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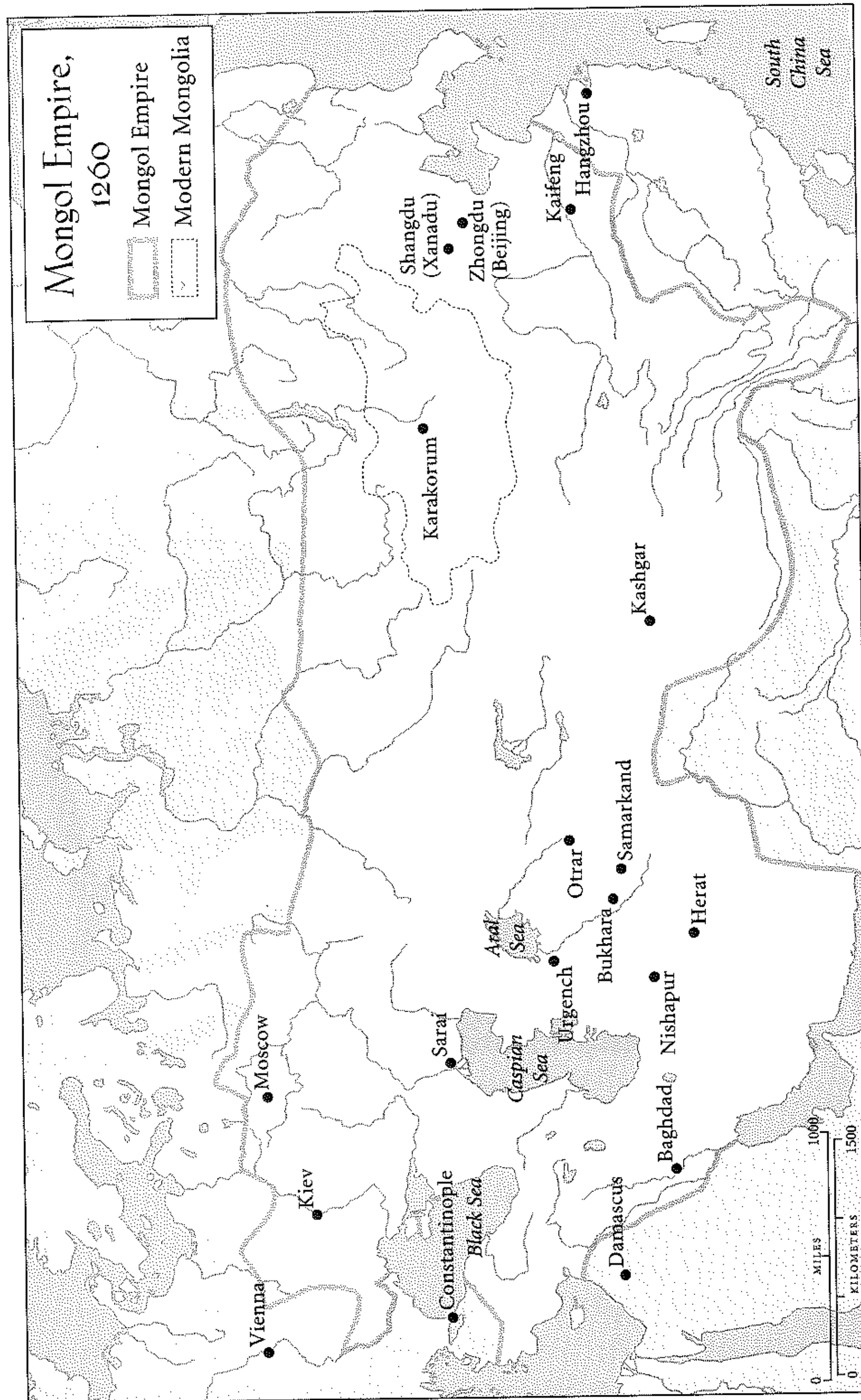

4

Spitting on the Golden Khan

The hooves of our Mongol horses go everywhere.
They climb to the heaven and plunge into the sea.
YELÜ CHUCAI, 1237

IN 1210, THE YEAR of the Horse and the forty-eighth year of the life of Genghis Khan and the fourth year of his new nation, a delegation arrived at the Mongol encampment to proclaim the ascension of a new Golden Khan to the Jurched throne and demand the submission of Genghis Khan and the Mongols as a vassal nation. From their capital city of Zhongdu, where modern Beijing now rises, the Jurched dynasty, founded nearly a century earlier in 1125, ruled Manchuria and much of modern-day Inner Mongolia and northern China. As a tribal people themselves from the forests of Manchuria, they claimed sovereignty over all the tribes of the steppe. Ong Khan had offered allegiance to them in the past, and the Jurched seemed eager to reassert their superiority over Genghis Khan, who had replaced Ong Khan as the dominant figure among the nomads of the steppe.

Jurched power over the steppe rested not from military prowess as much as from their tight control of goods flowing to the pastoralists from the workshops and cities across China. The position of a steppe khan rested on his ability to win in battle and to ensure a steady supply of trade goods. Usually the two coincided when battlefield victory provided an opportunity to loot

the defeated. Genghis Khan's unprecedented success in defeating and uniting all the tribes had the inadvertent consequence of ending the looting and thereby stifling the flow of goods. Since all manufactured goods originated in the south, Genghis Khan could either offer allegiance to one of the southern rulers and receive goods as a vassal warrior, or he could attack them and seize the goods.

Genghis Khan placed no trust in the Jurched. The Mongols had much closer ethnic and linguistic affinity with the Khitan, whom the Jurched had defeated and now dominated. Sensing the power of the new Mongol ruler, many Khitan had fled from Jurched territory to find sanctuary under Genghis Khan. In 1208, four high court officials deserted to the Mongols and urged them to attack the Jurched, but, fearful of a trap or some other nefarious scheme, Genghis Khan refused.

The unexpected death of the Golden Khan of the Jurched and the ascension of his young son to the throne in 1210 offered the Jurched court an opportunity to assess Genghis Khan by sending the envoy to him to announce the change of events and demand a strong show of submission from him. An idea of the type of ceremony expected is contained in an 1878 report in the *Peking Gazette* describing the investiture of a Mongol official by an envoy from the court of the Manchus, descendants of the Jurched. The young Mongol knelt "reverently upon the ground" and, "with the deepest gratitude," acknowledged himself "to be a Mongol slave of inferior ability, perfectly unable to repay in the slightest degree the Imperial favours of which his family have been the recipients for generations past, he declares his intention of performing his duties to the best of his feeble powers." He then "turned himself toward the Palace and beat his head upon the ground . . . in grateful acknowledgement of the Imperial bounty."

Genghis Khan knew full well how to kowtow—he had done it on Mount Burkhan Khaldun in repeated homage to the Eternal Blue Sky—but now, at nearly fifty years of age, he would kowtow to no man. Nor was he anyone's Mongol slave. Upon receiving the order to demonstrate submission, Genghis Khan is reported to have turned to the south and spat on the ground; then he unleashed a line of vindictive insults to the Golden Khan, mounted his horse, and rode toward the north, leaving the stunned envoy choking in his dust. Genghis Khan's defiance of the envoys of the Golden Khan was tantamount

to a declaration of war between the Mongols and the Jurched. Genghis Khan's need for trade goods already gave him a reason to make war on the Jurched, and the demand from the Golden Khan for submission now presented him with the pretext for attacking.

After the encounter with the Jurched envoy, Genghis Khan returned to his home base on the Kherlen River and, in the spring of 1211, the Year of the Sheep, summoned a *khuriltai*. Since everyone knew the issue to be decided, the people could exercise a veto simply by not showing up; if too few people came to the *khuriltai*, Genghis Khan would not have been able to proceed. By organizing a long public discussion, everyone in the community was included into the process, and, most important, everyone understood why they were fighting the war. Although on the battlefield the soldiers were expected to obey without question, even the lowest ranking were treated as junior partners who were expected to understand the endeavor and to have some voice in it. The senior members met together in large public meetings to discuss the issues, then individually went to their own units to continue the discussion with the lower-ranking warriors. To have the full commitment of every warrior, it was important that each of them, from the highest to the lowest, participate and know where he stood in the larger plan of events.

By including representatives from the allied Uighur and Tangut nations, Genghis Khan solidified his relations with them and thereby protected the exposed underbelly and rear of his land when he launched his invasion. On the home front, he also needed to inspire his people with the courage and understanding of this war. Toward both goals, Genghis Khan appealed to the honor of his followers and to their need to avenge past wrongs, but he also held out to them a much broader opportunity of unlimited goods from the great wealth of the cities of the Jurched. According to the *Secret History*, once he felt confident that his people and allies stood firmly with him, Genghis Khan publicly withdrew from the assembled delegates of the *khuriltai* to pray privately on a nearby mountain. He removed his hat and belt, bowed down before the Eternal Blue Sky, and stated his case to his supernatural guardians. He recounted the generations of grievances his people held against the Jurched and detailed the torture and killing of his ancestors. He explained that he had not sought this war against the Golden Khan and had not initiated the quarrel.

In his absence, the Mongol people divided into three separate groups, one each of men, women, and children, in order to fast and pray. For three nervous days and nights, the assembled Mongol nation awaited, bareheaded and hungry, the decision of the Eternal Blue Sky and the orders of Genghis Khan. Night and day they mumbled their ancient Mongol prayer of *"huree, huree, huree"* to the Eternal Blue Sky.

At dawn on the fourth day, Genghis Khan emerged with the verdict: "The Eternal Blue Sky has promised us victory and vengeance."

As the Mongol army set out south toward the splendid cities of the south, their overly confident Jurched enemies awaited them and mocked the Mongol advance. "Our empire is like the sea; yours is but a handful of sand," a Chinese scholar recorded the Jurched khan as saying in reference to Genghis Khan. "How can we fear you?" he asked.

He would soon have his answer.

In the thirteenth century, the area south of Mongolia now occupied by China consisted of many independent states and kingdoms containing perhaps a third of the world population. With some 50 million people, the Jurched kingdom was only the second largest of the many kingdoms occupying the territory now included in modern China. The largest and most important territory was under the administration of the Sung dynasty, heir to centuries of Chinese civilization, based in Hangzhou and ruling some 60 million people in southern China. A string of nomadic buffer states separated the Mongolian plateau from the Sung, each buffer state consisting of a hybrid of agricultural and grazing regions ruled over by a former nomadic tribe that had conquered and settled among its subjects in order to more efficiently exploit them. Frequently, a new tribe emerged from the steppes to displace the older tribe that had grown weak and dissipated from several generations of soft city life. In a long-established cycle, a nomadic army swept down from the steppe, conquered the peasants and cities to the south, created a new dynasty, and, after a few years, fell to the attack of another marauding tribe. Although the identities of the ruling tribe changed from century to century, the system had already been in place for thousands of years.

To the west of the Jurched were the kingdoms of the Tangut, then the

Uighur, and finally, in the Tian Shan mounts, the Black Khitan. The Uighur had already made their commitment to Genghis Khan, and, in what seemed to be a practice war, he had recently subdued the Tangut. The conquest of the Tangut took place through a series of raids between 1207 and 1209. The campaign was like a thorough dress rehearsal of the coming battle against the much stronger Jurched, complete with a crossing of the Gobi. The Tangut, a Tibetan people who had created an empire of farmers and herders along the upper reaches of the Yellow River in what is the modern Gansu Province in China, occupied a weak link along the line of oases in the interior desert that controlled the flow of trade goods from the Muslim West to the Chinese East. The routes stretched like thin, delicate ribbons across the deserts of the interior and provided the only links, albeit fragile ones, between the great civilizations of the East and the West. The Tangut raids had spurred Genghis Khan to learn a new type of warfare against walled cities, moats, and fortresses. Not only were the Tangut well fortified, but they had some 150,000 soldiers, nearly twice the size of the army Genghis Khan brought with him. Unlike generals who had grown up with cities and had access to centuries-old besieging techniques, Genghis Khan had to invent his own methods. He quickly learned the simple tactics, such as cutting off the Mongols' enemies from the surrounding food supply, but he soon attempted more unorthodox methods, such as when he attacked the fortified Tangut capital by diverting a channel of the Yellow River to flood it. With their inexperience in engineering, the Mongols succeeded in diverting the river, but they wiped out their own camp instead of the Tangut. Nevertheless, the Mongols survived their dangerous mistake. Genghis Khan learned from it and went on to conquer the city. In the future, the Mongols would use this method again, but each time they would be more adept at it and use it more successfully.

With Genghis Khan's decision to cross the Gobi and invade the Jurched in 1211, he had begun not just another Chinese border war: He had lit a conflagration that would eventually consume the world. No one, not even Genghis Khan, could have seen what was coming. He showed no sign of any global ambitions inasmuch as he fought only one war at a time, and for him the time had come to fight the Jurched. But starting from the Jurched campaign, the well-trained and tightly organized Mongol army would charge out of its

highland home and overrun everything from the Indus River to the Danube, from the Pacific Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. In a flash, only thirty years, the Mongol warriors would defeat every army, capture every fort, and bring down the walls of every city they encountered. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus would soon kneel before the dusty boots of illiterate young Mongol horsemen.

Crossing the vast Gobi required extensive preparation. Before the army set out, squads of soldiers went out to check the water sources and to report on grass conditions and weather. A Chinese observer remarked how the advance group scouted out every hill and every spot before the main army arrived. They wanted to know everyone in the area, every resource, and they always sought to have a ready path of retreat should it be needed.

The Mongol was ideally suited to travel long distances; each man carried precisely what he needed, but nothing more. In addition to his *deel*, the traditional wool robe that reached to his ankles, he wore pants, a fur hat with earflaps, and riding boots with thick soles. In addition to clothes designed to protect him in the worst weather, each warrior carried flints for making fires, leather canteens for water and milk, files to sharpen arrowheads, a lasso for rounding up animals or prisoners, sewing needles for mending clothes, a knife and a hatchet for cutting, and a skin bag into which to pack everything. Each squad of ten carried a small tent.

The movement and formation of the Mongol army were determined by two factors that set them clearly apart from the armies of every other traditional civilization. First, the Mongol military consisted entirely of cavalry, armed riders without a marching infantry. By contrast, in virtually all other armies, the majority of the warriors would have been foot soldiers. Approximately sixty-five thousand Mongol horsemen left on the Jurched campaign to confront an army with about the same number of horsemen, as well as another eighty-five thousand infantry soldiers, giving the Jurched an advantage of well over two to one but without the mobility of the Mongol force.

The second unique characteristic of the Mongol army was that it traveled without a commissary or cumbersome supply train other than its large reserve of horses that always accompanied the soldiers. As they moved, they milked the animals, slaughtered them for food, and fed themselves from

hunting and looting. Marco Polo alleged that the Mongol warriors could travel ten days without stopping to make a fire or heat food, that they drank horses' blood, and that each man carried with him ten pounds of dried milk paste, putting one pound of it in a leather flask of water each day to make his meal. The warrior carried strips of dried meat and dried curd with him that he could chew while riding; and when he had fresh meat, but no time to cook it, he put the raw flesh under his saddle so it would soon be softened and edible.

The Chinese noted with surprise and disgust the ability of the Mongol warriors to survive on little food and water for long periods; according to one, the entire army could camp without a single puff of smoke since they needed no fires to cook. Compared to the Jurched soldiers, the Mongols were much healthier and stronger. The Mongols consumed a steady diet of meat, milk, yogurt, and other dairy products, and they fought men who lived on gruel made from various grains. The grain diet of the peasant warriors stunted their bones, rotted their teeth, and left them weak and prone to disease. In contrast, the poorest Mongol soldier ate mostly protein, thereby giving him strong teeth and bones. Unlike the Jurched soldiers, who were dependent on a heavy carbohydrate diet, the Mongols could more easily go a day or two without food.

Traditional armies moved in long columns of men marching the same route with their large supplies of food following them. By contrast, the Mongol army spread out over a vast area to provide sufficient pasture for the animals and to maximize hunting opportunities for the soldiers. Genghis Khan moved at the center, flanked by the Army of the Right to the west and the Army of the Left to the east. A smaller unit took positions as advance guard and another as guard of the rear, where the Mongols also carried their reserve animals. The decimal organization of Genghis Khan's army made it highly mutable and mobile. Each unit of ten thousand functioned like a miniature version of Genghis Khan's camp. The commander of ten thousand moved at the center of his unit of one thousand, and he stationed the other nine units around him—to the left, the right, the back, and the front—as needed. Rather than a hierarchy of military units, Genghis Khan organized his men into a set of concentric circles.

Although the Mongols moved their military camps frequently, the central camp for each unit was laid out in a precise pattern so that newly arriving sol-

diers always knew where to report and how to find whatever they needed. Each Mongol unit of one thousand traveled with its own medical unit, usually composed of Chinese doctors, to care for the sick and wounded. The tents were lined up in specific formations, each formation with its name and purpose, and even the insides of the tents were arranged in precisely the same way. After a day of travel, fighting, or hunting, the army camped with the officers at the center of the camp surrounded by guards and other soldiers. At night, horses were kept ready in case they might be needed, and a perimeter was set up at the edge of the camp.

By contrast to the well-structured and neatly organized center of the camp, most of the common warriors broke up into their small bands and spread out over the countryside to camp at night. At dusk they made small fires, preferably when it was too light for the fire to show up clearly at a distance, yet too dark for the smoke to be seen from very far away. With the fire, they quickly prepared their only hot meal of the day. After eating, they did not linger or sleep by the fire; they dispersed into yet smaller groups of three to five men who slept in hidden recesses spread throughout the area. As soon as daylight broke the next morning, they began the day with a careful reconnaissance of the right, the left, the back, and the front.

With his men spread out over such a large area, communications became more important, yet more difficult. Conventional armies moved and camped in massive columns, and the commanders could easily communicate with one another through written messages. For the Mongols, the troops were more spread out, and even the officers were illiterate. All communication at every level had to be oral, not written. Orders moved by word of mouth from man to man. The problem with an oral system of communication lay in the accuracy of the message; the message had to be repeated precisely each time to each person and then remembered exactly as spoken. To ensure accurate memorization, the officers composed their orders in rhyme, using a standardized system known to every soldier. The Mongol warriors used a set of fixed melodies and poetic styles into which various words could be improvised according to the meaning of the message. For a soldier, hearing the message was like learning a new verse to a song that he already knew.

The soldiers, like bands of riders on the steppe still do today, frequently

sang as they rode in their small groups. In addition to singing about what soldiers always sing about—home, women, and fighting—the Mongol soldiers sang their laws and rules of conduct, which had also been set to music so that every man might know them. By memorizing the laws and constantly practicing the format of their message-songs, every man was ready, at any moment's notice, to learn a new message, in the form of a new verse to these well-rehearsed songs, and take it where ordered.

Despite the disadvantages of fighting on alien land outnumbered by enemies, Genghis Khan had the advantage of lessons learned from a lifetime of warfare, and he knew his troops and his officers intimately. He had fought with many of them for more than a quarter of a century, and a few of the generals, such as Boorchu and Jelme, had been with him for nearly forty years. He knew that he could trust them on long campaigns far away from his oversight. He also understood each general's strengths and weaknesses. Jebe, one of his commanders, would fight fast and furiously, taking unusual chances and inspiring resolute courage among his men in battle; while Muhali, another commander, moved slowly and methodically but could sustain longer and broader assignments.

The Mongols, no matter how rigorous their training, how precise their discipline, or how determined their will, could not conquer fortified cities by conventional warfare. In facing the Jurched, Genghis Khan employed the basic strategy of his earlier steppe wars by trying to win the battle before the first arrow was shot across the battlefield, to defeat the enemy by first creating confusion and then instilling fear to break his spirit. Because the Mongols initially lacked the weapons or knowledge to break down the massive city walls, they wreaked havoc in the surrounding countryside and then disappeared, only to reappear again just when it seemed that the city was safe.

Genghis Khan sought to further undermine his enemies by exploiting any internal social turmoil or rift he could identify. In the Jurched campaign, his first effort was to divide the Khitan from their Jurched rulers while breaking the confidence that the Chinese subjects had that the Jurched could defend them. In a masterful propaganda campaign, the Mongols entered Jurched territory announcing themselves as a liberating force intent on restoring the older Khitan royal family that had ruled before the Jurched overthrew them

a century earlier. Before the fighting began, many Khitan fled to join the Mongols, whom they saw as relatives speaking the same language. In one of the first actions of the war, Jebe, accompanied by Genghis Khan's brother Khasar, led a Mongol army straight for the Khitan homeland along the Liao River. The Mongol soldiers found enthusiastic support from the Khitan, and they quickly located a descendant of the Yelü dynasty, the former Khitan royal family. The following year, 1212, Genghis Khan officially restored the Khitan monarchy as a vassal state within the Mongol Empire. Of course, the Mongols had not yet conquered all the Jurched lands, but by creating the vassal state, he managed to further divide the Jurched and attract more deserters to the Mongol side.

Throughout his campaign he found members of the old Khitan aristocracy anxious to help him understand the land he had invaded. One of the most important would be Yelü Chucai, a young man in his twenties from the royal family of the Khitan. He attracted Mongol attention because of his training in astrology and the esoteric art of scapulimancy, divining the future by reading the cracks in the heated shoulder blade of a sacrificed sheep or goat. Because he was a native Khitan and spoke that language, he could easily communicate with the Mongols, but he also had extensive knowledge of Chinese culture. With their understanding of the Mongolian and Chinese languages, as well as their skill in writing and knowledge of law and tradition among the settled populace, the Khitan scholars proved so useful in administering the Mongol Empire that Genghis Khan concentrated more attention on attracting or capturing scholars of all sorts in an effort to apply their knowledge to benefit the empire. Thereafter, everywhere he went, he had such men brought to him for interrogation to see what skill they might have and where in his empire it might be applied.

The Mongol way of fighting was a refinement of the traditional steppe system that had been developed in Mongolia over many thousands of years. Superior weapons, in the end, did not account for the Mongol success. Weapon technology does not remain secret for long, and whatever works for one side can be readily adopted for use by the enemy after just a few battles. The Mongol's success arose from their cohesion and discipline, bred over millennia as nomads working in small groups, and from their steadfast loyalty to their leader.

Warriors everywhere have been taught to die for their leader, but Genghis Khan never asked his men to die for him. Above all else, he waged war with this strategic purpose in mind: to preserve Mongol life. Unlike other generals and emperors in history who easily ordered hundreds of thousands of soldiers to their death, Genghis Khan would never willingly sacrifice a single one. The most important rules that he created for his army concerned the loss of soldiers. On and off the battlefield, the Mongol warrior was forbidden to speak of death, injury, or defeat. Just to think of it might make it happen. Even mentioning the name of a fallen comrade or other dead warrior constituted a serious taboo. Every Mongol soldier had to live his life as a warrior with the assumption that he was immortal, that no one could defeat him or harm him, that nothing could kill him. At the last moment of life, when all had failed and no hope remained, the Mongol warrior was supposed to look upward and beckon his fate by calling out the name of the Eternal Blue Sky as his final earthly words. In fighting on the steppe, the nomads left the corpses of fallen soldiers and their possessions on the field to be disposed of by animals and to decompose naturally.

In the cultivated lands far from home, the Mongols feared that the body would not be allowed a natural decomposition and that local people might desecrate it. In another change from the normal pattern for steppe battles during the Jurched campaign, the Mongols began sending home the dead warriors for interment on the steppe. War captives transported the dead bodies by some means, probably sewing them in leather bags put on camels or in carts drawn by oxen. On the few occasions when this proved impossible, the Mongols had the bodies taken to a grassy area nearby and secretly buried each man with all of his belongings. They then drove animals over the grave to obscure it and prevent the peasants from finding it and exhuming the possessions.

The Mongols did not find honor in fighting; they found honor in winning. They had a single goal in every campaign—total victory. Toward this end, it did not matter what tactics were used against the enemy or how the battles were fought or avoided being fought. Winning by clever deception or cruel trickery was still winning and carried no stain on the bravery of the warriors, since there would be plenty of other occasions for showing prowess on the field. For the Mongol warrior, there was no such thing as individual honor in

battle if the battle was lost. As Genghis Khan reportedly said, there is no good in anything until it is finished.

Nowhere did Mongol ingenuity show itself more clearly than in their ability to transform the Jurched's greatest asset, their large population, into their greatest liability. Before attacking a city, the Mongols typically cleared out all the surrounding villages. They forcefully conscripted the local labor through an extension of their decimal organization of the military. Each Mongol warrior had to round up ten local men to work under his command; if any of them died, he had to replace the worker so that he always had ten men at his disposal. As an extension of the army, these captives performed the daily tasks of getting food and water for the animals and soldiers, as well as gathering needed material, such as stones and dirt, to fill in the moat in the upcoming siege. These conscripted men would also maneuver and operate the siege engines that pounded the walls with wooden or stone missiles and would push the movable towers built to breach the city walls.

For the Mongols, the lifestyle of the peasant seemed incomprehensible. The Jurched territory was filled with so many people and yet so few animals; this was a stark contrast to Mongolia, where there were normally five to ten animals for each human. To the Mongols, the farmers' fields were just grasslands, as were the gardens, and the peasants were like grazing animals rather than real humans who ate meat. The Mongols referred to these grass-eating people with the same terminology that they used for cows and goats. The masses of peasants were just so many herds, and when the soldiers went out to round up their people or to drive them away, they did so with the same terminology, precision, and emotion used in rounding up yaks.

Traditional armies of the era treated villages as resources to be looted and the peasants as a nuisance to be raped, killed, or disposed of in any convenient way. By contrast, the Mongols, who were always low in numbers compared with the place they invaded, put the massive number of people to strategic uses. The Mongol warriors modified the traditional steppe strategy of rounding up the enemy's herds and stampeding them toward their owners' battle lines or homes, thereby creating great confusion before the soldiers raced in to attack. In the Jurched campaign, the Mongols adapted this tactic to the herds of the peasant farmers. The Mongol army divided into small units that attacked undefended villages, set them afire, and chased out

the residents. The frightened peasants fled in all directions. They clogged the highways and made it difficult for the Jurched supply convoys to move. In the Jurched campaign, more than a million refugees fled the countryside in desperation and poured into the cities; they ate up huge stores of food, and caused chaos wherever they went.

Instead of being followed by mobs of refugees as was typical for the armies of the time, the Mongols were preceded by them, and the Mongols also used the displaced peasants in a more direct way as shields and as living battering rams against the city gates. The Mongols showed little concern for the loss of enemy life so long as it preserved Mongol life. As the captives fell in battle, their bodies helped to fill in the moats and form pathways over defensive holes and structures made by the enemies. Trapped inside their cities, the Jurched and their subjects starved; and in one city after another, they resorted to cannibalism. Discontent grew, and urban mutinies and peasant rebellions broke out against the Jurched officials, who proved unable to protect, feed, or manage the massive numbers of refugees. In the worst such rebellion, the Jurched army ended up killing some thirty thousand of their own peasants.

In contrast to the massive infantry armies that moved slowly and fought along a particular front or on a specific battlefield, the Mongols practiced warfare across the entire territory, and the ensuing turmoil and confusion allowed the Mongols to employ clever trickery of all sorts. In one episode, the Mongols captured a convoy with a high-ranking official en route to relieve the besieged city of Dading. One of the Mongols dressed in the envoy's clothes, took his official papers, and proceeded to the enemy city in disguise. As he arrived, by prearrangement, the Mongol army lifted its siege and departed. Once inside the city, the Mongol pretender fooled the local officials into believing that they had just defeated the Mongols. The pretender then oversaw the painstaking dismantling of the city's defenses and the withdrawal of troops. After several weeks of disarmament, he sent word to the Mongols, who returned like lightning and easily took the city.

The Mongols not only took advantage of such trickery, but in their relentless use of propaganda, they spread stories to foment anxiety and fear among the enemy. In one apocryphal account circulated to create anxiety among the enemy, the Mongols supposedly promised to retreat from a besieged city if

the Jurched defenders would give them a large number of cats and birds as booty. According to the story, the starving residents eagerly gathered the animals and gave them to the Mongols. After receiving all the birds and animals, the Mongols attached burning torches and banners to their tails and released them, whereupon the frightened animals raced back into the city and set it on fire. The story supplied a dramatic dose of war propaganda.

After all the reconnaissance, organization, and propaganda, when the attack finally came, the Mongol army sought to create as much confusion and havoc for the enemy as possible. One of the most common forms of attack, similar to the Bush Formation, was the Crow Swarm or Falling Stars attack. At the signal of a drum, or by fire at night, the horsemen came galloping from all directions at once. In the words of a Chinese observer of the time, "they come as though the sky were falling, and they disappear like the flash of lightning." The enemy was shaken and unnerved by the sudden assault and equally sudden disappearance, the roaring wave of noise followed by a greater silence. Before they could respond properly to the attack, the Mongols were gone and left the enemy bleeding and confused.

Beginning with the Tangut campaigns, Genghis Khan had discovered that Chinese engineers knew how to build siege machines that could batter city walls with massive stones from far away. The Chinese had already developed a number of those devices: the catapult hurled stones, flaming liquids, and other harmful substances at or across city walls; and the trebuchet, a catapult powered by the drop of a heavy counterweight, threw objects even faster than the torsion catapult. The ballista was a mechanical device that shot large arrows that could damage buildings and structures and kill any person or animal in its path. Although quite old in the military history of siege warfare, the weapons were new to the Mongols, but they soon became a permanent part of the arsenal of Genghis Khan, who appreciated the efficiency and ingenuity behind them. More than merely using the weapons, Genghis Khan acquired the engineering intelligence needed to create them. The Mongols eagerly rewarded engineers who defected to them and, after each battle, carefully selected engineers from among the captives and impressed them into Mongol service. Genghis Khan made engineering units a permanent part of the Mongol army, and with each new battle and each conquest, his war machinery grew in complexity and efficiency.

The siege engines exercised a particular fascination for the Mongols

because they allowed the attackers to stay well outside of the city and away from the danger of the person-to-person combat that they so abhorred. At some point, the Mongols encountered the Jurched use of the firelance, a bamboo tube stuffed with gunpowder, which when lit produced a slow burn that spewed sparks, flames, and smoke out of the end of the tube like a flamethrower. Developed from firecrackers, this weapon was used to ignite fires and as a device to disorient the enemy and their horses; in later refinements, the Mongols would adapt it for many more military purposes.

When he could not overtake their fortifications, Genghis Khan tried to draw the enemy out from their stronghold through strategems such as pretending to retreat, as illustrated in Jebe's siege of Liaoyang during the Jurched campaign. In a movement known as the Dog Fight tactic, he feigned a withdrawal, ordering his troops to leave behind a lot of their equipment and stores as though they had fled in great fearful haste. The city officials sent soldiers out to gather up the booty, and they quickly clogged the open gates with carts and animals transporting all the goods. With the soldiers on the open field, and the city gates opened, the Mongols fell upon them and raced through the open doors to capture the city.

As lifelong nomads, the Mongols learned early to fight on the move. For the soldier farmer, to flee meant to lose; to chase meant to win. The sedentary soldier sought to drive the attacker away from the place. The nomad sought to kill the enemy, and it mattered not at all whether he killed the enemy while attacking toward him or fleeing from him. For the Mongol, both directions represented fighting; a fleeing conquest was just as good as a stationary one. Once Mongols lured their opponents out of their walled cities, they applied the techniques they had learned for managing the movement of large groups of animals. Most commonly, they either strung their pursuers out in a long line that became increasingly defenseless and was easily attacked as soon as the Mongols had lured them into a trap, or the fleeing Mongols divided into their small squads and led their pursuers off in small groups that could be more easily overcome.

Even when routed or pursued by a determined enemy, the Mongols employed still more tricks with which to save themselves. If they were surprised and overtaken while on patrol, they usually carried some valuable items with them to strew on the ground as they escaped. The enemy invariably broke ranks to retrieve the goods, often fighting among themselves to

do so, and thereby allowed the Mongols to escape. At other times, the Mongols threw sand in the wind or tied tree branches to their horses' tails to whip up the dust in order to obscure their movements or to make the pursuers think that the Mongols were in much greater numbers than they actually were.

After the first year of the Jurched campaigns, it became clear that the worst danger for the Mongols derived not from battle but from the unpleasant climate. The lower altitude and closeness to great rivers and the ocean made the air hold its moisture, and in the summer, the heat and humidity became nearly unbearable for the Mongols and their shaggy horses. Repeatedly, they reported falling ill with a horrible variety of maladies when in the agricultural and urban areas. Campaigning nearly halted in the summer, when large numbers of the Mongols and their horse herds withdrew the relatively short distance to the higher and cooler grasslands of Inner Mongolia.

In 1214, Genghis Khan, at last, besieged the court of the Golden Khan himself in Zhongdu (Beijing). The court had just been through a palace coup, and the new Golden Khan had endured so much internal strife that rather than face a prolonged siege and war, he agreed to a settlement with the Mongols to make them withdraw. He gave them massive amounts of silk, silver, and gold, as well as three thousand horses and five hundred young men and women. To seal the arrangement, the Golden Khan recognized himself as a vassal of Genghis Khan and gave him one of his royal princesses as a wife.

In response, Genghis Khan broke his siege of Zhongdu and began the long trek back toward Outer Mongolia on the north side of the Gobi. The Khitan had received back much of their land, and their royal family had been restored; the Jurched would be allowed to keep a smaller kingdom for themselves. He evidenced no intention of ruling these areas or setting up a Mongol government so long as he could get the goods he wanted. Just as he had left the Uighur and the Tangut in charge of their own lands, he was glad to leave the Jurched and the Khitan to administer their kingdom in whatever way they saw fit so long as they remained subservient to the Mongols and supplied them with tribute.

Since both the Khitan and the Jurched acknowledged Genghis Khan as the

supreme emperor over all of them, he had no further reason to stay in their lands. The summer was just beginning, but already the heat and dryness prevented his army crossing the Gobi back toward home. Instead, they made camp on the south side of the Gobi at a place called Dolon Nor (Seven Lakes). As they awaited the cooler days of autumn, the troops could enjoy games, feasting, and the talents of the musicians and singers whom they had captured and were taking home with them.

As soon as the Mongols withdrew from the newly conquered territory, however, the Jurched authorities began to renege on their agreement. Mistrusting his own subjects, whom he suspected of secretly siding with the Mongol invaders, the Golden Khan, whom Genghis Khan had left on the throne, evacuated his capital at Zhongdu and the entire court fled south to Kaifeng, where they thought they would be well beyond the ability of the Mongol army to penetrate. For Genghis Khan, the flight of the Golden Khan was an act of betrayal of their new alliance, and he considered it rebellion. Although he had been away from his homeland between the Onon and Kherlen Rivers for more than three years, Genghis Khan prepared to return to fight again. He organized his army for a fourth year of fighting, marched down from Inner Mongolia, and headed back toward the capital that had surrendered to him and his army only a few months previously.

The Golden Khan had left a contingent of soldiers to guard the old capital city, but the soldiers and the people knew that they had been deserted. Genghis Khan's victories in the previous year's campaign inspired a mounting wave of support from within the enemy ranks, particularly those abandoned by the Golden Khan. In the traditional Chinese view, victory in war came to those whom Heaven favored—and with an increasingly long list of victories to his credit, it became apparent to Chinese peasants and Jurched warriors alike that Genghis Khan fought under the clear mandate of Heaven, and to fight against him risked offending Heaven itself. Many Jurched and other tribal soldiers in the service of the Golden Khan also discerned in Genghis Khan a true steppe warrior, like their own ancestors were prior to conquering and settling in cities. They had more in common with him and his soldiers than with the effete and debauched rulers who had, in any event, abandoned them to their fate against the invaders. Entire regiments, with their officers and weapons, deserted to join the Mongol forces.

Genghis Khan and his newly incorporated allies easily took the city. This time, however, he presented no opportunity for the defeated Jurched to submit tribute; the city would be punished and looted. The Mongols would take everything. Once it became clear that the city would soon fall, Genghis Khan turned over the final assault to his subordinates. Irritated by the increasing summer heat and disgusted by the filth of sedentary life, Genghis Khan left Zhongdu to return to the higher, drier, and more open lands of Inner Mongolia. He delegated the looting of the city to Khada, a Khitan commander, and his troops since they were more accustomed to managing cities and would know best how to extract the wealth. Mongol officials would wait outside the city some distance away for the loot to be brought to them and recorded. Genghis Khan expected the sacking to be executed in the usual and efficient Mongol manner that he had insisted upon since the defeat of the Tatars. In the Mongol way, soldiers treated the collection of loot as they did the harvesting of animals on the group hunt, distributing it among all the Mongols according to their rank. Down to the last brass button or final grain of silver, all of it was allocated according to a precise formula, from the 10 percent for the khan to the specified share for orphans and widows.

The new Mongol allies, however, either did not understand the system or simply refused to abide by it. Many of them, particularly the Khitan and the Chinese, who had suffered great repression and had many complaints against the Jurched, lusted after revenge and destruction. They felt that each soldier had the right to keep what he seized. They stripped gold from the walls of palaces, pried precious stones out of their settings, and seized chests filled with gold and silver coins. They loaded the precious metals into oxcarts and tied bundles of silk on their camels' backs.

Genghis Khan considered plunder to be an important matter of state, and as such he sent the chief Mongol judge, Shigi-Khutukhu, to the city to oversee the methodical looting and compile a meticulous inventory. Instead of an orderly process, Shigi-Khutukhu encountered chaos. Mongol officials outside the city, including the royal cook, had accepted silk embroidered with gold as bribes to allow the chaotic looting by the allied soldiers to continue; and when Shigi-Khutukhu arrived, he, too, was offered a personal share of the goods. He refused and returned to Genghis Khan to report the misconduct.

Genghis Khan became angry, rebuked the Khitan, and confiscated the goods, but no record of the punishment survives.

As the Mongol warriors withdrew from the cities of the Jurched, they had one final punishment to inflict upon the land where they had already driven out the people and burned their villages. Genghis Khan wanted to leave a large open land with ample pastures should his army need to return. The plowed fields, stone walls, and deep ditches had slowed the Mongol horses and hindered their ability to move across the landscape in any direction they wished. The same things also prevented the free migration of the herds of antelope, asses, and other wild animals that the Mongols enjoyed hunting. When the Mongols left from their Jurched campaign, they churned up the land behind them by having their horses trample the farmland with their hooves and prepare it to return to open pasture. They wanted to ensure that the peasants never returned to their villages and fields. In this way, Inner Mongolia remained a grazing land, and the Mongols created a large buffer zone of pastures and forests between the tribal lands and the fields of the sedentary farmers. The grassy steppes served as ready stores of pasturage for their horses that allowed them easier access in future raids and campaigns, and they provided a ready store of meat in the herds of wild animals that returned once the farmers and villagers had been expelled.

Through the first half of 1215, the Year of the Pig, the Mongols slowly set out with caravans of people, animals, and goods from the smoldering ruins of Zhongdu to the high, arid plateau of Inner Mongolia. They gathered again at Dolon Nor, where Genghis Khan had waited unsuccessfully to cross back home one year earlier, and they waited for the summer to pass before venturing across the Gobi. Genghis Khan had, once again, shown his ability to win in war, and now he demonstrated, on a scale unprecedented in the history of steppe khans, his ability to bring the goods home to his people.

A river of brightly colored silk flowed out of China. It was as though Genghis Khan had rerouted all the different twisting channels of the Silk Route, combined them into one large stream, and redirected it northward to spill out across the Mongol steppes. The caravans of camels and oxcarts carried so much of the precious cloth that the Mongols used silk to wrap their other goods and as packing material. They threw away their rawhide ropes

and used twisted cords of silk instead. They bundled robes embroidered with silver and golden thread in the designs of blooming peonies, flying cranes, breaking waves, and mythical beasts, and they packed silk slippers sewn with tiny pearls. The Mongols filled carts with silk rugs, wall hangings, pillows, cushions, and blankets, as well as silk sashes, braid, fringe, and tassels. They carried bolts of raw silk, silken threads, and cloth worked into every imaginable type of clothing or decorations and in more colors than the Mongol language could identify.

In addition to silk, satin, brocade, and gauze, the bundles contained whatever objects the Mongol eye fancied and could be moved, including lacquered furniture, paper fans, porcelain bowls, metal armor, bronze knives, wooden puppets, iron kettles, brass pots, board games, and carved saddles. The Mongols carried jugs of perfume and makeup made from ocher, yellow lead, indigo, flower extracts, fragrant waxes, balsam, and musk. They brought hair ornaments and jewelry crafted from precious metals, ivory, or tortoiseshell and studded with turquoise, pearls, cornelian, coral, lapis lazuli, emeralds, and diamonds. Wagons loaded with skins of wine, casks of honey, and bricks of black tea followed camels that smelled of incense, medicines, aphrodisiacs, and special woods of cinnabar, camphor, and sandalwood.

Long lines of clerks laboriously cataloged, checked, and rechecked the goods of each caravan of camels and oxcarts. Musicians played and sang to delight their captors as the caravan moved. Whenever the caravan paused, acrobats, contortionists, and jugglers performed while young girls gathered dried dung for the fire, milked the animals, cooked a meal, and offered whatever else might be asked of them. Boys tended the animals and lifted the heavy loads. Behind the animals came the endless lines of marching captives—thousands upon thousands. Princes and priests. Tailors and pharmacists. Translators and scribes. Astrologers and jewelers. Artists and soothsayers. Magicians and goldsmiths. Anyone evidencing a skill had been rounded up, together with those who merely attracted the attention of one of the Mongols for whatever reason or fancy.

In all the centuries of raiding and trading, no leader had brought back to his homeland nearly the amount of goods as Genghis Khan. But vast as the quantities were, the appetites of his own people were insatiable. As he returned from his campaigns, his caravans were laden with valuable goods,

but each load created the desire for yet more. Every Mongol could sit in his *ger* on lacquered furniture draped in silk; every maiden was perfumed, painted with makeup, and bejeweled. Every riding horse was fixed with metal fittings, and every warrior with bronze and iron weapons. To work their crafts, the thousands of new craftsmen needed more raw materials—everything from wood, clay, and cloth to bronze, gold, and silver. To feed these workers, constant supplies of barley, wheat, and other food commodities had to be hauled across the vast wasteland separating the herders' pastures and the agricultural fields of the south; and the more captives Genghis Khan brought home, the more food and equipment he had to obtain to supply them. Novelties became necessities, and each caravan of cargo stimulated a craving for more. The more he conquered, the more he had to conquer.

The steppes could no longer be isolated. Genghis Khan had to organize supply lines, maintain production, and coordinate the movement of goods and people on an unprecedented scale. What began as a quick raid on cities south of the Gobi for silks and baubles had turned into three decades of the most extensive war in world history. Genghis Khan would spend the next fifteen years of his life fighting across the face of Asia, and at his death, he bequeathed the war to his descendants to expand into new countries and against new people for two more generations.

After the Jurched campaigns, the Great Khan returned directly to his steppes of Khodoe Aral between the Kherlen and the Tsenker Rivers. In keeping with his prior practices, Genghis Khan immediately began to distribute the accumulated booty to his generals and officers, who in turn made the appropriate divisions among their own men. For the first time in his career, however, he simply had too much loot and material to distribute, and he needed to find ways to administer it and store it until needed. To solve this problem of affluence, Genghis Khan allowed the construction of some buildings. He situated them near the small Avarga Stream, somewhat to the side of the steppe where a spring bubbled up out of the ground. According to tradition, Borte treated her young son Ogodei with the water from this spring in order to cure a disease. Collectively, the buildings were named the Yellow Palace, and they served mostly as warehouses for the goods brought back from the cam-

paigns. With rivers on both sides and a small clump of hills in the middle, the area was easily protected, and made a surprise attack virtually impossible.

After his long absence, Genghis Khan had many pending problems to solve, not only among his Mongol subjects, but also with the Siberian tribes of the north and the Uighur farmers of the south. Some of the Siberian tribes that had first submitted to Mongol rule during Jochi's invasion of 1207 used Genghis Khan's lengthy absence on the Jurched campaign to quit sending tributary furs, forest products, and young women. When a Mongol envoy arrived to investigate, however, he found that in keeping with the fame of their women, they now had a woman chief whom they called Botohui-tarhun, a name that meant roughly Big and Fierce. Rather than surrender thirty maidens to the Mongols as wives, she took the Mongol himself captive. When the messenger did not return, Genghis Khan eventually sent another negotiator, and she took him captive as well.

In 1219, the Year of the Hare, Genghis Khan sent a trusted general with a detachment of good soldiers to find out what had happened. Accustomed to campaigning on the open steppes and in the farmlands, the Mongols had little experience fighting or traveling in the dense forest. Usually, the Mongols crossed the steppe by spreading out and moving forward on a broad front. In the forest, however, they had to follow one another along the narrow trails. Botohui-tarhun's forces heard them coming long before they arrived in her territory, and like any experienced forest hunter, she set a trap for them. She sent a contingent of her troops to seal off the trail behind the men to prevent their escape, then she ambushed them from the front. Botohui-tarhun's forces triumphed—and in the battle, her warriors killed the Mongol general.

Such a loss was highly unusual, and it enraged Genghis Khan. At first, he threatened to lead the army himself in vengeance against the victorious queen. His advisers soon convinced him otherwise. They prepared a large expedition, and this time the Mongols were determined to win by whatever means necessary. A small detachment of Mongol warriors moved out as a decoy pretending to guard the frontier trail and passes between the Mongols and the queen's territory. Meanwhile, the Mongol soldiers in the main force of the army secretly cut a new road through the forest from another direction. With axes, adzes, saws, chisels, and all the tools and

weapons they could muster, the Mongols laboriously cleared a path by following the mountain trail of the "red bull," probably the large reddish deer or elk. After completing the secret road, the Mongol soldiers swooped down on the queen's headquarters so fast that in the words of the *Secret History*, it seemed as though they had descended "through the top of the smoke-holes of their tents."

The victorious Mongols freed their envoys and brought back the tribe as prisoners to be divided up as servants and mates. Genghis Khan gave the queen Botohui-tarhun in marriage to the second of the envoys, whom she may have already taken as her husband since she had kept him as her prisoner and had not killed him.

The forest tribes provided only a brief distraction for Genghis Khan compared to the more serious issues among the Uighurs of the desert oases, who ranked among his most steadfast subjects. They supported him so strongly that other Muslim Uighurs, living further to the west in the foothills of the Tian Shan Mountains of what is modern-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, wished to overthrow their Buddhist rulers and join Genghis Khan as well. Envoys came to the Mongol country from the Muslim people of Kashgar, a trading city in what is now the province of Xinjiang, in western China. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, these people were ruled by another group of Khitan that originated in Manchuria; but they had been driven out of the east by the Jurched, and settled in the Tian Shan Mountains. To differentiate them from the Khitan who had stayed in the east, the Mongols called them Kara Khitan, the "Black Khitan," since black both signified distant kin and was, in particular, the color that symbolized the west.

While many of the Uighurs had voluntarily joined the Mongols, others remained under the control of the Black Khitan, who were now ruled by Guchlug, the son of the Tayang Khan of the Naiman, Genghis Khan's erstwhile enemy. After the defeat of his people, Guchlug fled to the south, where he married the daughter of the Black Khitan ruler and then usurped his power. Although Guchlug was originally a Christian and the Black Khitan were Buddhists, they shared a common mistrust of the Uighur subjects, who were Muslims. In his newly acquired position as ruler of the kingdom, Guchlug began to persecute his Muslim subjects by limiting the practice of their religion. He forbade the call to prayer and prohibited pub-

lic worship or religious study. When Guchlug left the capital of Balasagun on a campaign, his subjects closed the city gates behind him and tried to prevent his return. In retaliation, he besieged the capital, conquered it, and then razed it.

Without a Muslim ruler willing to protect them, the Muslims of Balasagun turned to Genghis Khan to overthrow their oppressive king. Though the Mongol army was stationed twenty-five hundred miles away, Genghis Khan ordered Jebe, the general who restored the Khitan monarchy, to lead twenty thousand Mongol soldiers across the length of Asia and defend the Muslims. Genghis Khan's refusal to take to the battlefield himself indicates how low a priority these lands held for him. His world was in Mongolia, and he wanted to spend as much time as he could with his family at the Avarga encampment along the banks of the Kherlen River. The distant oasis cities of the desert and mountains held little attraction for him. This particular invasion offered him little more than an opportunity to finally deal with his old enemy Guchlug.

Because the Mongols conducted the campaign at the request of the Uighur Muslims, they did not allow plunder, destroy property, or endanger the lives of civilians. Instead, Jebe's army defeated the army of Guchlug and, in a punishment befitting his crimes, had him beheaded on a plain near the modern borders of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. Following the execution, the Mongols sent a herald to Kashgar to proclaim the end of religious persecution and the restoration of religious freedom in each community. According to the Persian historian Juvaini, the people of Kashgar proclaimed the Mongols "to be one of the mercies of the Lord and one of the bounties of divine grace."

Although Persian and other Muslim chroniclers recorded the episode in tremendous detail, the *Secret History* summed up the entire campaign in one simple sentence. "Jebe pursued Guchlug Khan of the Naiman, overtook him at the Yellow Cliff, destroyed him, and came home." From the Mongol perspective, that is probably all that mattered. Jebe had done his duty: He killed the enemy and returned home safely. The campaign tested and proved the ability of the Mongol army to successfully operate over thousands of miles from the home base and apart from Genghis Khan himself.

More important than acquiring new subjects or building his reputation as

the defender of persecuted religions, the victory over the Black Khitan gave Genghis Khan complete control over the Silk Route between the Chinese and the Muslims. He now had vassal states among the Tangut, the Uighurs, the Black Khitan, and the northern Jurched lands; and although he controlled neither the primary production area of the Sung dynasty nor the primary purchasing areas in the Middle East, he controlled the links between. With his control over large amounts of Chinese trade goods, he saw tremendous opportunities for trade with the Muslim countries of central Asia and the Middle East.

In 1219, with many military and commercial accomplishments behind him, Genghis Khan neared sixty years of age. As Juvaini describes, "He had brought about complete peace and quiet, and security and tranquillity, and had achieved the extreme of prosperity and well-being; the roads were secure and disturbances allayed." He seemed content to live out his days in peace, to enjoy his family and horses, and to bask in the new prosperity he had brought to his people.

He had far more goods now than he could possibly use or distribute to his people, and he wanted to use this vast amount of new resources to stimulate trade. In addition to the thriving supply of traditional Asian goods, other commodities sometimes trickled in from the more distant and exotic western lands of the Middle East. The Muslims in that part of the world produced the finest of all metals, the magnificent gleaming steel. They had cottons and other fine textiles, and they knew the mysterious process of making glass. The vast area from the mountains of modern Afghanistan to the Black Sea fell under the power of the Turkic sultan Muhammad II, whose empire was called Khwarizm. Genghis Khan wanted these exotic commodities, and toward this end he sought a trading partnership with the distant sultan.

The French historian Pétis explained Genghis Khan's situation at the time: ". . . this Emperor having nothing more to fear either from the East, West, or Northern Parts of Asia, endeavour'd to cultivate a sincere Friendship with the King of Carizme. He therefore toward the latter end of this Year 1217 sent three Ambassadors to him with Presents . . . to ask . . . that their People might trade together with Safety, and find in a perfect Union with one

another, that Repose and Plenty which are the chief Blessings that can be wished for in all Kingdoms."

To negotiate a trade treaty and formalize their commercial relations, Genghis Khan sent an envoy to the sultan of Khwarizm: "I have the greatest desire to live in peace with you. I shall look on you as my son. For your part, you are not unaware that I have conquered North China and subjected all the tribes of the north. You know that my country is an ant heap of warriors, a mine of silver, and that I have no need to covet other dominions. We have an equal interest in fostering trade between our subjects."

With some suspicion and reluctance, the sultan agreed to the treaty. Since the Mongols themselves were not merchants, Genghis Khan turned to the Muslim and Hindu merchants already operating in his newly acquired territories of the Uighur; from among them, he assembled 450 merchants and retainers whom he sent from Mongolia to Khwarizm with a caravan loaded with the luxury commodities of white camel cloth, Chinese silk, silver bars, and raw jade. He sent an Indian at the head of the delegation with another message of friendship to the sultan, inviting trade so that "henceforth the abscess of evil thoughts may be lanced by the improvement of relations and agreement between us, and the pus of sedition and rebellion removed."

When the caravan entered Khwarizm in the northwestern province of Otrar, now located in southern Kazakhstan, the arrogant and greedy governor seized the goods and killed the merchants and their drivers. He had no idea what a grievous response would follow. As the Persian observer Juvaini explained, the governor's attack not only wiped out a caravan, it "laid waste a whole world."

Hearing of the episode, Genghis Khan sent envoys to request that the sultan punish the local official for the attack; instead, the sultan rebuked the khan in the most publicly dramatic and offensive manner he knew. He killed some of the envoys and mutilated the faces of the others, whom he sent back to their master. It only took a few weeks for word of the rebuke to fly across the steppes and reach the Mongol court, where, in the words of Juvaini, "the whirlwind of anger cast dust into the eyes of patience and clemency while the fire of wrath flared up with such a flame that it drove the water from his eyes and could be quenched only by the shedding of blood." In anger, humiliation, and frustration, Genghis Khan withdrew once again to his mountaintop of Burkhan Khaldun, where he uncovered "his head, turned his face toward the earth and for three days and nights offered up prayer, saying 'I was not the author of this trouble; grant me strength to exact vengeance.' Thereupon he descended from the hill, meditating action and making ready for war."

5

Sultan Versus Khan

War for the nomadic people was a sort of production.
For the warriors it meant success and riches.
SECHEN JAGCHID,
Essays in Mongolian Studies

GENGHIS KHAN SET OUT to the west, heading for Khwarizm in 1219, the Year of the Rabbit, and arrived with the following spring in the Year of the Dragon, when he crossed the desert to suddenly appear deep behind enemy lines at Bukhara. Before the year ended, the Mongols had taken every major city in the Khwarizm empire, and its sultan lay abandoned and dying on a small island out in the Caspian Sea where he had sought refuge from the relentless hounding by Genghis Khan's warriors.

The Mongols carried the fighting deeper into the new lands, and in a campaign of four years, they conquered the cities of central Asia as though swatting flies. The names seem to run together in a numbing sequence of syllables in a dozen languages: Bukhara, Samarkand, Otrar, Urgench, Balkh, Banakat, Khojend, Merv, Nisa, Nishapur, Termez, Herat, Bamiyan, Ghazni, Peshawar, Qazvin, Hamadan, Ardabil, Maragheh, Tabriz, Tbilisi, Derbent, Astrakhan. The armies of Genghis Khan crushed every army wherever they found them, from the Himalayan Mountains to the Caucasus Mountains, from the Indus

River to the Volga River. Each conquered city had its own story that followed a mildly different course of events, but the results never varied. No city withstood their onslaught. No citadel survived untaken. No prayers could save the people. No officials could bribe or talk their way out of submission. Nothing could slow, much less stop, the Mongol juggernaut.

By riding against Khwarizm, Genghis Khan attacked a newly formed kingdom only twelve years older than his own Mongol nation, but he attacked not just an empire, but an entire ancient civilization. The Muslim lands of the thirteenth century, combining Arabic, Turkic, and Persian civilizations, were the richest countries in the world and the most sophisticated in virtually every branch of learning from astronomy and mathematics to agronomy and linguistics, and possessed the world's highest levels of literacy among the general population. Compared with Europe and India, where only priests could read, or China, where only government bureaucrats could, nearly every village in the Muslim world had at least some men who could read the Koran and interpret Muslim law. While Europe, China, and India had only attained the level of regional civilizations, the Muslims came closest to having a world-class civilization with more sophisticated commerce, technology, and general learning, but because they ranked so high above the rest of the world, they had the farthest to fall. The Mongol invasion caused more damage here than anywhere else their horses would tread.

Just as in northern China, where the formerly nomadic Khitan, Jurched, and Tangut tribes ruled over peasant populations, across the Middle East the formerly nomadic Turkic tribes such as the Seljuks and the Turkoman had conquered and ruled various kingdoms populated mostly by farmers. A series of Turkic states dominated the political landscape from the territories of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, across Persia, and into the heart of the Anatolia region of modern Turkey along the Mediterranean. The civilization of the area rested on an ancient bed of Persian cultures, heavily augmented by influences from the Arab world and from earlier classical civilizations from Rome to India. The cultural mosaic of the Middle East included sizable minority populations of Jews, Christians, and other religious and linguistic groups. Overall, however, the scholars, judges, and religious leaders spoke Arabic and quoted the Koran. The soldiers spoke the Turkic dialects of their warrior tribe. The peasants spoke and sang in the many dialects of Persian.

Despite the wealth of the area at the time of Genghis Khan's sudden appearance, the complexity of its social life left its many kingdoms riven with political rivalries, religious tensions, and cultural hatreds. As an upstart Turk, the sultan of Khwarizm could scarcely claim any allies among his fellow Muslims, mostly Arabs and Persians, who looked upon him as little more than a barbarian conqueror himself. Relations between the sultan of Khwarizm and the Arab Caliph in Baghdad were so strained that according to several chronicles, the Caliph supposedly petitioned Genghis Khan to attack the sultan by sending him a secret message tattooed onto a man's head, who then passed undetected through Khwarizm territory to reach the Mongols. Although apocryphal, the story of the tattooed messenger circulated widely in the Muslim world and conferred a certain legitimacy on Genghis Khan's war against the sultan for those Muslims looking for a religious reason to side with the infidel against a Muslim sultan. According to a possibly true story, the Caliph further aided the Mongol attack by sending Genghis Khan a gift of a regiment of Crusaders captured in the Holy Land. Since Genghis Khan had no need for infantry, he freed them, and some of them eventually made their way home to Europe with the first rumors of the previously unknown Mongol conquerors.

In addition to the strains with his Muslim neighbors, the sultan of Khwarizm faced numerous divisions within his own lands and family. The sultan quarreled constantly with his mother, who held virtually as much power as he did, and the threat of a Mongol invasion heightened their disagreement on everything from how to run the empire to how to prepare for war. It was her brother who had seized the first Mongol caravan that precipitated the war, but in refusing to allow her son to punish him and thereby avoid war, she exacerbated the tensions with the Mongols. If the stresses within the ruling family were not menacing enough, the masses of Persian and Tajik subjects showed little connection to their rulers and even less to the Turkic soldiers who were stationed in their cities to exploit them rather than defend them. In turn, the soldiers had minimal vested interest in protecting the lands where they were stationed, and they showed little inclination to risk their lives to save people whom they despised.

When Genghis Khan dropped down on the cities of Khwarizm, he commanded an army of about 100,000 to 125,000 horsemen, supplemented by Uighur and other Turkic allies, a corps of Chinese doctors, and engineers for

a total of 150,000 to 200,000 men. By comparison, the Khwarizm ruler had some 400,000 men under arms across his empire, and they were fighting with the home advantage on their own territory.

The Mongols promised justice to those who surrendered, but they swore destruction to those who resisted. If the people accepted and acted as relatives should by reciprocating the offer of kinship by offering food, then the Mongols would treat them as family members with a guarantee of protection and certain basic familial rights; if they refused, they would be treated as enemies. Genghis Khan's offer to the besieged was as simple as it was horrifying, as when he sent this message to the citizens of Nishapur: "Commanders, elders, and commonality, know that God has given me the empire of the earth from the east to the west, whoever submits shall be spared, but those who resist, they shall be destroyed with their wives, children, and dependents." The same sentiment found expression in many documents of the era, one of the clearest in the Armenian chronicle that quotes Genghis Khan as saying that "it is the will of God that we take the earth and maintain order" to impose Mongol law and taxes, and to those who refused them, the Mongols were obligated to "slay them and destroy their place, so that the others who hear and see should fear and not act the same."

Some cities surrendered without fighting. Others fought for a few days or weeks, and only the hardiest of defenders held out for more than a few months. Genghis Khan had learned much from his campaigns against the Jurched cities: not only how to capture heavily fortified cities, but how to treat them afterward, in particular how to most efficiently plunder them. He did not want to repeat the mistakes of the chaotic plunder of Zhongdu. In Khwarizm, he introduced the new and more efficient system of first emptying the city of all people and animals before beginning to loot, thereby minimizing the danger to his men as they plundered.

Before the plundering began, the Mongol warriors followed a similar procedure toward the enemy population in each hostile city. First, they killed the soldiers. The Mongols, dependent on cavalry, had little use for an infantry trained to defend fortress walls, and, more important, they did not want to leave a large army of former enemies blocking the route between them and their homeland in Mongolia. They always wanted a clear, open way home. After executing the soldiers, the Mongol officers sent clerks to divide the civilian population by profession. Professional people included anyone who

could read and write in any language—clerks, doctors, astronomers, judges, soothsayers, engineers, teachers, imams, rabbis, or priests. The Mongols particularly needed merchants, cameleers, and people who spoke multiple languages, as well as craftsmen. These workers would be put to use by the Mongols, who themselves practiced no crafts other than war, herding, and hunting. Their growing empire needed skilled workers in almost every service imaginable, including smiths, potters, carpenters, furniture makers, weavers, leather workers, dyers, miners, papermakers, glassblowers, tailors, jewelers, musicians, barbers, singers, entertainers, apothecaries, and cooks.

People without occupations were collected to help in the attack on the next city by carrying loads, digging fortifications, serving as human shields, being pushed into moats as fill, or otherwise giving their lives in the Mongol war effort. Those who did not qualify even for these tasks, the Mongol warriors slaughtered and left behind.

In Genghis Khan's conquest of central Asia, one group suffered the worst fate of those captured. The Mongol captors slaughtered the rich and powerful. Under the chivalrous rules of warfare as practiced in Europe and the Middle East during the Crusades, enemy aristocrats displayed superficial, and often pompous, respect for one another while freely slaughtering common soldiers. Rather than kill their aristocratic enemy on the battlefield, they preferred to capture him as a hostage whom they could ransom back to his family or country. The Mongols did not share this code. To the contrary, they sought to kill all the aristocrats as quickly as possible in order to prevent future wars against them, and Genghis Khan never accepted enemy aristocrats into his army and rarely into his service in any capacity.

Genghis Khan had not always pursued this policy. In the first conquests of the cities of the Jurched, the Tangut, and the the Black Khitan, Genghis Khan had often protected the rich and even allowed rulers to stay in office after he defeated them. But the Jurched and the Tangut had betrayed him as soon as his army withdrew. By the time Genghis Khan arrived in the Muslim countries of central Asia, he had learned his lesson about the loyalty, dependability, and usefulness of the rich and powerful. In his keen awareness of public attitudes and opinions, he also recognized that the common people cared little about what befell the idle rich.

By killing the aristocrats, the Mongols essentially decapitated the social system of their enemies and minimized future resistance. Some of the cities

never recovered enough to rebuild after the loss of aristocrats on the battlefield or from the annihilation of their families. Genghis Khan wanted officeholders who were loyal and indebted to the Mongols alone for their positions of power and prestige, and for this reason he recognized no titles other than those granted by him. Even an allied prince or king who wished to retain an older title had to have it reconferred on him by the Mongol authorities. In his report on his trip to Mongolia from 1245 to 1247, the papal envoy Giovanni Di Plano Carpini complained frequently about the lack of respect that Mongols showed the aristocratic people. The lowest-ranking Mongol could walk in front of visiting kings and queens and speak rudely to them.

The fate of the sultan's mother, who had been the most powerful woman in the empire, showed the Mongol attitude toward aristocratic women. They captured her and killed most members of her court and some two dozen members of her family. Then they sent her off to live the remaining decade of her life in ignominious servitude in Mongolia, where she disappeared from history. Such a woman earned no prestige or consideration by virtue of her birth; she, like a captured man, was only as good as her skills, work, and service.

When the Mongols passed through a city, they left little of value behind them. In a letter written just after the invasion, the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, who barely escaped the Mongols, wrote glowingly of the beautiful and luxurious palaces that the Mongols had "effaced from off the earth as lines of writing are effaced from paper, and those abodes became a dwelling for the owl and the raven; in those places the screech-owls answer each other's cries, and in those halls the winds moan."

Genghis Khan epitomized ruthlessness in the eyes of the Muslims. Chroniclers of the era attribute to Genghis Khan the highly unlikely statement that "the greatest joy a man can know is to conquer his enemies and drive them before him. To ride their horses and take away their possessions. To see the faces of those who were dear to them bedewed with tears, and to clasp their wives and daughters in his arms." Rather than finding such apocalyptic descriptions derogatory, Genghis Khan seemed to have encouraged them. With his penchant for finding a use for everything he encountered, he devised a powerful way to exploit the high literacy rate of the Muslim people,

and turned his unsuspecting enemies into a potent weapon for shaping public opinion. Terror, he realized, was best spread not by the acts of warriors, but by the pens of scribes and scholars. In an era before newspapers, the letters of the intelligentsia played a primary role in shaping public opinion, and in the conquest of central Asia, they played their role quite well on Genghis Khan's behalf. The Mongols operated a virtual propaganda machine that consistently inflated the number of people killed in battle and spread fear wherever its words carried.

By August 1221, only a year into the campaign, Mongol officials sent their Korean subjects a demand for one hundred thousand sheets of their famous paper. The volume of paper shows how rapidly Mongol record keeping was increasing as the size of the empire grew, but the order also symbolized the Mongol emphasis on writing their history. Increasingly, paper was the most potent weapon in Genghis Khan's arsenal. He showed no interest in having his accomplishments recorded or in panegyrics to his prowess; instead, he allowed people to freely circulate the worst and most incredible stories about him and the Mongols.

From every conquered city, the Mongols sent forth delegations to the other cities to tell them of the unprecedented horrors inflicted by the nearly supernatural abilities of Genghis Khan's warriors. The power of those words can still be felt in the accounts of eyewitnesses recorded by chroniclers such as the historian Ibn al-Athir, who lived through the era of the conquest in Mosul, a city now located in Iraq, but at that time close to but slightly beyond the Mongol campaign. He recorded the accounts of refugees in his book *al-Kamil fi at-tarikh*, known in English as *The Perfect History* or *The Complete History*. At first, Ibn al-Athir seemed disinclined to believe the accounts: "Stories have been related to me, which the hearer can scarcely credit, as to the terror of the Tatars." But he quickly warmed to the retelling. "It is said that a single one of them would enter a village or a quarter wherein were many people, and would continue to slay them one after another, none daring to stretch forth his hand against this horseman." From another account, he heard that "one of them took a man captive, but had not with him any weapon wherewith to kill him; and he said to his prisoner, 'Lay your head on the ground and do not move,' and he did so, and the Tatar went and fetched his sword and slew him therewith."

Each victory released a flood of new propaganda, and the belief in Genghis

Khan's invincibility spread. As absurd as the stories appear from a reasoned distance and safety in time, they had a tremendous impact across central Asia. Ibn al-Athir lamented the Mongol conquests as "the announcement of the death-blow of Islam and the Muslims." With a touch of the dramatic, he added, "O would that my mother had not born me or that I had died and become a forgotten thing ere this befell!" He agreed to write out the gory details only because "a number of my friends urged me to set it down in writing." He declared the invasion as the "greatest catastrophe and the most dire calamity . . . which befell all men generally, and the Muslims in particular . . . since God Almighty created Adam until now." By comparison, he noted that the worst slaughters in pre-Mongol history had been unleashed upon the Jews, but the attack of the Mongols on the Muslims was worse because of the toll of Muslims whom "they massacred in a single city exceeded all the children of Israel." Lest the reader prove too suspicious, Ibn al-Athir promised details about the Mongol "deeds which horrify all who hear of them, and which you shall, please God, see set forth in full detail in their proper connection." The impassioned rhetoric, however, seems to have been more an effort to arouse his fellow Muslims than to accurately chronicle their conquest.

Although the army of Genghis Khan killed at an unprecedented rate and used death almost as a matter of policy and certainly as a calculated means of creating terror, they deviated from standard practices of the time in an important and surprising way. The Mongols did not torture, mutilate, or maim. War during that time was often a form of combat in terror, and other contemporary rulers used the simple and barbaric tactic of instilling terror and horror into people through public torture or gruesome mutilation. In an August 1228 battle with Jalal al-Din, the son of the sultan, four hundred Mongol prisoners fell into enemy hands, and they knew well that they would die. The victors took the Mongol warriors to nearby Isfahan, tied them behind horses, and dragged them through the streets of the city to entertain the city's residents. All the Mongol prisoners were thus killed as public sport and then fed to dogs. Because of this public torture, the Mongols never forgave the civilized people of that city, and it, too, would eventually pay a price. In another case where a Mongol army lost a battle, the Persian victors killed the captives by driving nails into their heads, the seat of their souls according to Mongol belief. This episode was echoed a century later in 1305, when the sultan of Delhi turned the

deaths of other Mongol prisoners into public entertainment by having them crushed by elephants. He then built a tower from the severed heads of the Mongols who had been killed or captured in battle.

Civilized rulers and religious leaders from China to Europe depended upon these gruesome displays to control their own people through fear and to discourage potential enemies through horror. When the Byzantine Christian emperor Basil defeated the Bulgarians in 1014, he had fifteen thousand Bulgarian war captives blinded. He left one man out of each hundred with one eye in order that he might lead the other ninety-nine homeward and thereby spread the terror. When the Christian Crusaders took cities such as Antioch in 1098 and Jerusalem in 1099, they slaughtered the Jews and Muslims without regard for age or gender, but merely because of their religion.

Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who ranks as one of Germany's greatest historical and cultural heroes, best exemplified the use of terror in the West. When he tried to conquer the Lombard city of Cremona in the north of modern Italy in 1160, he instituted an escalating series of violent acts of terror. His men beheaded their prisoners and played with the heads outside the city walls, kicking them like balls. The defenders of Cremona then brought out their German prisoners on the city walls and pulled their limbs off in front of their comrades. The Germans gathered more prisoners and executed them in a mass hanging. The city officials responded by hanging the remainder of their prisoners on top of the city walls. Instead of fighting each other directly, the two armies continued their escalation of terror. The Germans then gathered captive children and strapped them into their catapults, which were normally used to batter down walls and break through gates. With the power of these great siege machines, they hurled the living children at the city walls.

By comparison with the terrifying acts of civilized armies of the era, the Mongols did not inspire fear by the ferocity or cruelty of their acts so much as by the speed and efficiency with which they conquered and their seemingly total disdain for the lives of the rich and powerful. The Mongols unleashed terror as they rode east, but their campaign was more noteworthy for its unprecedented military success against powerful armies and seemingly impregnable cities than for its bloodlust or ostentatious use of public cruelty.

Those cities that surrendered to the Mongols at first found their treatment so mild and benign, in comparison with the horrific stories that circulated, that they naively doubted the abilities of the Mongols in other areas as well. After surrendering, a large number of the cities waited obediently until the Mongols had passed well beyond their country, and then revolted. Since the Mongols left only a few officials in charge and stationed no military detachment to guard a city, the inhabitants misinterpreted the Mongol withdrawal as weakness and presumed that the main Mongol army would never return that way. For these cities, the Mongols showed no mercy; they returned quickly to the rebels and destroyed them utterly. An annihilated city could not revolt again.

One of the worst slaughters was unleashed on the citizens of Omar Khayyám's home city of Nishapur. The residents revolted against the Mongols, and in the ensuing battle an arrow fired from walls of the city killed Genghis Khan's son-in-law, Tokuchar. In revenge for the revolt and as a lesson to other cities, Genghis allowed his widowed daughter, who was pregnant at the time, to administer whatever revenge she wished upon the captured city. She reportedly decreed death for all, and in April 1221, the soldiers carried out her command. According to widely circulated but unverified stories, she ordered the soldiers to pile the heads of the dead citizens in three separate pyramids—one each for the men, the women, and the children. Then she supposedly ordered that the dogs, the cats, and all other living animals in the city be put to death so that no living creature would survive the murder of her husband.

The most painful episode for Genghis Khan personally occurred during a battle in the beautiful valley of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, a Buddhist pilgrimage site and home of the largest statues in the world. Ancient devotees had carved giant images of Buddha in the mountainside, and one can only wonder what the Mongols thought of such large images. During the battle there, an arrow struck and killed young Mutugen, Genghis Khan's favorite grandson. Genghis Khan received word of the death before the boy's father, Chaghatai, was informed. Genghis Khan summoned his son, and before telling him what had happened, ordered Chaghatai not to weep or mourn.

Genghis Khan had cried publicly many times in his life and at the least provocation. He had cried in fear, in anger, and in sadness, but faced with the death of one whom he loved more than any other, Genghis Khan did not

allow himself or his sons to show their pain and anguish through tears or mourning. Whenever faced with great difficulty or personal pain, Genghis Khan funneled it into combat. Kill, don't mourn. He transformed the painful sorrow into a great fury that he poured out over the people of the valley. No one—rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, good or bad—would survive. The valley was eventually resettled by the Hazara, a name that meant "ten thousand" in Persian, who claimed to be descendants from one of Genghis Khan's regiments of that size.

While the destruction of many cities was complete, the numbers given by historians over the years were not merely exaggerated or fanciful—they were preposterous. The Persian chronicles reported that at the battle of Nishapur, the Mongols slaughtered the staggeringly precise number of 1,747,000. This surpassed the 1,600,000 listed as killed in the city of Herat. In more outrageous claims, Juzjani, a respectable but vehemently anti-Mongol historian, puts the total for Herat at 2,400,000. Later, more conservative scholars place the number of dead from Genghis Khan's invasion of central Asia at 15 million within five years. Even this more modest total, however, would require that each Mongol kill more than a hundred people; the inflated tallies for other cities required a slaughter of 350 people by every Mongol soldier. Had so many people lived in the cities of central Asia at the time, they could have easily overwhelmed the invading Mongols.

Although accepted as fact and repeated through the generations, the numbers have no basis in reality. It would be physically difficult to slaughter that many cows or pigs, which wait passively for their turn. Overall, those who were supposedly slaughtered outnumbered the Mongols by ratios of up to fifty to one. The people could have merely run away, and the Mongols would not have been able to stop them. Inspection of the ruins of the cities conquered by the Mongols show that rarely did they surpass a tenth of the population enumerated as casualties. The dry desert soils of these areas preserve bones for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years, yet none of them has yielded any trace of the millions said to have been slaughtered by the Mongols.

Genghis Khan would be more accurately described as a destroyer of cities than a slayer of people, because he often razed entire cities for strategic reasons in addition to revenge or to provoke fear. In a massive and highly successful effort to reshape the flow of trade across Eurasia, he destroyed cities on the less-important or more inaccessible routes to funnel commerce into more routes that his army could more easily supervise and control. To stop trade through an area, he demolished the cities down to their very foundations.

In addition to the organized destruction of some cities, he depopulated expansive areas of land by the laborious destruction of the irrigation system. Without irrigation, the villagers and farmers left, and the fields reverted to grazing land. This allowed large areas to be set aside for the herds that accompanied the army and were kept as reserves for future campaigns. Just as when he churned up the agricultural land when he left northern China to return to Mongolia, Genghis Khan always wanted a clear area of retreat or advancement where his army could always find adequate pasturage for the horses and for the other animals on which their success depended.

After four years of campaigning in central Asia, Genghis Khan was in his sixties. He was at the height of his power without competition from any rival within his tribe or threat from any enemy external to it. Yet in contrast to this overwhelming success on the battle front, his family was already, even before he died, tearing itself apart. Leaving the Mongol homeland in the care of his youngest brother, Temuge Otchigen, he had brought all four of his sons with him on the central Asian campaign, where he hoped that they would not only learn to be better warriors, but also how to live and work together. Unlike conquerors who came to think of themselves as gods, Genghis Khan knew clearly that he was mortal, and he sought to prepare his empire for a transition. In the tradition of the steppe, each son in a herding family received some of each kind of animal that the family owned, as well as the use of some portion of the grazing lands. Similarly, Genghis Khan planned to give each son a miniature empire reflecting, to the degree practical, the diverse holdings of the whole empire. Each son would be the khan of a large number of people and herds on the steppe as well as owner of a large section of territory with cities, workshops, and farms in the sedentary zones. Above the other three, however, one son would be the Great Khan who would administer the central government, provide a final court of appeal, and, together with the advice of his other brothers, have responsibility for foreign affairs, particu-

larly for making war. The system depended on the ability and willingness of the brothers to work together and to cooperate under the leadership of the Great Khan.

Even before he left on the Khwarizm campaign, the plan encountered difficulty when, despite the strong taboos against discussing or preparing for death, he summoned a family *khuriltai* to deal precisely with that subject. The meeting turned into one of the pivotal episodes of Mongol history by bringing together all the rivalries of the past and foreshadowing the way in which his empire would eventually be broken apart.

In addition to his sons, Genghis Khan had several of his most trusted men with him to be a part of the discussion, since their agreement and support would also be necessary to guarantee the succession after his death. As the meeting began, the two eldest sons, Jochi and Chaghatai, seemed tensely poised, like steel traps ready to snap. If Ogodei, the third son, arrived true to character, he would have already had a few drinks and been mildly inebriated, although it seems unlikely that he would have been completely drunk in his father's presence. Tolui, the youngest, remained quiet and seemed to have disappeared into the folds of the tent while his older brothers dominated center stage.

Genghis Khan opened the family *khuriltai* by explaining the business of selecting a successor. He was quoted as saying that "if all my sons should wish to be Khan and ruler, refusing to serve each other, will it not be as in the fable of the single-headed and the many-headed snake." In this traditional fable, when winter came, the snake's competing heads quarreled among themselves and disagreed about which hole was better for them to find refuge in from the cold wind and snow. One head preferred one hole and pulled in that direction, and the other heads pulled in other directions. The other snake—with many tails but only one head—went immediately into one hole and stayed warm throughout the winter, while the snake with many heads froze to death.

After explaining the seriousness and importance of the issue, Genghis Khan asked his eldest son, Jochi, to speak first on the matter of succession. Order of seating, walking, speaking, drinking, and eating all carry heavy symbolic value among Mongols even today. By setting this order of speaking, the khan was publicly emphasizing that Jochi ranked as his eldest son, and this

set him up as the likely successor. If the younger sons accepted this order of speaking, it would be tantamount to accepting Jochi's legitimacy and seniority over them.

Chaghatai, the second son, refused to allow that assumption to pass unstated and untested. Before Jochi could answer his father, Chaghatai spoke up loudly. "When you tell Jochi to speak," he defiantly asked his father, "do you offer him the succession?" Then he blurted out the rhetorical question that was intended as a statement of fact, no matter how much Genghis Khan disagreed, about the suspicious paternity of Jochi, who had been born forty years earlier, but too soon after Borte's rescue from her Merkid kidnappers. "How could we allow ourselves to be ruled by this bastard son of a Merkid?" demanded Chaghatai of his father and brothers.

Jochi snapped at being called a bastard by his brother. He let loose a scream, lunged across the tent, and seized Chaghatai by the collar. The two men pummeled each other. In painfully emotional words that were probably spoken by Genghis Khan himself, but which the *Secret History* attributes to an adviser in an effort to preserve the dignity of the khan, Chaghatai was reminded how much his father loved and respected him. The father pleaded in obviously painful words with his sons to understand how different things were in the old days, before the boys were born, when terror ruled the steppes, neighbors fought neighbors, and no one was safe. What happened to their mother when she was kidnapped was not her fault: "She didn't run away from home. . . . She wasn't in love with another man. She was stolen by men who came to kill."

Genghis Khan almost meekly implored his sons to remember that despite the circumstances of their birth, they all sprang "from a single hot womb," and that "if you insult the mother who gave you your life from her heart, if you cause her love for you to freeze up, even if you apologize to her later, the damage is done." The councillor reminded the sons how hard both parents worked to create their new nation, and he listed the sacrifices that both of them made to make a better world for their sons.

After the long, emotional scene, Genghis Khan knew that he could not impose a choice on his sons that they would reject after his death. He had to negotiate a compromise agreement that all of them would be willing to accept. He invoked his limited parental authority by reasserting that he him-

self accepted Jochi as his eldest son, and he commanded his other sons to accept this as fact and not to repeat suspicions about his paternity again.

Chaghatai submitted to the command of his father but made it clear that even in abiding by his edict, words could not make it true. Chaghatai grinned and said that the "game killed by mouth cannot be loaded onto a horse. Game slaughtered by words cannot be skinned." Outwardly, the sons would all recognize Jochi's legitimacy as long as their father lived; but inwardly, they would never do so. Recognizing the legitimacy of Jochi as the eldest son, however, did not guarantee him the succession to the office of Great Khan because such an important office was supposed to be based upon ability and support from the others, not on age.

Having incurred so much anger from his father, Chaghatai knew that the father would not then agree to his taking the office of Great Khan, but he still wanted to prevent Jochi from having it. So Chaghatai offered the family a compromise, which may have been spontaneously conceived or already agreed upon by the younger siblings. He said that neither he nor Jochi should become khan; instead, the succession should to fall to their third brother, the mellow, good-natured, hard-drinking Ogodei.

With no other option open to him other than war, Jochi agreed to this compromise and endorsed Ogodei as the successor. Genghis Khan then allotted personal lands and herds to each son by doing what parents always do to quarreling youngsters: He separated Jochi and Chaghatai. "Mother Earth is broad and her rivers and waters are numerous. Make up your camps far apart and each of you rules your own kingdom. I'll see to it that you are separated." He then warned the sons not to behave so that people would laugh at or insult them.

The Muslim scholars serving at the Mongol court evidenced a tortured difficulty in recording this event, since for them a man's honor rested on his control of the sexuality of the women around him. It was almost inconceivable that a man as powerful as Genghis Khan might have had a son sired by another man, or even be accused of such a thing by his own sons. Unlike the *Secret History,* written by a Mongol and including a full account of the family fight, the first Persian chronicler, Juvaini, wrote the conflict out of his history completely by making the family *khuriltai* into a gathering of serene decorum and complete unanimity. In his version of events, Genghis Khan delivered a beautiful speech on the admirable qualities of Ogodei, and all of

his sons agreed. The sons obediently "laid the knee of courtesy upon the group of fealty and submission and answered with the tongue of obedience, saying 'Who hath the power to oppose the word of Genghis Khan and who the ability to reject it?' . . . All Ogodei's brothers obeyed his commandment and made a statement in writing."

With a little more distance from the original events, Rashid al-Din offered a slightly more honest account, but his manuscript has blanks in crucial places that would impugn the honor of Genghis Khan or his wife. He wrote that "because of ______, the path of unity was trodden upon both sides between them," but the good members of the family "never uttered that taunt but regarded his ______ as genuine." Whether the blanks were entered into the original work by Rashid al-Din or made by later scribes copying it, they show the symbolic and political importance of the issue of Jochi's paternity for generations to come.

At the end of the emotionally intense family encounter between Genghis Khan and his sons, it is doubtful that anyone knew how far-reaching the effects of this meeting would be. In this family *khuriltai,* the victors had just carved up the world in a way that would presage the Vienna Congress following the Napoleonic Wars, the Versailles Conference after World War I, and the meetings of the World War II Allies at Yalta and Potsdam.

Although repeatedly mentioned in the family conference, Borte was absent, but presumably still alive. It is not known if she heard of what went on among her sons, and no reliable information exists on exactly what happened to her. Oral tradition maintains that during this time, she continued to live in the beautiful steppe at Avarga on the Kherlen River, only a few days ride from where she and her husband had lived in the first days of their marriage. She likely died there, or in the vicinity, sometime between 1219 and 1224.

The unpleasant episode cast a pall over the remaining years of Genghis Khan's life and particularly over the central Asian campaign. The fighting among his sons made him keenly aware of how much work he needed to do to preserve the empire after his death. His sons did not match up to the needs of the empire. While pursuing his great quest to unite the steppe tribes and conquer every threat around him, he had never devoted the attention he should have to his sons, and now they were all reaching middle age and were

still unproven men. In his mistrust of his own relatives and his lifelong reliance on his companions and friends from youth, he had not built a working relationship among his own sons nor trained them to replace him.

Throughout his final years of life, Genghis Khan sought, without success, to mend the relations between Jochi and Chaghatai by assigning them to a joint campaign against the city of Urgench, a former capital of the sultan south of the Aral Sea. The tension seething between the two brothers nearly erupted into fighting against each other during the siege. Both brothers knew that the city would belong to Jochi as a part of his patrimony, and because of this they could not agree on the tactics to conquer it. Jochi suspected that because Urgench would belong to him, his brother was trying to destroy it utterly. Chagahatai, in turn, suspected that Jochi's greed made him want to protect the buildings and structures of the city even at the risk of killing more Mongol soldiers.

Whereas most cities had fallen in a matter of days or weeks, the Mongol conquest of Urgench required an unprecedented six months. The city's defenders fought fiercely. Even after the Mongols broke through the city walls, the defenders continued to fight from house to house. Uncomfortable with fighting in the claustrophobic confines of a nearly destroyed city, the Mongols set fires to burn down the city. The defenders continued fighting from the charred ruins. Finally, the Mongols built a dam, diverted the river, and flooded the city, thereby killing the remaining warriors and destroying nearly everything in it. Urgench never rose again, and although allotted to Jochi, nothing remained there for him and his descendants to rule over.

Angry with the quarreling between his sons, Genghis Khan summoned them, momentarily ostracized them by refusing to admit them to the court, then, when he finally admitted them, alternately berated, scolded, and pleaded with them. More conversations and quotes survive from this phase of Genghis Khan's life than any other, and they show a growing concern but lessening power to control his family. After too long a neglect of their education, he tried to teach his sons everything at once, and in doing so he struggled to articulate lessons he had learned and ideas he had but had not verbalized clearly. He was accustomed to giving orders, not making explanations.

He tried to teach them that the first key to leadership was self-control, particularly the mastery of pride, which was something more difficult, he explained, to subdue than a wild lion, and anger, which was more difficult to defeat than the greatest wrestler. He warned them that "if you can't swallow your pride, you can't lead." He admonished them never to think of themselves as the strongest or smartest. Even the highest mountain had animals that step on it, he warned. When the animals climb to the top of the mountain, they are even higher than it is.

In keeping with the laconic Mongol traditions, he warned his sons not to talk too much. Only say what needs to be said. A leader should demonstrate his thoughts and opinions through his actions, not through his words: "He can never be happy until his people are happy." He stressed to them the importance of vision, goals, and a plan. "Without the vision of a goal, a man cannot manage his own life, much less the lives of others," he told them.

Some thoughts seem to contradict others. As much as he emphasized the importance of seizing the mantle of leadership, he seemingly sought to impart cautious conservatism in that "the vision should never stray far from the teaching of the elders." As he explained it, "the old tunic, or *deel,* fits better and is always more comfortable; it survives the hardships of life in the bush, while the new or untried *deel* is quickly torn." In keeping with his own sober manner and simple style of living, Genghis Khan warned them against the pursuit of a "colorful" life with material frivolities and wasteful pleasures. "It will be easy," he explained, "to forget your vision and purpose once you have fine clothes, fast horses, and beautiful women." In that case, "you will be no better than a slave, and you will surely lose everything."

In one of his most important lessons, he told his sons that conquering an army is not the same as conquering a nation. You may conquer an army with superior tactics and men, but you can conquer a nation only by conquering the hearts of the people. As idealistic as that sounded, he followed with the even more practical advice that even though the Mongol Empire should be one, the subject people should never be allowed to unite as one: "People conquered on different sides of the lake should be ruled on different sides of the lake." Like so many of his teachings, this, too, would be ignored by his sons and their successors.

The Mongol conquest stopped at the city of Multan, in the center of modern-day Pakistan, in the summer of 1222, the Year of the Horse. After descending

from the mountains of Afghanistan onto the plains of the Indus River earlier that year, Genghis Khan had considered conquering all of northern India, circling around south of the Himalayas, and heading north across the Sung territory of China. Such a plan well suited the Mongol sensibility that one should never return by exactly the same route that one came. However, the geography and climate stopped him. As soon as the Mongols left the dry and colder region of the mountains, both warriors and horses weakened and grew sick. Even more alarming, the Mongol bows that were so well adapted to the extreme cold and heat of the steppe homeland also weakened in the damp air and seemed to lose the powerful accuracy that made the Mongol warrior such a dreaded shot. Facing these obstacles, Genghis Khan headed back into the mountains in February, and despite the tremendous loss of lives among the prisoners who cleared the snow-filled passes, he took his army to more comfortable and colder terrain. He left behind two *tumen,* some twenty thousand men, to continue the India campaign, but by summer illness and heat had so depleted their ranks that the survivors withdrew and limped back to the benign and healthful environment of Afghanistan.

Despite the aborted invasion of India, the campaign had achieved its main goals of conquering the Khwarizm empire and bringing central Asia and much of the Middle East under Mongol control. Before leaving the newly conquered lands, Genghis Khan called for a celebration that featured what was probably the largest hunt in history. During months of preparation during the winter of 1222–1223, his men cordoned off a large area by planting posts in the ground and stringing long pieces of horsehair twine between them. They hung strips of felt on the twine, and when the wind blew, as it almost always did, it frightened the animals away from the edges and toward the center of the area. At the appointed time, different armies began to converge on the area from different directions. Tens of thousands of soldiers took part in the ensuing hunt, which lasted for several months. They bagged all manner of animals from rabbits and birds to large herds of gazelle, antelope, and wild asses.

The hunt was part celebration, but it also seemed an effort to use the conviviality of the hunts and the entertainment that followed them to mellow relations among his sons, soothe over the hotheaded anger of the battlefield, and end the campaigns on a cooperative note. Still smarting from the wounds inflicted by his brothers and apparently alienated from his father as well,

Jochi, the most beloved of the sons, claimed to be ill and refused to come even when summoned by direct order of Genghis Khan. Relations between the father and son nearly erupted into armed conflict when Genghis Khan heard that the supposedly ill Jochi had organized rival hunts in a celebration for his men.

The father and son never met again. Instead of returning to Mongolia, Jochi stayed in the newly conquered territory. He would soon die there, leaving as much mystery surrounding his death as his birth. The timing of his death, while his father still lived, sparked rumors that Genghis Khan may have killed Jochi in order to ensure political peace among his sons and for the Mongol Empire; but as with so many parts of Mongol history, only the rumors survived without convincing evidence one way or another.

Despite the tensions within Genghis Khan's family, for most Mongols the victorious return of the army marked a high point in their lives. The triumphant spirit of the group hunt was continued throughout the long trek back to Mongolia, where the mood of pride and success erupted in a joyous homecoming and victory celebration, or *naadam.* Long caravans of captives preceded the main part of Genghis Khan's army. For nearly five years, a steady flow of camel caravans lumbered out of the Muslim lands carrying packs of looted goods to Mongolia, where the population eagerly awaited each load of exotic luxuries. Mongol girls who had spent their days milking goats and yaks when the army left soon wore garments of silk and gold, while their newly acquired servants milked the animals for them. Old people who had rarely seen metal in their childhood cut meat with knives of engraved Damascus steel set in handles of sculpted ivory, and they served *airak* from silver bowls while their musicians sang to them.

Although Genghis Khan was once again in the land that he loved, he could hardly stop to rest before setting out on another campaign. Perhaps knowing that he was nearing the end of his life, he did not have time to stop, or perhaps he realized that his empire depended upon constant conquest. If he paused, factionalism within his own family threatened to rip the empire apart. Probably even more pressing, his followers had grown dependent on a steady flow of goods. They would not willingly return to the simple goods that he had known as a child. In order to feed this voracious appetite, he had to move on to new conquests.

He launched the final campaign in his long life against the Tangut, the first

foreign enemies he had invaded in 1207, the year following the creation of the Mongol Empire. Despite their initial surrender, Genghis Khan had nourished a lingering grudge against their khan for refusing to furnish troops for the Khwarizm invasion. The Tangut king smugly sent word that if Genghis Khan could not defeat Khwarizm alone, then he should not go to war. Although irritated, Genghis Khan kept his immediate focus on the Khwarizm campaign; but once finished with it, he turned back toward the Tangut. As he again moved his army south, he almost certainly had plans for yet one more major campaign in which the Tangut war would only be an opening move. He probably intended to secure a base in the Tangut kingdom and then move on south toward the final goal of the Sung dynasty, a prize that had eluded the army he had left fighting in northern China when he invaded Khwarizm.

During the winter of 1226–1227, while en route across the Gobi to make war on the Tangut, Genghis Khan paused to hunt wild horses. He rode a reddish gray horse that shied when the wild horses charged him, and the skittish horse threw the Great Khan to the ground. Despite internal injuries, a raging fever, and the concerned advice of his wife Yesui, Genghis Khan refused to return home and instead pressed on with the Tangut campaign. Although his health never recovered after the fall, he continued the campaign against the Tangut king, whose name, by an odd coincidence, was Burkhan, which meant "god," as in the sacred mountain Burkhan Khaldun. The name was so sacred to Genghis Khan that once he defeated the Tangut, he ordered that the king's name be changed before he was executed.

Six months later and only a few days before the final victory over the Tangut, Genghis Khan died. The *Secret History* states clearly that he died at the end of summer, but although the text describes in great detail each horse that he rode, it falls suddenly silent regarding the circumstances of his death. Other sources maintain that when death finally arrived, his Tatar wife Yesui prepared the body for burial in a simple way befitting the manner in which Genghis Khan had lived. Attendants cleaned and dressed the body in a plain white robe, felt boots, and a hat, then wrapped it in a white felt blanket filled with sandalwood, the valuable aromatic wood that repelled insects and infused the body with a pleasant perfume. They bound the felt coffin with three golden straps.

On the third day, a procession set out toward Mongolia with the Great Khan's body on a simple cart. The Spirit Banner of Genghis Khan led the

mourners, followed by a woman shaman, and behind her followed a horse with a loose bridle and Genghis Khan's empty saddle.

It is difficult to imagine what kind of image Genghis Khan thought he was leaving to the world. Only a small hint of how he saw himself can be found in the chronicle of Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani, who called Genghis Khan accursed and described his death as his descent into hell. Yet Juzjani recorded a conversation that an imam claimed to have had with the infamous conqueror. The cleric served in Genghis Khan's court and, at least according to his own boastful claim, became a special favorite of the Mongol khan. One day during a conversation, Genghis Khan supposedly said, "A mighty name will remain behind me in the world."

With some hesitation, the imam told Genghis Khan that he was killing so many people that there might not be anyone left to remember his name. The khan did not like this response and told the cleric, "It has become evident to me that [you do] not possess complete understanding, and that [your] comprehension is but small. There are many kings in the world," he explained to the learned man. In reference to his future reputation, he added that there are many more people in other parts of the world and many more sovereigns and many more kingdoms. Genghis Khan confidently declared, "They will relate my story!"

We find an unusual and more informative glimpse into the mind of Genghis Khan and into his image of himself near the end of his life, which survives in the text of a letter Genghis Khan sent to a Taoist monk in China, a copy of which was made by some of the old monk's followers. Unlike the *Secret History,* which mostly records deeds and spoken words, this letter recorded Genghis Khan's analysis of himself. Although the letter is available to us only in the form written in classical Chinese by a scribe, almost certainly one of the Khitan traveling with the Mongol court, the sentiments and perceptions of Genghis Khan himself come out quite clearly in the document.

His voice comes through as simple, clear, and informed by common sense. He ascribed the fall of his enemies more to their own lack of ability than to his superior prowess: "I have not myself distinguished qualities." He said that the Eternal Blue Sky had condemned the civilizations around him because of their "haughtiness and their extravagant luxury." Despite the tremendous wealth and power he had accumulated, he continued to lead a simple life: "I

wear the same clothing and eat the same food as the cowherds and horse-herders. We make the same sacrifices, and we share the riches." He offered a simple assessment of his ideals: "I hate luxury," and "I exercise moderation." He strove to treat his subjects like his children, and he treated talented men like his brothers, no matter what their origin was. He described his relations with his officials as being close and based on respect: "We always agree in our principles and we are always united in mutual affection."

Although he sent the letter on the eve of his invasion of the Muslim world and it was written in Chinese, he clearly did not see himself as the heir of kingdoms or cultural traditions in either area. He acknowledged only one preceding empire from which he personally took inspiration—his ancestors, the Huns. It is clear that he did not wish to rule in either the Muslim or the Chinese style. He wanted to find his own way as befitted a steppe empire descended from the Huns.

He claimed that his victories had been possible only through the assistance of the Eternal Blue Sky, "but as my calling is high, the obligations incumbent on me are also heavy." He did not, however, feel that he had been as successful in peace as he had been in war: "I fear that in my ruling there may be something wanting." He said that good officials over the state are as important as a good rudder to a boat. While he managed to find men of talent to serve as his generals, he admitted he had unfortunately not been able to find men as good in administration.

Most important, the letter shows a shift in the political thinking of Genghis Khan. After admitting to his shortcomings, Genghis Khan nevertheless shows in this document a rising sense of himself and his mission on earth. He had begun his campaign against the Jurched—his first major campaign beyond the steppe—as a series of raids for plunder, but by the end of it he had installed a vassal state. His words reveal a deeper and wider plan than mere raiding and controlling trade networks. He acknowledged that he went south to accomplish something that no one else in history had done. He was pursuing "a great work," because he sought to "unite the whole world in one empire." He was no longer a tribal chief, and now he sought to be the ruler of all people and all lands from where the sun rises to where the sun sets.

Perhaps the most fitting description of Genghis Khan's passing was penned in the eighteenth century by Edward Gibbon, the British historian of

the Romans and a great scholar on the history of empires and conquest. He wrote simply that Genghis Khan "died in the fullness of years and glory, with his last breath, exhorting and instructing his sons to achieve the conquest of the Chinese empire." To fulfill the wishes and commands of Genghis Khan, there still remained much to be done.

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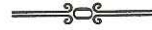

The Discovery and Conquest of Europe

For our sins, unknown tribes came.
CHRONICLE OF NOVGOROD, 1224

IN THE SPIRIT OF inebriated generosity at the celebration of his installation as Great Khan, Ogodei threw open his father's treasury and riotously distributed all the riches stored there. He passed out pearls, the gem most admired by the Mongols, by the casket loads. Bolts of silk cloth were thrown out among the people. Horses and camels were decorated in great finery, and all the Mongols had new silk *deels* embroidered with golden threads. They had so many beautiful colors that each day the courtiers could all wear the same color, and then the next day a different color was prescribed. They drank, feasted, and played games throughout the summer of 1229 at Avarga, where storehouses had been erected to serve as a treasury for some of the tremendous amount of loot sent back from Genghis Khan's campaigns. The days of blue and green and white and yellow silks rolled one into the other, as the most powerful family in the world celebrated itself. To lubricate the event, the alcohol flowed without pause. Men and women drank

until they passed out; they slept a while, and then resumed drinking when they awoke.

About this time, the family took on the name of the Golden Family or Golden Lineage. Gold symbolized royalty for the steppe people, but it could just have easily represented the vast wealth that the family held and that they quickly began to use up. Without Genghis Khan to moderate the celebration, his heirs now ruled the empire, drunk with riches they had not earned and with the alcohol that they had come to love. The drunken revelry of Ogodei Khan's inauguration set the standard and the model for his rule, and, at least momentarily, it controlled the spirit of the empire as well. As Ata-Malik Juvaini wrote soon thereafter, Ogodei "was ever spreading the carpet of merrymaking and treading the path of excess in constant appreciation to wine and the company of beautiful women."

In the interim after Genghis Khan's death and during the Mongol distraction with the celebration of Ogodei's election, some of the newly conquered subjects broke away and stopped sending tribute. Ogodei had to send large armies back into northern China and central Asia to reassert Mongol dominance. As soon as he was installed in 1230, he sent a force of three *tumens,* nearly thirty thousand soldiers, to strengthen the Mongol hold on central Asia, but most of the wealth had already been taken. He sent in an occupying army, one that even took its families along, not a conquering one. The level of tribute remitted back to Mongolia from both northern China and central Asia, however, remained modest compared to the wealth taken in the original looting.

Ogodei did not accompany his army; conquest was not his priority. As part of his enjoyment of his empire, Ogodei decided that like all great sovereigns he should have a permanent capital city—not just a collection of *gers,* but real buildings with walls and roofs, windows and doors. Contrary to the thinking of his father, Ogodei had become convinced that a kingdom conquered on horseback could not be ruled on horseback, when, of course, rule from horseback and a mobile center of power had in fact been one of the primary factors behind Mongol success. In the first of several bad mistakes in what would be a short reign, Ogodei abandoned this policy and tried to create a fixed center of power and administration for the empire.

Since the old homeland on the Onon and Kherlen Rivers now belonged, as was the Mongol custom, to Tolui, the youngest son, Ogodei decided to

build his capital on his own territory farther west. He chose an area in the middle of the Mongol lands on the Orkhon River in the territory that had earlier belonged to Ong Khan's Kereyid tribe and before that had been the capital of the early Turkic kingdoms. He chose the site according to the nomadic standards for a good camp. It was on an open steppe, with good wind to keep down mosquitoes, with ample water far enough away that it would not be polluted by the people living in the city, and with mountains nearby as a winter sanctuary for the herds. In all these regards the site of Karakorum, as it came to be known, was perfect, the only problem being that a city with a permanent population has much different requirements than a good, but temporary, camp. They needed a constant supply of food throughout the year, and without any way of producing it, the city would be constantly dependent on goods brought at great expense from hundreds of miles south of the Gobi. Its location on the open steppe provided no shelter from the extremely bitter winter wind. Unlike the herds that could withdraw to the protection of the mountains, the city could not be so easily relocated each season. These problems would plague, and ultimately doom, this Mongol capital.

Ogodei probably began construction of his palace in a typically Mongol style by shooting an arrow across the steppe and then building the first wing following the arrow shot. In keeping with the Mongol system of measuring space, the building stretched the length of a standard bowshot. He built another wing in the same way, and placed a tall pavilion in the middle to connect them. He built a sturdy wall to enclose the palaces, and from these walls the place acquired the name of Karakorum, meaning "black stones" or "black walls." Rashid al-Din described Ogodei's new palace as "exceedingly tall in structure and with lofty pillars, such as was in keeping the high resolve of such a king. The craftsmen finished the buildings by painting them with colorful designs and pictures."

The Mongols continued to live in their *gers* around Karakorum as they had on the open steppe. The royal court moved from area to area with the seasons—often several days' or a week's journey away from the capital. Chinese architects and craftsmen designed and built the structures of Karakorum, but the private palace Ogodei built for his family at Kerchagan, a day's ride from Karakorum, was in the Muslim style. Unlike other world capitals that functioned as showpieces for the power, grandeur, and majesty of the ruling family, Karakorum served primarily as a large warehouse and workshop, ignored by most Mongols, including Ogodei, through most of the year. They used it as a base where they kept their goods, and their goods included craftsmen who worked for them. The city produced little, but it collected tribute from across the empire. One-third of the city was reserved to house the newly recruited clerks needed to run the empire. These included scribes and translators from every nation in the empire so that they could manage the correspondence with each country.

The oldest visitor's account we have of the city comes from Juvaini, who described a garden enclosed within a compound with a gate facing each of the cardinal directions. Within the garden, Chinese artisans built "a castle with doors like the gates of the garden; and inside it a throne having three flights of steps, one for [Ogodei] alone, another for his ladies and a third for the cup-bearers and table-deckers." In front of the palace, Ogodei built a series of lakes "wherein many water fowl used to gather." He would watch the hunting of these birds and afterward would give himself up to the joys of drinking. As befitted a man so fond of alcohol, the centerpiece of the palace complex was a series of gold and silver vats so large that he reportedly kept camels and elephants on hand so that "when a public feast was held they might lift up the various beverages."

In addition to the palaces for himself and other members of the Golden Family, Ogodei erected several houses of worship for his Buddhist, Muslim, Taoist, and Christian followers. Of these, the Christians seemed to be gaining dominance at the Mongol court because Ogodei, like his three brothers, had taken Christian wives when they conquered the Kereyid and Naiman, and some of his descendants were Christian, particularly his favorite grandson, Shiremun (the Mongol version of the biblical name Solomon). Part of the attraction of the Mongols to Christianity seemed to be in the name of Jesus, Yesu, which sounded like the Mongolian word for nine, their sacred number, and the name of Genghis Khan's father, Yesugei, who was the founder of the whole dynasty. Despite the high status of Christians, the small city of Karakorum was probably the most religiously open and tolerant city in the world at that time. Nowhere else could followers of so many different religions worship side by side in peace.

To encourage trade caravans to seek out his new capital, Ogodei paid extremely high prices for all manner of goods whether he needed them or not and whether they were of high or low quality. Rashid al-Din wrote that Ogodei "would sit, every day, after he had finished his meal, on a chair outside his Court, where every kind of merchandise that is to be found in the world was heaped up in piles. These wares he used to give away to all classes of Mongols and Muslims, and it would often happen that he would command persons of great size to take as many of the wares they wanted as they could lift up." In addition to animals and a variety of foods, merchants arrived with loads of textiles, ivory tusks, pearls, hunting falcons, golden goblets, jeweled belts, willow whip handles, cheetahs, bows and arrows, garments, hats, and exotic animal horns. People also came to entertain, including actors and musicians from China, wrestlers from Persia, and a jester from Byzantium.

Ogodei Khan frequently paid twice the asking price for imported goods as a show of appreciation for the effort the merchant made in reaching his realm and as an inducement for other merchants to do the same. Ogodei also decreed that whatever price the merchants asked should be paid to them plus a 10 percent bonus. The Mongols also provided the capital backing to finance caravans when needed. In an effort to improve trade, Ogodei introduced a standardized system of weights and measures to replace the various types used in different countries and cities. Because bullion and coins proved so bulky to transport, the Mongols created a system of paper money exchanges that made trade much easier and safer.

Ogodei's army managed to reassert Mongol rule in central Asia and, under the able leadership of old general Subodei, allied with the Sung dynasty to pick apart the remaining wealth and land of the Jurched. His father had kept a steady supply of goods coming by living in the field at war and shipping home the loot; Ogodei, however, increasingly used the might of his army to make the routes safe for merchants to bring in more goods. He stationed permanent garrisons to protect the roads and merchants, and he abolished the complex system of local taxes and extortion that had added to the difficulty and expense of trade. The Mongols planted trees along the sides of roads to shade the travelers in summer and to mark the road during winter snows. In areas where trees would not grow, they erected stone pillars to mark the way. Juvaini stated that the Mongol roads were to ensure "that wherever profit or

gain was displayed, in the uttermost West or the farthermost East, thither merchants would bend their steps."

The dismounting of Ogodei at Karakorum, and the building of stone walls so hated by his father, marked a major step away from the policies of Genghis Khan. Thereby began a process of co-optation that over the next four decades transformed the Mongols from a nation of mounted warriors to a sedentary court with all the trappings of civilized decadence that was so contrary to Genghis Khan's legacy.

By 1235, Ogodei had squandered most of his father's wealth. Ogodei's city was expensive to build and operate, and his habits expensive to meet. Tribute still poured in from across the empire, but it did not come in quite the volume of his father's day. No matter what he did to build a capital or reform the administration, in the end the Mongol Empire rested on conquest. He desperately needed an infusion of wealth to continue in the lifestyle to which he and the Mongols had become accustomed. The Mongol people grew no crops and manufactured no products, and they were loath to trade away the horses that they bred in such copious numbers. If the Mongol Empire were to survive, Ogodei had to take them to war against a new target, one that had not yet been looted. But which, and where?

To decide the targets of future conquest, Ogodei summoned a *khuriltai* to the steppes near his newly built capital of Karakorum. Each participant seemed to support a different course of action. Some wanted the army to head south into the vast subcontinent of India that Genghis Khan had merely glimpsed from the northern mountains but had declined to invade because of its wretched heat. Others advocated a prolonged push farther into Persia and then on to the fabled Arab cities of Baghdad and Damascus, and still others advocated a full-scale assault on the Sung, with whom the Mongols had recently been allies of convenience.

One man, however, had a different proposal. Subodei, fresh from his victory over the Jurched, had been the greatest general in Genghis Khan's army, and with his shrewd knowledge of siege warfare and the use of large attack machines, he had played a major role in every important campaign the Mongols had fought. He was now sixty years old, probably blind in one eye, and according to some reports so fat that he could no longer ride a horse and had to be hauled around in an iron chariot. Despite these physical limitations, his mind was sharp and vigorous, and he was eager to return to war.

Rather than returning to fight against the Muslim or Chinese armies over which he had many victories, Subodei favored a break with the policies of Genghis Khan by organizing a massive campaign to the west, toward Europe, a previously unknown civilization that he had recently discovered quite by accident. He insisted that like China, India, and the Muslim countries, Europe also held the promise of great wealth. Subodei had tested the European armies, and he knew how they fought and how easily they could be defeated.

For most of the participants in the *khuriltai*, Europe was a great unknown. Subodei was the only surviving commander who had been there, and he had originally probed it with only a small force. His discovery of Europe happened more than a decade earlier, in 1221, during Genghis Khan's invasion of central Asia, when Subodei and Jebe had circled the Caspian in pursuit of the Khwarizm sultan. After the sultan's death, they asked and received permission to continue to see what lay to the north. There they discovered the small Christian kingdom of Georgia, ruled by Giorgi III the Brilliant.

Jebe led the probe of their defenses. After centuries of warfare with the Muslims around it, Georgia boasted a highly skilled and professional army, and operating on their home territory, the defenders moved out to meet the attacking Mongols as they had met numerous Turkic and Muslim armies before them. Jebe's Mongols charged the Georgians, fired a few volleys, and then turned to flee in what appeared to the Georgians to be a panicked rout; but, of course, it was no more than the Dog Fight strategy of the feigned retreat. The overconfident Georgian forces broke ranks and began to eagerly chase the Mongols, who barely managed to stay ahead of their pursuers. The Georgian horses gradually began to tire under their heavy loads and the strain of the long pursuit; they began to thin out as the weaker ones fell farther behind.

Then, suddenly, with the Georgian forces spread out and beginning to tire, Jebe's retreating warriors led them straight into the ranks of the other Mongol regiment waiting under Subodei's command. While Subodei's men began to pick off the Georgians, Jebe's soldiers mounted fresh horses and struck out to rejoin the fight. Within hours, the Mongols had completely destroyed the Georgian army and the small nation's aristocracy. Subodei made the country a vassal state, the first in Europe, and it proved to be one of the most loyal and supportive Mongol vassals in the generations ahead.

With this test complete, Subodei and Jebe set out down the mountains to explore the plains of eastern Europe and see what the rest of these unknown people were like on the battlefield. Systematically but persistently, the Mongols probed the area. With the usual emphasis on reconnaissance and information gathering, they determined the number of people, the location of cities, the political divisions, and the rivalries among them. The Mongols found some Turkic tribes, known as the Kipchak, living on the plains between the northern shores of the Black and Caspian Seas. The Kipchak practiced a herding lifestyle very familiar to the Mongols. Playing on their similarities as fellow dwellers within felt walls and speaking related languages, the Mongols learned much from them and enticed some Kipchak to join them as allies. The real object of Subodei's interest was in the agricultural lands farther north and west. The area contained many cities, and although all shared the Orthodox religion and the Russian language, rival and ambitious lords ruled them. Subodei moved his forces toward them to see how they would respond. He reached the banks of the Dnieper River, north of the Black Sea, at the end of April 1223.

The Christian cities of the plain managed to unite enough against the heathen invaders to send out their armies. Hastily assembled troops set out from all the small kingdoms and city-states of the area—Smolensk, Galich, Chernigov, Kiev, Volhynia, Kursk, Suzdal, and some of the Kipchak. Three of the armies—from Galich, Chernigov, and Kiev—came under the command of princes, all of whom were named Mstislav. The most impressive of the three Mstislavs was Prince Mstislav Romanovitch of Kiev, the largest and richest of all the cities, who arrived with the most impressive army, including his two sons-in-law. As the Russian armies gradually trickled in, the Mongols sent an envoy of ten ambassadors to negotiate a surrender or alliance. The Russians haughtily executed them all without any awareness of what a serious breach of Mongol diplomatic etiquette they had committed and what a high price their princes, and all Russians, would soon pay for their crime.

The Mongols began the confrontation with a small skirmish, after which they immediately began to fall back toward the east, from whence they had come, as though they might have been afraid to fight such a large and powerful foe. The Russian troops and some of their Kipchak allies gleefully followed them, but day after day the Mongols remained a little beyond the reach

of the pursing Russians. While some of the regiments had not yet arrived to join the pursuit, the slower regiments fell behind, and the faster ones raced on nipping at the heels of the fleeing Mongols. The Russians feared that the Mongols might escape and thereby deprive the Russians of the large number of horses and other booty they carried from their earlier raids across Persia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In the competition for glory and loot, the Russian princes began pushing their soldiers on to get the glory of being the first to attack the Mongols; but in a crucial mistake, they made no plans for an organized retreat, regrouping, or withdrawal. After nearly two weeks of chase, the vanguard of the Russian army finally caught up with the Mongols on the Kalka River, which empties into the Sea of Azov, and here at last they would force the invaders to fight, at the place Jebe and Subodei had selected as most advantageous to the Mongols. Without pausing to allow their men to recover from the long forced march, and in fear that the Mongols might escape once again, the confident Russian princes drew up the battle lines for attack.

The later chronicles varied greatly on the number of Russian soldiers present, but somewhere between forty and eighty thousand men fought on the Russian side; the Russians fielded at least twice as many soldiers as the Mongols. But the Russian soldiers had been recruited mostly from the grainfields and small villages of the countryside. They were peasants who, when healthy and properly nourished, were quite strong and experienced in episodic campaigns, but they could scarcely be considered a professional army, particularly at the end of winter when they were poorly nourished. Most of them had more expertise in swinging a scythe to cut hay or cracking a whip to spur on an ox than using the weapons of war. Yet assured of easy victory by their aristocratic officers, the peasants lined up dutifully in military ranks behind their shields. Each man carried whatever weapon he had found or adapted from his farm tools—a makeshift sword, spear, mace, or club. A smaller number of better-trained archers stood nearby, and the elite officers proudly perched atop their steeds in the rear behind their infantry.

The Russian soldiers braced themselves, standing solidly shoulder to shoulder, unsure what kind of attack would come, but they remained determined not to break ranks. But the attack seemed not to come. Instead of attacking, the Mongols starting singing and beating their drums, and then, just as suddenly, the Mongol rank fell into an eerie but absolute quiet. Since

it was a clear spring day without too much dust, the Mongols had chosen a Silent Attack to be controlled and coordinated by the waving of flags, at which signal the mounted Mongol archers raced silently forward toward the Russian infantry lines. The pounding of their hoofs on the earth reverberated across the lines and into the legs of the nervous soldiers waiting for the brunt of their charge. But the opposing sides failed to clash. The Mongol horsemen halted just beyond reach of the Slav's hand weapons, and from there, the Mongols fired their arrows straight into the Russian infantry ranks. All around them, the Russian soldiers saw their comrades falling in pools of blood, yet they had no one within reach to counterattack. They had no one with whom to have a sword fight. No one at whom to throw a spear or chase with a club. All they had was a barrage of arrows, and the Mongols had purposefully made the arrows so that they could not be nocked onto their adversaries' bowstrings. In their angry frustration, all the Russian soldiers could do was break the fallen arrows to make sure that the Mongols could not retrieve them to use again.

With their infantry cut to pieces, the Russian archers took aim and began to return the volley of arrows, but with the shorter range of the less-powerful European bows, few hit their mark. In mockery, the Mongols chased down the Russian arrows; but rather than breaking them, they fired them back at their original owners, since the notches of the arrow easily fit the Mongol bowstring. The stunned Russian forces quickly began to fall back in panic. The Mongols followed them, picking them off one by one as they would a herd of fleeing gazelle or panicked deer. As the retreating Russians bumped into the columns of soldiers that had not yet arrived, they began to fall over one another, jamming the route of retreat and increasing the chaos and the slaughter.

The mounted princes of Russia sat astride their massive warhorses with their shiny javelins, glistening swords, colorful flags and banners, and boastful coats of arms. Their European warhorses had been bred for a massive show of strength—to carry the weight of their noble rider's armor on the parade ground—but they had not been bred for speed or agility on the battleground. In their heavy metal armor, the Russians normally had little to fear on the battlefield from other European aristocrats mounted on similar show horses, but with their infantry routed all around them, they, too, had to flee—but beauti-

ful as their horses were, they could not carry the heavy loads for long. The Mongols overtook the ironclad warriors, and one by one killed the reigning princes of the city-states of Russia. The Mongols continued chasing and slaughtering the Russians all the way back to the Black Sea, where the campaign began. In the words of the Novgorod Chronicle entry for 1224, of the large army sent out to fight the Mongols, only "every tenth returned to his home." For the first time since the attack of the Huns on Europe nearly a thousand years earlier, an Asian force had invaded Europe and utterly annihilated a major army.

At the end of the campaign, Subodei and Jebe led their soldiers down to spend a relaxing spring in the Crimea on the Black Sea. They celebrated their victory with a great drunken party that lasted for days. The guest of honor was the defeated Prince Mstislav and his two sons-in-law, but their treatment showed how much the Mongols had changed since the time of Genghis Khan. The Mongols wrapped the three of them in felt rugs, as befitted high-ranking aristocrats, and stuffed them beneath the floorboards of their *ger*, thereby slowly, but bloodlessly, crushing the men as the Mongols drank and sang through the night on the floor above them. It was important to the Mongols that the Russians understand the severe penalty for killing ambassadors, and it was equally as important for the Mongol leaders to reaffirm to their own men the extent to which they would always be willing to go to avenge the unjust killing of a Mongol.

Although the chroniclers of Armenia, Georgia, and the trading cities of ancient Russia recorded the appearance of the Mongols, they were totally mystified as to who these people were, and where they went when they left. The chroniclers interpreted their own defeat at the hands of these strangers as a punishment from God. Since the Mongols did not stay to occupy the land but continued on their trek back to Mongolia, the Europeans quickly forgot the Mongol victories and returned to their own squabbles. In the Christian interpretation, the Mongols had fulfilled God's wish to chastise the people, so God sent them home again. As explained by the Novgorod Chronicle, "the Tartars turned back from the river Dnieper, and we know not whence they came, nor where they hid themselves again; God knows whence he fetched them against us for our sins."

Twelve years after Subodei's first victory over the Russians, participants at Ogodei's *khuriltai* reviewed the information about the earlier Mongol victory. Ogodei's primary interest was the wealth accrued from the European campaign, not the battle tactics. Despite the stunning victory on the battlefield, the expedition had produced little loot compared with the Chinese or Muslim campaigns. Because Subodei's force had not had time or the numbers to organize a campaign against the walled cities, they had brought back little, but his reconnaissance revealed that there were many cities. More important, during their rest to fatten the horses in the Crimea, the Mongols discovered trading centers manned by the merchants of Genoa, some of which the Mongols had raided.

Ogodei seemed to dislike, and perhaps mistrust, Subodei, and the feelings seemed largely mutual. Subodei's position was most strongly supported by the family of Jochi, who lived in the far western steppe and had inherited the lands conquered by Subodei around the Volga River. After Jochi's death, he had been succeeded in the office of khan of his lineage by his son Batu. As the second eldest and one of the most capable of Genghis Khan's grandsons, Batu Khan was in the best position to be elected Great Khan when Ogodei died, and a campaign against Europe would add greatly to his wealth, prestige, and ultimate candidacy.

For much the same reasons that Batu wanted the campaign, Ogodei Khan resisted it. He personally stood much more to gain from a campaign against the Sung. In his position at the center of the Mongol Empire, the lands of two of his brothers' families separated him from Europe, but only the land of his youngest brother, Tolui, lay between him and the Sung dynasty. Conveniently for Ogodei, only three years earlier—in the fall, when the most fermented mare's milk was available—forty-year-old Tolui had staggered drunk out of his tent one morning after a drinking binge and dropped dead. Ogodei immediately moved to annex his dead brother's property, which included the ancestral homeland and Burkhan Khaldun, by arranging a marriage between his son Guyuk and Tolui's widow, Sorkhokhtani, who was the Kereyid niece of the late Ong Khan. She refused, however, on grounds that her four young sons needed her undivided attention, a decision that later proved one of the most important in the history of the empire; but for now, her untested sons lacked the power to compete with their uncle, the Great Khan.

By moving south against the Sung, Ogodei would be increasing his presence in and surrounding the holdings of Sorkhokhtani, and he used the invasion as a pretext to assume command of some of the warriors who had been

granted to her husband. Thus, for Ogodei, a campaign against the Sung could have the double benefit of bringing more wealth from China while giving him the chance to annex the lands and armies of his deceased brother from his widow.

With the family divided between those who wanted to invade Europe and those favoring an attack on the Sung dynasty, they reached a remarkable and unprecedented decision: The Mongol army would push out in all directions; it would divide and attack the Sung dynasty and Europe simultaneously. The Mongol army would fight campaigns that would stretch it out over a distance of five thousand miles and more than one hundred degrees of latitude, a feat unmatched by any army until World War II, when the United States and the Allies fought campaigns simultaneously in Europe and in Asia. Ogodei Khan sent three armies—mostly under the command of his favored sons—to attack the Sung from different directions. The European campaign would operate under the command of Batu Khan, who would be guided by Subodei; but in a move probably designed to minimize Batu's power, grandsons from all four branches of the family would be sent to command different aspects of it. Ogodei sent Guyuk, his least-favorite and most-annoying son.

Daring as the decision was, it was probably the worst in the history of the Mongol Empire. Despite many successes in the Sung campaign, the Mongols ultimately failed to conquer the main territory of the Sung—and in the process, Ogodei lost his favorite son. This was probably due to the division in their focus and the lack of Subodei's guidance. Because of the half-staffed invasion, the Sung empire managed to limp along for another four decades before finally capitulating to the Mongols. By contrast, the European campaign, despite prolonged bickering among the different princes of the family, achieved tremendous military success, but once again produced very little of value compared with the wealth in the cities conquered earlier by Genghis Khan.

Preparation for the campaign toward Europe required two years. Messengers went out in all directions to deliver the decision and distribute assignments. The system of post stations established by Genghis Khan were renewed and expanded by decision at the *khuriltai* of 1235; with a war on such a vast front, swift and reliable communication became more important than ever. Before

the actual invasion, the Mongols sent in small squads to probe enemy defenses and to locate appropriate pasturelands and water sources for the Mongol animals. They identified valleys and plains that would best feed sheep or goats and those that would support cattle and horses. Where the natural grassland seemed inadequate, the Mongols opened up farmland for pasture by sending in small detachments of soldiers to burn villages and farm settlements in their future path. Without farmers to plow and plant the land, it reverted to grassland before the main Mongol army arrived.

The five-year European campaign marked the zenith of Mongol military ability, and almost everything went according to plan on the battlefield. The army for the invasion of Europe consisted of some fifty thousand Mongols and another one hundred thousand allies. Subodei embodied the accumulated knowledge of the old steppe hunter and warrior who had followed Genghis Khan closely and knew how he thought and fought. In addition, Mongke and Batu, the two smartest and most capable grandsons of Genghis Khan, helped to command the European war effort. By the start of the campaign, the Mongol army had absorbed the best of Chinese and Muslim technology and military knowledge, making it an incredible fighting force that probably surpassed the army commanded by Genghis Khan himself.

Subodei set the conquest of the Volga River, occupied by the Bulgars, as his initial objective. In 1236, the Year of the Monkey, the main army set out. They moved with a party of about two hundred scouts in front and with a rear guard of another two hundred warriors. Once they reached the Volga, the real invasion began. At this point, the Mongols enacted their unusual but, for them, tried-and-true strategy of dividing their army and invading on at least two fronts at once. In this way, the enemy could not tell which city or prince would be the main target. If any prince took his army from his home city to help another prince, then the other Mongol army could attack the undefended one. With such uncertainty and danger to his home base, every prince kept his army at home to guard his own territory, and none came to the aid of the others.

Subodei led his forces north up the Volga toward the homeland of the Bulgars, while Mongke, the eldest son of the deceased Tolui, led another force south toward the Kipchak Turks. Some of the Kipchak fled from him, but others agreed to join the Mongols in attacking the Russian cities. After the

quick routing of the Volga Bulgars, the Mongols used their territory for the base camp and a reserve of millions of animals pastured on the steppes for hundreds of miles to the east. Some of the nomadic tribes already living in the eastern European plains joined with the Mongols, while others fled from them and spread fear and panic ahead of the invaders.

From the Volga, they began a three-year campaign across what would later become Russia and Ukraine. In their probes, they found the city-states and principalities still as divided and antagonistic toward one another as they had been when the Mongols invaded nearly two decades earlier. The Mongols followed the same protocols in every case. They began the campaign in each territory by sending official envoys to request the capital city to surrender, join the Mongol family, and become the vassals of the Great Khan. If they agreed, the envoy offered protection to the new vassals from their enemies and allowed them to keep their ruling family and their religion. In return for such protections, the people had to agree to commit tribute of 10 percent of all wealth and goods to the Mongols. Few cities took the offer.

The Mongols made the city of Riazan one of the first targets. The Chronicle of Novgorod for 1238 recorded that "Tartars came in countless numbers, like locusts." First, small units of Mongol warriors divided to scourge the countryside. Each Mongol warrior seized a set number of civilians for the jobs ahead, such as digging fortifications, cutting trees, and hauling supplies. They then burned the villages and sent the remaining peasants scrambling toward safety within the city's wooden walls. When the Mongol army finally reached the city, they sent, much to the consternation and horror of the people gathered inside, a woman ambassador to deliver their terms and demand surrender. Fearing that she was a witch, the city officials refused to admit her for any negotiation, and the Mongols prepared for attack.

Everything about the invading Mongols must have seemed horrifying to the Russians. "They have hard and robust breasts," wrote an observer, "lean and pale faces, stiff high shoulders, and short distorted noses; their chins are sharp and prominent, the upper jaw low and deep, the teeth long and few, their eyebrows stretch from the hair to the nose, their eyes are black and restless, their countenances long and grim, their extremities bony and nervous, their legs thick but short below the knee." When attacking, the Mongol warriors wore a light leather armor that was thick in the front but thin at the back

so "that they might not be tempted to run away." In battle, "they use darts, clubs, battle-axes, and swords . . . and fight bravely and unyieldingly, but their chief prerogative is their use of the bow." If captured, "they never ask for mercy, and themselves never spare the vanquished." It is their "intention and fixed purpose of reducing all the world under their dominion."

Instead of attacking the walls of Riazan, the Mongols used their massive number of conscripted laborers in a project that confused and terrified the citizens even more. The workers cut down trees, hauled them to the Mongol lines outside the city, and rapidly began building a wall completely surrounding the already walled city. The Mongol wall formed a strong stockade that surrounded the city completely, sealed off the gates, and prevented the city's defenders from sending out forays of troops to attack the Mongols or to destroy their siege machines. The wall was a wooden form of the traditional line, the *nerge*, used to enclose the animals in a group hunt. The Mongol wall cut off routes for reinforcements to arrive in the city or to bring food or supplies. Probably the most psychologically horrifying effect of the wall was that it sealed the people into their own city without hope of escape. Behind their wall, the Mongols remained out of range of the bows fired from the city wall, and they could set up their siege engines and other equipment without being seen.

From the safety of catwalks behind their own newly built wall, the Mongol warriors now looked down upon the city of Riazan exactly as generations of Mongol hunters had looked down at their tightly bunched hunting prey from behind the safety of their ropes strung from trees and hung with felt blankets. Already accustomed to attackers using catapults and battering rams, the city dwellers had not experienced the innovations in bombardment that the Mongols had developed into a new form of warfare. Their catapults rained down rocks, chunks of wood, flaming pots of naphtha, gunpowder, and other unknown substances. The Mongols used these as incendiaries to spread fires, but also as smoke bombs and to create terrible smells, which, at that time in Europe, were thought to be both acts of evil magic and the source of disease. In addition to shooting fire, the firelances could launch a small incendiary rocket or hurl exploding grenades over enemy walls. The mysterious devices provoked such terror that the victims later reported that the Mongols traveled not only with horses but with trained attack dragons as well.

In the bombardment of the city, the fire, smoke, and confusion caused by these unknown substances from an unseen invader demoralized the people as much as it destroyed their defenses. After five terrorizing and highly destructive days of bombardment, the Mongols finally emerged from behind their wall and attacked the damaged city walls with scaling ladders and battering rams. Within the day, they had taken the city. The civilians sought refuge in their church, where many of them died in the conflagration ignited by the Mongol attack. The victors rounded up the ruling aristocrats and executed them all. As a contemporary Russian chronicler wrote of the carnage, after the Mongol army passed "no eye remained open to cry for the dead." The Mongols culled the captives to be kept for labor and forced large numbers of people to flee on to the next city. Not only did the refugees carry gory details of the attack to terrify the residents of the next city, but the increasing number of refugees would, once again, strain the capacity of that city before the Mongols arrived to attack it as well.

While the new prisoners dismantled the stockade wall and began transporting the logs on toward the next targeted city, a cadre of Mongol census takers followed the army to record the number of people, animals, and products seized. They divided the goods and the captives into lots according to the laws of shares for everyone from orphans and widows to the Golden Family. Then they sent thousands of prisoners to transport the goods back to Karakorum.

The refugees spread information about the Mongols across Europe, as can be seen from the chronicle written by Matthew Paris, a monk of the Benedictine abbey at St. Albans in Hertfordshire, England. In 1240 he recorded the oldest known mention of the Mongols in western Europe, calling them "an immense horde of that detestable race of Satan" and "like demons loosed from Tartarus." He wrote, incorrectly, that "they are called Tartars, from a river called Tartar, which runs through their mountains." *Tartarus* was the Greek name for Hell, the lowest cavern beneath Hades, where the Titans had been condemned after creating a war among the gods.

Paris wrote that the Mongols "ravaged the eastern countries with lamentable destruction, spreading fire and slaughter wherever they went." He then described in specific detail the horror of these invaders who "razed cities to the ground, burnt woods, pulled down castles, tore up the vine-trees,

destroyed gardens, and massacred the citizens and husbandmen; if by chance they did spare any who begged their lives, they compelled them, as slaves of the lowest condition, to fight in front of them against their own kindred. And if they merely pretended to fight, or perhaps warned their countrymen to flee, the Tartars following in their rear, slew them; and if they fought bravely and conquered, they gained no thanks by way of recompense, and thus these savages ill-treated their captives as though they were horses."

Matthew Paris's diatribe against the Mongol invaders escalated from frenzied alarm to hysterical loathing: "The men are inhuman and of the nature of beasts, rather to be called monsters than men, thirsting after and drinking blood, and tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and human beings." Interspersed in the contemptuous vitriol, he did relay some important and accurate information: "They clothe themselves in the skins of bulls, and are armed with iron lances; they are short in stature and thickset, compact in their bodies, and of great strength; invincible in battle, indefatigable in labour; they wear no armour on the back part of their bodies, but are protected by it in front; they drink the blood which flows from their flocks, and consider it a delicacy; they have large powerful horses, which eat leaves and even the trees themselves, and which owing to the shortness of their legs, they mount by three steps instead of stirrups." Other parts of his description have a kernel of truth mixed with some odd misperceptions: "They have no human laws, know no mercy, and are more cruel than lions or bears; they have boats made of the hides of oxen, ten or twelve having one amongst them; they are skilful in sailing or swimming, hence they cross the largest and most rapid rivers without any delay or trouble; and when they have no blood, they greedily drink disturbed and even muddy water."

At the same time in 1240 that Matthew Paris recorded these observations, the Mongols had finished capturing most of the regional cities of Russia and were preparing to capture the largest and most important political and religious center in the Slavic world—Kiev. Taking advantage of early ice to cross the rivers in November 1240, the Year of the Rat, Mongol envoys arrived at the gates of Kiev. Not unexpectedly, the city authorities murdered them and arrogantly pinioned the bodies above the city gate.

Under the leadership of Mongke, the Mongol army amassed around the

city in the early winter in what the Russian priests recorded as "clouds of Tatars." The noise of the Mongols was said to be so loud that people inside the city could not hear one another talk. As the soldiers fought to hold the walls, the civilians sought refuge in the magnificent Church of the Virgin. When no room remained to take in anyone else, the people closed the doors. Still hoping to find protective proximity to the virgin's shrine, many other terrified refugees clambered up the church walls seeking sanctuary on the roof. The number grew so large that their weight caused the entire building to collapse, crushing the throngs inside.

When the Mongol forces took the city on December 6, 1240, they looted and burned it to the ground. The Kievan commander Dmitri had fought so hard, even after being abandoned by many of the city's aristocrats, that Batu, with great appreciation of his military talent and tenaciousness, released him and let him live. The Russian phase of the Mongol invasion was coming to a successful close. Only a little more than one year later, in the entry for 1242, the Novgorod Chronicle began referring to the new ruler not only as Khan Batu of the Mongols, but also as *Tsar* Batu, a title that literally meant *Caesar* Batu, signifying a newly united rule over the many warring princely families of Russia. As Prince Michael said on being presented before Batu Khan, "To thee, Tsar, I bow, since God hath granted thee the sovereignty of this world."

With the fall of Kiev, the Mongol conquest of the European east was complete. The Mongols evicted more refugees to flee toward the west and begin terrorizing central Europe with their tales before the Mongols arrived. The refugees barely had time to get away before Subodei sent out new scouting squads in February 1241, while the rivers were still frozen and the riders could more easily and quickly reach the plains of Hungary. On the battlefields of Europe, future control of the Mongol Empire and the world was being fought over—not in the battles themselves, which proved relatively easy for the Mongols to win, but in the political skirmishing behind the scene among the grandsons of Genghis Khan. The compromised selection of Ogodei as the Great Khan after the death of his father had not settled the issue of succession; it had merely postponed it for a generation, and that generation was now in command of the Mongol armies across Europe and already vying for leadership.

Subodei was accompanied by representatives from the family of each of Genghis Khan's four sons. After the death of Ogodei's favorite son, one of

these young men would become the next Great Khan, but which one? Under Mongol law, the person would have to be elected at a *khuriltai,* and the campaign in Europe was the proving ground and the election campaign for each of them. The grandsons jockeyed for leadership and for precedence in the emerging hierarchy, and part of this involved seizing credit for the military victories. As with many Mongol political processes, they reach a climactic expression in a fight over who took precedence. At a victory banquet, Batu stood and offered the opening toast. By drinking first, he demonstrated his position as the eldest and the highest ranking of the grandsons, tantamount to publicly proclaiming that he expected be the next Great Khan. Guyuk objected vehemently, claiming that he should be served before Batu because his father was the Great Khan. Another, named Buri, who was "headstrong and brave" but who "uttered harsh words when he drank," resurrected the oldest and most painful issue in the family when he angrily denounced Batu as not really a member of the family because his father was a Merkid bastard.

According to a report that later made its way back to the Great Khan, the three princes spent a long time shouting and screaming at one another. "You are nothing more than an old woman with a beard," Buri screamed at Batu. "Batu is just an old woman with a quiver," echoed Guyuk. Outraged at their treatment by the rest of the family, Guyuk and Buri stormed out of the banquet, mounted their horses, and rode away swearing and cursing. When word reached Ogodei Khan of the incident, he was livid. Ogodei summoned the young men back to court. He initially refused to see them and threatened to have his son Guyuk executed. "May he rot like an egg!" Ogodei said of his ill-behaved son.

When he calmed down and finally admitted Guyuk into his *ger,* he reprimanded him harshly for fighting within the family and for mistreating his soldiers. "You broke the spirit of every man in your army," he charged. In insightful questioning into the proper way to treat one's own troops, Ogodei Khan asked his son, "Do you think that the Russians surrendered because of how mean you were to your own men? Do you think that they surrendered because they were afraid of you?" he added mockingly. "Because you captured one or two warriors, you think that you won the war. But you did not capture even a single kid goat."

Ogodei continue his tirade against his son: "This was your first time out of the *ger,* and so you try to flaunt your manhood. You act as though you

achieved everything. You shout and scream at people as though they were animals." He finally calmed down with soothing words from the sons of his other brothers. He quoted a saying of his father's about the need to let army matters be settled out on the steppe, then sent all the boys back to continue the conquest of Europe.

Europe had heard little of the earlier conquests of Genghis Khan in Asia and had only the faintest glimmer of information about his destruction of the Khwarizm empire—but suddenly, with the fall of Kiev, a mass of refugees and stories came pouring out of eastern Europe. Right behind them came the feared Mongol horsemen, seemingly from every direction. Matthew Paris wrote that the Mongols invaded the West "with the force of lightning into the territories of the Christians, laying waste the country, committing great slaughter, and striking inexpressible terror and alarm into every one." This reference to "lightning" warfare was possibly the first mention of the style that later acquired the German name *Blitzkrieg.*

Subodei dispatched a three-pronged army of fifty thousand toward Hungary in the south and a smaller, diversionary force of twenty thousand across Poland toward Germany in the north. The Mongol armies swept across some four thousand miles from their home base in Mongolia, on across the plains of eastern Europe, and into Poland and Hungary—right up to the walls of Vienna and the German cities of the Teutonic Knights and the Hanseatic League. In the north, they jumped across Poland like a stone skipping across an icy pond. One city after another fell as the Mongols ripped through the country. Duke Henry II of Silesia assembled an army of thirty thousand, including knights from throughout Germany, France, and Poland; in his panicked conscription of all potential soldiers, he even drafted a contingent of gold miners to fight the invaders. On April 9, 1241, the two armies met at Liegnitz, near the modern German-Polish border. The Mongols chose an open area for the fighting about six miles from the city, and the battlefield became thereafter known in German as Wahlstatt, the Chosen Place.

Duke Henry ordered his cavalry to charge the Mongol ranks. The Mongols repulsed the first wave, but they seemed to yield to the second and then suddenly turned in flight. With cries of victory, the European knights broke ranks and began chasing the Mongols, who retreated slowly, only a short distance beyond the weapons of the knights. Then, precisely when the European

horses began to tire under the heavy armor of their riders, thundering explosive noises erupted around them and heavy smoke engulfed them, causing great confusion. As described by chronicler Jan Dlugosz, the Mongols used on the battlefield a device resembling a "great head, from which there suddenly bursts a cloud with a foul smell that envelops the Poles and makes them all but faint, so that they are incapable of fighting." The smoke and noise cut off the European knights from the archers and infantry far behind them. Once again, the Mongols had made their enemies overconfident and then lured them into a fatal trap. Spread out, disorganized, confused, and tiring quickly, the knights and their horses posed easy targets for the Mongols, who turned and began shooting them down.

The Mongols crushed the Germans. European records document the deaths of twenty-five thousand of Duke Henry's thirty thousand men, but Mongols took many of those captive, particularly the miners, an occupation little understood but much appreciated by the Mongols, who constantly sought out people with novel skills and talents. The victors marched thousands of the miners east to begin mining the rich mineral deposits in Dzungaria, the western Mongolian area that was the personal property of Ogodei.

The entire campaign from Kiev to Germany had been merely a Mongol diversion to keep the Europeans from sending soldiers to fend off the real Mongol objective: invading the grassy plains of Hungary. Having succeeded in killing off most of the northern army and in scattering and neutralizing the rest, the Mongol force withdrew from the Polish and German cities; in time, the local people convinced themselves that they actually had won the battle and repulsed the invaders. The fallen Duke Henry II became a martyr as Henry the Devout, and a Benedictine monastery was built with the altar over the exact spot where, according to Christian mythology, his mother, Saint Hedwig, found his headless, naked corpse, identifying it by the six toes on his left foot. Much later, in the nineteenth century, the Prussian government turned the abbey into a military school, where they trained the future German officers with special emphasis on the tactics of the battle that took place there.

Within days, the Mongol tactics used to defeat and massacre the German knights were replayed in Hungary on a larger field with many times more casualties. After Subodei's army of fifty thousand had pillaged much of

Hungary, they began to retreat when King Bela and his army came after them. Subodei retreated for several days until he arrived at the topography best suited to Mongol victory on the Plain of Mohi. There, the Hungarians gathered into a densely packed camp that was fortified with a circle of wagons and heavy iron chains where the king kept them cooped up for several days. For Batu, accustomed to having his men spread out to sleep in small groups, the Hungarian decision to mass in such a tight formation with a chain around them was identical to the circle of rope and felt blankets with which the Mongols engulfed their prey on large group hunts. The Mongols pulled up catapults and began hurling their mysterious assortment of naphtha, gunpowder, flaming oil, and other substances.

Unable to tolerate the smoke and fire, the Hungarians moved out of their camp. They found themselves virtually surrounded by the Mongols, but in one area, it seemed that the Mongols had forgotten to station their horsemen. In what must have seemed a near miracle to the Christian Hungarians, the gap lay precisely in the direction of their capital of Pest, three days flight away. The Hungarians moved out toward home. As the Hungarians fled, their panic grew. They raced on foot and on horseback, broke ranks, spread out, and dropped their equipment in order to flee more quickly. Of course, the Mongols had not left the gap open by accident; they already had stationed horsemen to wait for the fleeing, frightened Hungarians. The Mongols chased many of the men into bogs and marshes to drown them. The chronicler Thomas of Spalato, archdeacon of what is now the city of Split in Croatia, described the Mongols as *de Peste Tartorum,* the Tartar Plague, and he wrote the most vivid account of their slaughter of the Hungarians: "The dead fell to the right and to left; like leaves in winter, the slain bodies of these miserable men were strewn along the whole route; blood flowed like torrents of rain."

Their knights having failed to defeat the Mongols on the battlefield, the clergy now tried to subdue them through supernatural devices. Perhaps in the knowledge that many of the Mongols were Christian, but not knowing how much the Mongols detested and feared exposure to the remains of the dead, Christian priests attempted to keep the Mongols out of Pest by parading the bones and other relics of their saints before the approaching army. The exposure to pieces of dead bodies enraged the Mongols, for whom such acts were ritually contaminating as well as disgusting. The fearful and angry Mongols not only slew the clerics, but burned the relics and the churches as

well to purify themselves from the pollution. For Europe, the encounter had proven as much a religious setback as a military loss, for in addition to the soldiers and king killed, Hungary lost a bishop, two archbishops, and many religious knights of the Templars.

The Mongols had destroyed the knighthood of the country and chased King Bela IV south to the Adriatic. Several texts survived to describe the tremendous psychological and emotional impact of the Mongol invasion, including the *Carmen Miserabile super Destructione Regni Hungariae per Tartaros, or Sad Song of the Destruction of Hungary by the Tartars,* by Roger of Torre Maggiore. European knighthood never recovered from the blow of losing nearly one hundred thousand soldiers in Hungary and Poland, what the Europeans mourned as "the flower" of their knighthood and aristocracy. Walled cities and heavily armored knights were finished, and in the smoke and gunpowder of that Easter season of 1241, the Mongol triumph portended the coming total destruction of European feudalism and the Middle Ages.

Later in 1241, only a few months after the Mongol victories, alarm turned to panic when an eclipse blotted out the sun on Sunday, October 6. People across Europe interpreted the solar eclipse on the sacred day as a certain sign of yet more suffering to come at the hands of the Mongols. The panic was fed by the ignorance of the identity of the attackers. In a widely circulated letter filled with erroneous information, a cleric reported to the archbishop of Bordeaux that the Mongols were "cannibals from Hell who eat the dead after a battle and leave only bones, which even the vultures are too noble to peck." According to this detailed and purposefully incendiary account, the Mongols enjoyed eating old women, and they celebrated their victories by gang raping Christian virgins until they died of exhaustion. Then "their breasts were cut off to be kept as dainties for their chiefs, and their bodies furnished a jovial banquet to the savages."

The sequence of consecutive Mongol victories over the Bulgars, the Russians, the Hungarians, the Germans, and the Poles caused widespread alarm and near panic in some quarters. Who were these people and what did they want? As Matthew Paris lamented, no European knew their language: "For never till this time has there been any mode of access to them, nor have they themselves come forth, so as to allow any knowledge of their customs or persons to be gained through common intercourse with other men."

With no other source of helpful information, the Christian clerics looked

to the Bible for an answer. The name *Tartar* sounded to them like *Tarshish*, whose king "shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." The psalm also stated: "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents."

For the clerics, the mention of bringing presents connected the king of Tarshish with the three kings of the East who brought gifts to the Christ child, and suddenly they saw an explanation to connect these passages with the Mongols. In 1164, German Crusaders returning from foreign campaigns brought home bones that they claimed were from the Three Kings; in 1181, the Germans began construction of an elaborate reliquary of golden enamel to hold the remains in their marvelous new cathedral of Cologne. Consequently, because of this episode and what everyone realized was the theft of sacred relics, the Christians feared that the Tartars were invading Europe in order to reclaim the bones of their ancestors. In that case, the Mongols would likely cut straight through the heart of Europe to reach their goal at Cologne.

When the Mongols veered south from Hungary toward the Balkans and thereby failed to ride on Cologne, the clerics deduced that if the Mongols were not searching for the bones of the Three Kings, perhaps the invaders were exiled Jews who had failed to return home from the Babylonian captivity. They had been shut up and sealed off by a river that ran beyond Persia. Christian chroniclers reported that the year 1241 corresponded to the year 5000 in the Jewish calendar, and that year, many Jews were expecting the coming of the Messiah or a reappearance of King David.

Matthew Paris initially seemed skeptical of this claim since the Mongols did not speak Hebrew and had no law, which clearly contradicted the biblical account of God's giving the law to Moses. With no other better explanation, however, Paris soon found a way to justify the link between the Mongols and the Jews and the parallels between the time of Moses and his own era. These new people could be missing Hebrew tribes since "in the time of the government of Moses their rebellious hearts were perverted to an evil way of thinking, so that they followed after strange gods and unknown customs, so now in a more wonderful manner, owing to the vengeance of God, they were unknown to every other nation, and their heart and language was confused, and their life changed to that of the cruel and irrational wild beast."

Because of "the enormous wickedness of the Jews," the Christians accused them of bringing the wrath of the Mongols on innocent Christians. According to Paris's highly unlikely report, the European Jewish leaders "assembled on a general summons in a secret place." The "wisest and most influential amongst them" spoke, explaining that their "brethren of the tribes of Israel, who were formerly shut up, have gone forth to bring the whole world to subjection to them and to us. And the more severe and the more lasting that our former suffering has been, the greater will be the glory that will ensue to us." The speaker supposedly wanted the other Jews to greet the Mongols "with valuable gifts, and receive them with the highest honour: they are in need of corn, wine, and arms." Accordingly, the Jews collected "all the swords, daggers, and armour, they could find for sale anywhere, and, in order to conceal their treachery, securely, stowed them away in casks." With no better explanation forthcoming, the Christians accepted this story as proof of "the hidden treachery and extraordinary deceit of the Jews." They were therefore at once handed over to the executioners, to be either consigned to perpetual imprisonment, or to be slain with their own swords.

No matter how absurd the details and no matter the lack of evidence, the stories evoked terribly real and disastrous consequences across Europe. Unable to defeat the Mongols, their enemy menacing the boundaries of their civilization, the Europeans could defeat the Jews, their imagined enemies at home. In one city after another from York to Rome, angry Christian crowds attacked the Jewish quarters of their cities. The Christians attempted to punish the Jews with the same treatment that they had heard the Mongols had used in their campaigns. The Christians set fire to Jewish homes and massacred the residents. Those Jews who managed to escape the cities fled from place to place in search of refuge, but in almost all communities, they found more persecution. To clearly identify which refugees were Jewish refugees and to prevent their entering new Christian communities, the church ordered that Jews had to wear distinctive clothes and emblems to mark them for all to see.

With the destruction of the Hungarian army, the route lay open to Vienna, and within weeks, terrified locals saw the Mongol scouting parties prowling around the outlying districts of the city. In a skirmish with one of these advance guards, the Hapsburg troops captured a Mongol officer, who, to the

surprise and consternation of the Christians, turned out to be a thirty-year-old literate Englishman who had made his way through the Holy Land, where he seemed to have developed a talent for learning languages and transcribing them. There is some speculation that with his level of education and his flight from England, he may have been involved in the effort to force King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215. After fleeing England and facing excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church, he ended up in the service of the more tolerant Mongols. The presence of a European, and a former Christian, among the Mongol army made it clear that the Mongols really were humans and not a horde of demons, but the terrified Christians killed the English apostate before they could get a good accounting of the Mongols' mysterious mission outside Vienna.

The capture of the unnamed Englishman coincided with the end of Mongol penetration into Europe. They had followed the grass steppes across central Asia, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary; but where the pastures ended, the Mongols stopped. With five horses per warrior, they needed that pasture to function. Their marked advantages of speed, mobility, and surprise were all lost when they had to pick their way through forests, rivers, and plowed fields with crops and ditches, hedges, and wooden fences. The soft furrows of the peasant's field offered an insecure foothold for the horses. The place where fields began also marked the transition from the dry steppe to the humid climate of the coastal zones, where the dampness caused the Mongol bows to lose strength and accuracy.

Despite their probes across the Danube, the full-scale Mongol invasion of western Europe failed to materialize. On December 11, 1241, Ogodei, reportedly in a drunken stupor, died. News of the death reached the Mongol forces in Europe, four thousand miles from Karakorum, within four to six weeks. Chaghatai died at about the same time, and thus in the mere fourteen years since the death of Genghis Khan, all four of his sons had died, and now the princes, Genghis Khan's grandsons, raced home to continue their battles against each other in the quest to become the next Great Khan. The struggle among the lineages would last another ten years—and for at least this decade, the rest of the world would be safe from Mongol invasion.

Over the early months of 1242, the Year of the Tiger, the Mongols withdrew from western Europe back to their stronghold in Russia. The European cities produced little loot, and the armies the Mongols routed had been poorly supplied. The most valuable asset the Mongols took with them were the tents and furnishing of the Hungarian king's camp, which Batu used for his base camp on the Volga River. Despite the lack of goods, the Mongols had found a variety of craftsmen such as the miners from Saxony, scribes and translators, and, from their raids around Belgrade and the Balkans, a contingent of French prisoners that included at least one Parisian goldsmith.

Disappointed with the material reward of their invasion and eager to show some profit, the Mongol officers struck a deal with the Italian merchants stationed in the Crimea. In exchange for large amounts of trade goods, the Mongols allowed the Italians to take many of their European prisoners, especially the young ones, to sell as slaves around the Mediterranean. This began a long and lucrative relationship between the Mongols and the merchants of Venice and Genoa, who set up trading posts in the Black Sea to tap this new market. The Italians supplied the Mongols with manufactured goods in return for the right to sell the Slavs in the Mediterranean markets.

This decision to sell the young people would create a major future problem for the Mongols, because the Italians sold most of their slaves to the sultan of Egypt, who used them in his slave army. In another twenty years, the Mongols were destined to meet this army composed mostly of Slavs and Kipchaks who had plenty of experience fighting the Mongols, and in many cases had even learned the Mongol language before being transported away. That future meeting along the Sea of Galilee in modern Israel would prove to have a far different outcome than the first meeting on the plains of Russia.