

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Copyright Regulations 1969

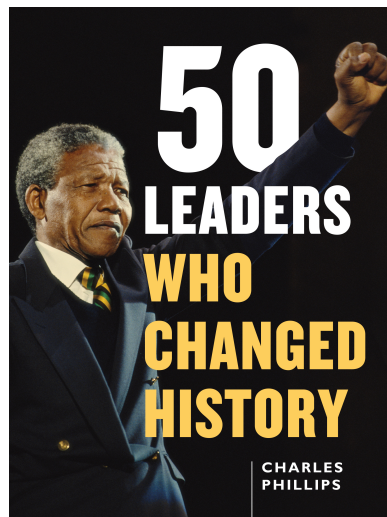
WARNING

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by or on behalf of Methodist Ladies' College pursuant to Part VB of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.

Phillips, C. (2015). *50 leaders who changed history*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Pier 9.



13

GENGHIS KHAN

FEARSOME MONGOL CHIEF WHO USED MILITARY MIGHT TO BUILD A VAST EMPIRE

Genghis Khan was a ruthless war leader who spread terror far and wide as he built one of history's largest empires, fusing together many of the nomadic tribes of northeast Asia.

NATIONALITY: *Mongolian*

ACHIEVEMENT: *Created Mongol Empire*

WHEN: *1206-27*

At a great assembly of the Mongol clans beside the River Onon in 1206, Temüjin was declared Genghis Khan – the overlord of all. Showing the determination, ambition and ruthlessness for which he would become famous, Temüjin had been building up his power base for years. He had eliminated all his enemies and

the Mongols were united. He was ready to embark on a campaign of world conquest.

Genghis Khan's initial target was China. He first attacked the border state of Xixia, then launched a full-scale onslaught in 1211. In 1214 he accepted a vast bribe to hold off, but attacked again the following year and captured Beijing. Then in 1219–23 he attacked the Muslim empire of Khwarezm in Central Asia and Persia (modern Iran), ruthlessly overrunning settlement after settlement, massacring populations and forcing survivors to serve in his army, and reducing agricultural fields and elegantly planned irrigation schemes to dust and rubble. On his death in 1227 he had aggressively expanded his borders and established the foundations of what would become the world's largest continuous empire.

In war Genghis Khan was utterly merciless. Most of what we know of him and his army's conquests – aside from what is described in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, a saga written down in c.1240 – derives from accounts written by scribes in cultures ravaged by the raiders, detailing the horrors swiftly moving Mongol armies inflicted on more settled peoples. One such account relates the events of the attack on Khwarezm. Khan was provoked when Inalchuq, the governor of the city of Otrar (now a ruin in Kazakhstan), attacked a caravan of merchants he had sent to establish trading links with the shah of Khwarezm. When the shah failed to repair the damage, Genghis Khan unleashed the full force of his military machine, sending an army of 200,000 men. When he captured Otrar, he put Inalchuq to a grisly death by pouring molten silver into his eyes and ears. He then returned to unleash another overwhelming punishment in 1226, this time on the rulers of Xixia, who had refused to supply troops for the campaign against Khwarezm. Khan overran the capital and executed all the members of the imperial family.



▲ An anonymous chronicle image shows Genghis Khan and the Mongols fighting Chinese warriors in the Battle of the Badger Mouth, northern China, in 1211.

TWO KINDS OF LOYALTY

As vividly demonstrated by such episodes, Genghis Khan punished every slight against him. He never allowed an enemy or subordinate to feel that they had the upper hand. In this way Khan demanded loyalty by ruling with an iron fist.

The danger implicit in this often short-term approach to inspiring loyalty is that any slight relaxation of power will lead to revolts. However, Genghis Khan also built loyalty by other means. On occasion he was open to being merciful and promoting brave and skilful enemies so they could serve in his army. In 1201, he was shot in the neck with an arrow during a battle against the Taijut tribe. After he had won the victory and treated his wound, he confronted the Taijut prisoners and demanded to know who had fired the arrow. A warrior named Zurgadai, perhaps figuring that he had nothing left to lose, stepped forwards and defiantly declared himself. Temüjin, admiring his spirit and his skill with a bow, spared his life and gave him a position in the Mongol army. He became one of the Mongols' foremost generals and one of Genghis Khan's most loyal subordinates.

The ruthlessness with which Genghis Khan dealt with defeated enemies meant that his reputation travelled before him. Enemies could be reduced to a state of abject terror before any fighting began and surrendered when they might have otherwise fled or fought. He was brutal, too, when building up his power base among the Mongol tribes before 1206. After he overwhelmed the Tatar tribe in battle, he slaughtered every survivor who was taller than the axle of a cart – anyone shorter would have been a child of impressionable age who would grow up in thrall to him.

TIMELINE

1162

Born, near Lake Baikal, Mongolia.

c.1171

Their tribe abandons him and his mother and brothers after his father's death.

c.1176

Kills half-brother Behter.

1178

Marries Börte of the Onggirat tribe.

1184

Rescues Börte after she was captured by the Merkits tribe.

c.1177

Enslaved by Tayichiud tribe, but escapes.

1190

Unites Mongol confederation of tribes.

1206

Sole ruler of Mongols after defeating all rivals.

1211

After making ruler of Xixia his vassal, turns against Jin dynasty in China.

1215

Captures Jin capital Zhongdu (Beijing).

1219–23

Overruns Muslim empire of Khwarezm.

1226

Campaigns against Xixia.

18 August 1227

Dies.

c.1240

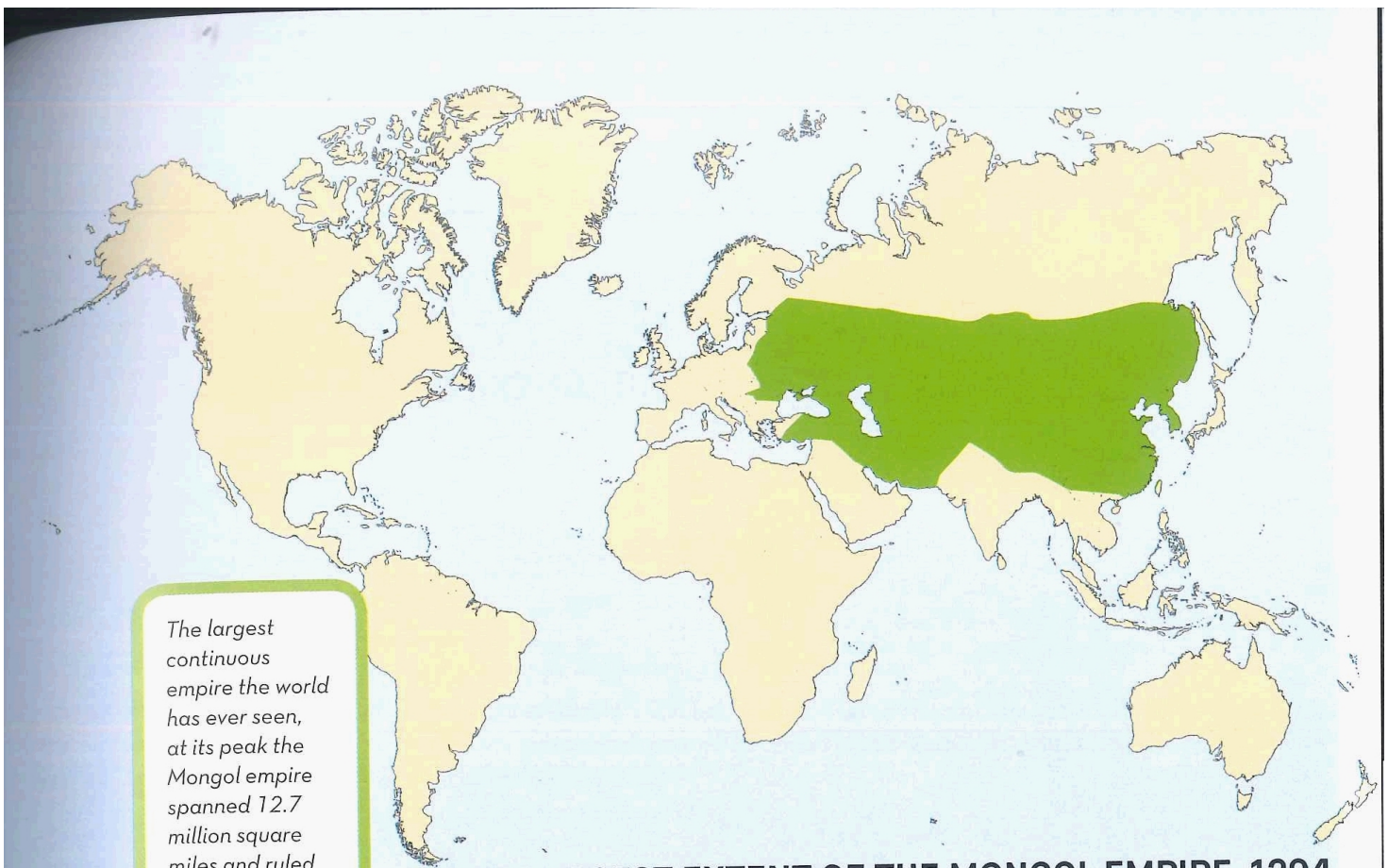
The chronicle A Secret History of the Mongols details Genghis Khan's achievements.

OPEN-MINDED

For a man with such a fearsome reputation, Genghis Khan was remarkably tolerant when it came to religious faith. He was himself a follower of the Mongols' shamanistic religion that honoured spirits of mountains, winds and sky, and was known for his devotion to their supreme god 'Eternal Blue Heaven' and to the mountain Burkhan Khaldun, but he allowed the peoples in his territories to follow their own faith freely – whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim or Taoist. He summoned Qiu Chuji, a Taoist from Shandong, east China, to attend on him and discuss means of prolonging life and the possibility of immortality. Genghis Khan put Qiu Chuji in charge of all the religious followers in his vast empire and gave him the name 'Immortal Spirit'.

LISTENING EAR

Genghis Khan's reputation is that of a man who was single-minded in pursuit of land and glory, swift to seek revenge and issue terrifying punishments. But he was also open to advice and willing to learn. As a nomad, he initially saw no use for the cultivated fields of northern China except as a place to graze his ponies. But he listened when a former adviser to one of the Jin emperors told him that these fields and the craftsmen living in the towns nearby produced foods and goods on which he could levy taxes. He also learned from captured enemies how to lay siege to towns and the uses of weapons such as catapults and mangonels that had been quite foreign to the Mongols.



The largest continuous empire the world has ever seen, at its peak the Mongol empire spanned 12.7 million square miles and ruled 25% of the world's population.

THE LARGEST EXTENT OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE, 1294

By the end of his life his empire stretched right across Asia as far as the Adriatic Sea. An estimated 40 million had been slaughtered by his troops. In Mongolia he is celebrated as a national hero, founder of the country when he became ruler of all the steppe tribes in 1206. In his empire he opened a connection between Asia and Europe, between East and West. More widely, his conquests established a stable political environment across vast territories in Asia, boosting trade and cultural exchange along the 6,500 km (4,000-mile) Silk Route from Europe to China and India – as such he is credited with having expanded the horizons of East and West. Nonetheless, as a leader, Khan is generally considered the epitome of the cruel warlord, utterly ruthless in his pursuit and application of power.



LEADERSHIP ANALYSIS

LEADER TYPE: *Ruthless*

KEY QUALITIES: *Iron-willed, ruthless, disciplined*

LIKE-MINDED LEADERS: *Attila the Hun, Napoleon Bonaparte*

FACT: *His original name Temüjin means 'man of iron' or blacksmith.*