedraggled, spread-out Georgians. Archers, who had been hiding with the reserve horses, backed up the cavalry with a barrage of arrows as they routed the Georgians.

Continuing their exploration, the Mongol detachment crossed the Caucasus Mountains. They wound up just north of the Black Sea on rich pastureland for their horses. After a brief respite, they attacked several sites inciting Russian retaliation in 1223 under Matislav the Daring, who had a force of 80,000 men. Jebe and Subedei commanded no more than 20,000 troops and were outnumbered by a ratio of four to one.

Knowing that an immediate, direct clash could be disastrous, the Mongols again used their tactic of feigned withdrawal. They retreated for more than a week, because they wanted to be certain that the opposing army continued to pursue them but was spaced out over a considerable distance. At the Kalka River, the Mongols finally took a stand, swerving around and positioning themselves in battle formation, with archers mounted on horses in the front.

Mongol archers and heavy cavalry

The Mongols' retreat seems to have lulled the Russians into believing that the invaders from the East were in disarray. Matislav the Daring ordered the advance troops to charge immediately. This decision proved to be calamitous. Mongol archers on their well-trained steeds crisscrossed the Russian route of attack, shooting their arrows with great precision. The Russian line of troops was disrupted, and the soldiers scattered.

After their attack, the archers turned the battlefield over to the Mongol heavy cavalry, which pummeled the already battered, disunited, and scattered Russians. Wearing an iron helmet, a shirt of raw silk, a coat of mail, and a cuirass, each Mongol in the heavy cavalry carried with him two bows, a dagger, a battle-ax, a twelve-foot lance, and a lasso as his principal weapons. Using lances, the detachment of heavy cavalry rapidly attacked and overwhelmed the Russian vanguard, which had been cut off from the rest of their forces in the very beginning of the battle.

Rejoined by the mounted archers, the combined Mongol force mowed down the straggling remnants of the Russian forces. Without an escape route, most were killed, and the rest were captured. Rather than shed the blood of rival princes—one of Chinggis Khan's commands—Jebe and Subedei ordered the unfortunate commander and two other princes stretched out under boards and slowly suffocated as Mongols stood or sat upon the boards during the victory banquet.

DOCUMENT 2 QUESTIONS

Each group member must answer these questions in their notes. Be ready to share your answers with the class.

1. How does the battle of the Kalka River illustrate the Mongol battle tactics?
2. Describe the weapons carried by the soldiers in the heavy cavalry.
3. What do you think would be the major difficulty for the riders?

DOCUMENT 3 - The Mongol War Machine / Genghis Khan's genius for organization

The Mongol War Machine

In the 13th century the Mongol army was the best army in the world. Its organization and training, its tactical principles and its structure of command would not have been unfamiliar to a soldier of the twentieth century. By contrast the feudal armies of Russia and Europe were raised and run on the same lines as they had been for several hundred years and their tactics would have seemed unimaginative to the soldiers of the Roman Empire.

At the time of Chingis Khan's birth the nomads of the eastern steppes lived in a feudal society. Each tribe was led by its khan, and were divided into clans which formed an *ordu*, the Mongol word for a camp (and source of the English word horde). Within the *ordu* each family lived in a *yurt*, a tent made of felt stretched over a wooden frame, and even for the rich families, life was often frugal: at the end of winter when the preservation of the herds was of paramount importance they would travel for several days without eating in search of fresh pasture and game. For the many poor, life was always squalid. The men of the clan spent their time hunting, tending their herds and fighting: a man's survival may have depended on his ability as a horseman and an archer, but his success depended on his strength as a warrior and his cunning as a bandit. Since the easiest way to acquire more horses and cattle was to steal them and the simplest way to look after them was to have it done for you by slaves, the nomad clans were constantly raiding each other. But the objectives of these raids was sometimes even more than the capture of animals and able-bodied men: the nomad warriors were polygamous and tradition forbade them to marry within their own clan.

Chinggis Khan's genius for organization

Once Chinggis Khan had united the tribes by force of arms, he began to suppress those customs that had preserved their poverty and discord. He forbade any man to own a Mongol slave, made cattle-theft and kidnapping punishable by death, and to spread among all the Mongol people the loyalty that had previously been limited to members of the same clan, divided the clansmen among the different units of his new army. It was to be an army for which the keen-eyed mounted archers were almost perfect raw material. The life that had given them their incomparable powers of endurance had also made them sullen, fatalistic, phlegmatic and callous. They could suffer without complaint and kill without pity and they were easily led. In an age when conditions in the camps of campaigning armies were often appalling, Mongol soldiers would live as they had always lived in the yurts of their *ordu*. To turn these reckless warriors into disciplined soldiers required only organization and tactical training.

It was Chinggis Khan's genius for organization that was to turn a confederation into a nation. It was called Mongol after his own tribe. It was the cohesion and persistence that he inspired and the structured military society that he left behind that were to distinguish the Mongol conquerors from the other nomad raiders...who washed the bodies of the dead, were liable for military service. When messengers brought the order to mobilize, trained men would collect their weapons and equipment from the officer in charge of the armory in their *ordu*, select a small herd of horses and set out to join their unit.

DOCUMENT 3 QUESTIONS

Each group member must answer these questions in their notes. Be ready to share your answers with the class.

1. What kind of society did the nomads of the Steppes come from? Where else did we see this kind of society?
2. What changes did Chinggis (Genghis) Khan make to Mongol society?
3. Why was Chinggis (Genghis) Khan known as a genius for organization?

DOCUMENT 4 – The Bow

The Bow

The bow was easily the Mongols' most important weapon. The mediaeval English longbow had a pull of 75 pounds and a range of up to 250 yards, but the smaller bows used by the Mongols had a pull of between 100-150 pounds and a range of over 350 yards. The velocity was further increased by the difficult technique known as the Mongolian thumb lock: the string was drawn back by a stone ring worn on the right thumb which released it more suddenly than the fingers. A soldier could bend and string his bow in the saddle by placing one end between his foot and the stirrup and he could shoot in any direction at full gallop, carefully timing his release to come between the paces of his horse, so that his aim would not be deflected as the hooves pounded the ground.

Whenever possible Mongols preferred to ride mares, since their milk as well as their blood, and in the last resort their flesh, provided them with everything they needed to survive. The Mongol nomads valued their horses far above all other possessions. Horses played their part in traditional ceremonies and folklore and there was a whole period in Chinese art when all the statues and paintings were of horses, since the Mongol patrons desired nothing else. War horses were treated with the same sentimental respect as any other comrade in arms. A horse that had been ridden in battle was never killed for food and when it became old or lame it was put out to grass, although when a soldier died his favorite horse was killed and buried with him so that their spirits would ride together.

To their enemies, the inexplicable coordination with which Mongol armies achieved their separate and common objectives was often astounding. Although their battlefield tactics were no more than the adaptation and perfection of those that had been developed by nomad archers over the past seven or eight hundred years, each carefully-designed campaign was a masterpiece of original and imaginative strategy and Mongol commanders could not have planned with as much breadth and daring as they did without absolute confidence in their communications. ...The Mongol army was a 'modern' army and the differences between it and the armies of the twentieth century can all be accounted for by progress in science and in technology, but not in the art of war.

DOCUMENT 4 QUESTIONS

Each group member must answer these questions in their notes. Be ready to share your answers with the class.

1. Why was the bow the Mongol's most important weapon?

2. How did the Mongol bow differ from the medieval English longbow?

3. Why is the Mongol army considered a 'modern' army?