

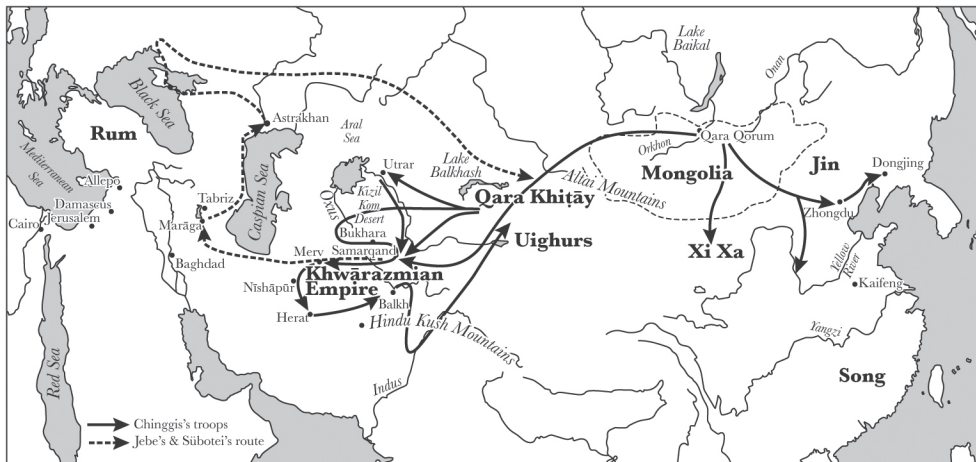
## Chinggis Khān

**Chinggis** (Genghis) **Khān** (c. 557–624/1162–1227) was the founder of the Mongol empire, whose career and legacy reshaped the mediaeval Muslim world. Most of our information about his life derives from the anonymous and partly mythical Mongolian source known as *The secret history of the Mongols*, compiled probably soon after Chinggis Khān's death. This is supplemented by nonextant Mongol sources that were partially preserved in Persian or Chinese works, mainly Rashīd al-Dīn's *Ĵāmi' al-tawārīkh* ("Collection of chronicles") and the anonymous *Shengwu qingshenglu* ("Records of the holy warrior").

Born as Temüjin (lit., blacksmith) to a minor chieftain in northeastern Mongolia around 1162 (thus in the Chinese sources and currently accepted; 1167 is also mentioned; Muslim sources usually give the less plausible 549/1154; Rashīd, 1:231, trans. Thackston, 1:152), the future Chinggis Khān suffered hard times as a youth. Growing up in times of political crisis and tribal rivalries encouraged by the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234), the superpower of twelfth-century Mongolia that ruled northern China, he had to fight his way to power. When Temüjin turned nine, his father, Yesügei, arranged his marriage to the daughter of the ruler of the Qonggirat tribe and delivered him to his in-laws. On his way back, Yesügei was poisoned by the Tatars, an enemy tribe. Temüjin was called back to succeed his father, but Yesügei's supporters, mainly the Tayichi'ut clan, abandoned him, leaving his family to its fate. By the time the teenaged Temüjin set out to reclaim his Qonggirat bride, Börte, he had killed his elder half-brother, escaped from Tayichi'ut captivity, and secured his

first companions (*nökörs*, people who chose to join a leader in return for his protection). These *nökörs* later became the elite of the new empire. Temüjin also forged an alliance with Jamuqa, his sworn brother (*anda*) and later arch-enemy, and subsequently with his father's *anda*, To'oril, later known as Ong Khān, head of the influential Kerayit tribe. Both were called to help him after the Merkit tribe kidnapped his beloved Börte in about 1183–4. Temüjin got back his (pregnant) wife and began to assert his authority over his clan and the neighbouring Turco-Mongolian tribes, by forging alliances and discarding them after they had served his purpose. He gradually made a name for himself as a successful, ruthless, and generous leader.

In the middle to late 1180s, Temüjin was enthroned as the *khān* of his tribe, and, during the succeeding decades, part of which he perhaps spent in Jin captivity, he gradually won over rival tribes, notably the Tatars in 1202, his former allies the Kerayits in 1203, the Naiman of western Mongolia in 1204, and his erstwhile rival Jamuqa in 1205. In 1206, an assembly (*quriltay*) of all the tribes of Mongolia proclaimed him Chinggis Khān, a new title meaning either the fierce ruler or the universal *khān* (de Rachewiltz, The title Činggis Qan/Qayan reconsidered). It took Chinggis Khān more time and effort to unite the tribes of the eastern steppe than it took him to conquer half the known world. Soon after the *quriltay*, Chinggis Khān began to expand his rule. His first campaigns were motivated by revenge, the elimination of potential rivals, and the acquisition of riches—far more than by any grand design for world conquest. His first goal was China, then divided among three dynasties, the Tangut Xi Xia in the northwest (centred in today's Gansu



Map 1. The Campaigns of Chinggis Khān.

province), the Jurchen Jin in Manchuria and northern China, and the native Chinese Song dynasty in the south. Chinggis Khān first raided the weaker Xi Xia in 1205 and 1207, reducing it to a tributary state in 1209. In 1211, he turned against the Jin, conquering its capital, in present-day Beijing, in 1215; this time, moving from raids to conquest, he left troops to handle the territory. Challenges to his leadership of the Mongol world then made Chinggis turn west. The forest tribes of northwestern Mongolia rebelled and were subdued in 1216. In the same year, generals were sent against a Naiman prince who had usurped the Qara Khitāy throne in Central Asia in 1211 and was gradually imposing his authority over eastern Central Asia. By that time, several eastern vassals of the Qara Khitāy, notably the Uighurs of Gaochang (east Xinjiang), who later played a major role as cultural brokers for the Mongols, and the Muslim Qarluqs of Qayaliq (in southern Kazakhstan) and Almaliq (in northern Xinjiang) were already among Chinggis Khān's allies. In 615/1218, his generals overran the Qara Khitāy in an unchar-

acteristically benign conquest, incorporating most of their troops into the Mongol ranks. This conquest brought Chinggis Khān face to face with the empire of the Khwārazm Shāh, then the strongest ruler in the eastern Islamic world. Chinggis Khān first suggested peaceful coexistence to Muḥammad Khwārazm Shāh (r. 596–617/1200–20), but, when the latter's representative murdered Chinggis Khān's ambassador and plundered his caravan in 616/1218, at Utrār (on the Jaxartes, in present-day Kazakhstan), and the Khwārazm Shāh refused to punish him, Chinggis Khān advanced into the Muslim world. After careful planning, the Mongol troops crossed the Jaxartes in 617/1219 in three coordinated columns, attacking Utrār, Khwārazm, and Bukhara and continuing to the Khwārazmian capital, Samarkand. Preferring not to confront Chinggis on the battlefield, the Khwārazm Shāh divided his troops into garrisons and he himself escaped northward. With the conquest of Samarkand, in Rabī' I 617/May–June 1220, nearly all of Transoxania was in Mongol hands less than a year after Chinggis's forces crossed the Jaxartes. The

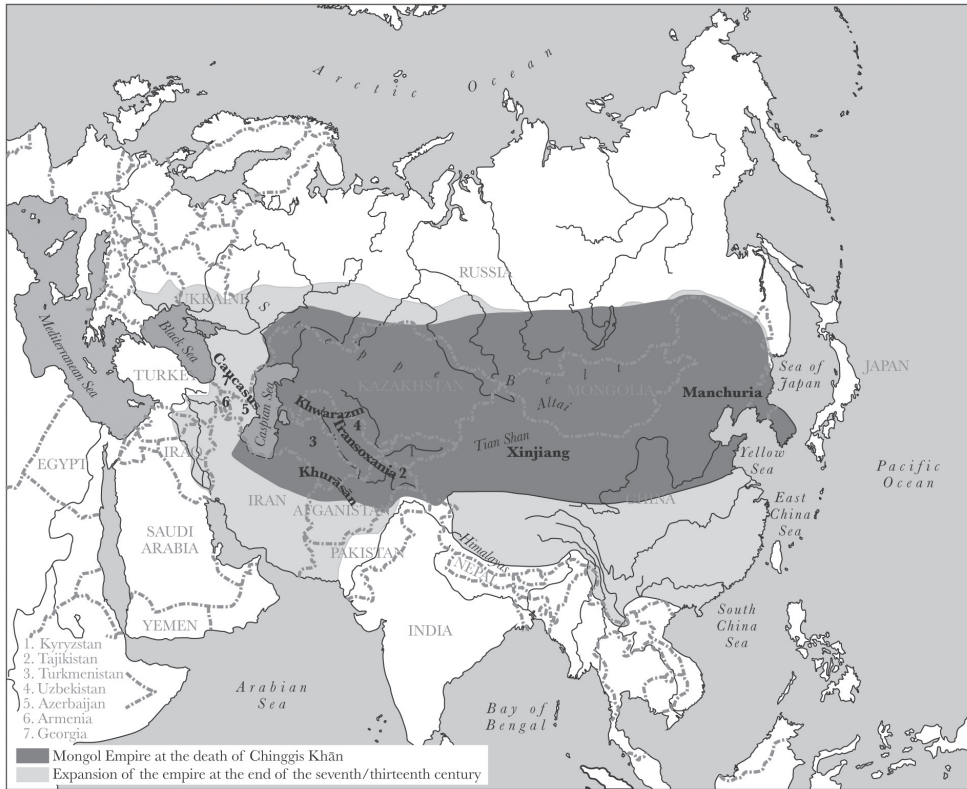
harsh and rapid “infidel” conquest was accompanied by massacres and devastation on an unprecedented scale and came as a shock to the Muslim population of Central Asia and the Middle East (e.g., Ibn al-Athīr, 12:358 ff.). Khurāsān was next in line. As the Mongols met strong resistance and did not originally intend to settle there, it was even more brutally ravaged by Chinggis Khān’s son, Tolui (d. 629/1232), and myriads of people were massacred. While the restoration of Transoxania had already begun in Chinggis Khān’s day, Khurāsān remained in ruins for decades.

Chinggis Khān’s commanders Jebe and Sübetei continued to pursue the Khwārazm Shāh, who died, in late 617/1220, on a small island in the Caspian Sea, bereft of his troops, his wealth, and his glory; the troops took the long way back to Mongolia, wreaking havoc in Russia in 620/1223. In 618/1221, Chinggis’ troops defeated Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazm Shāh (r. 617–28/1220–31), Muḥammad’s son and the only Muslim leader who actually challenged the Mongols (on the Indus River), although Jalāl al-Dīn himself did not die until 628/1231. Chinggis Khān spent the next years in Transoxania, where he met the Daoist patriarch Changchun (d. 1227), whom he had summoned from China to teach him the secret of longevity. In 1225 Chinggis Khān returned to Mongolia and attacked the Xi Xia, who had refused to send troops for the western campaign. Chinggis Khān did not see the final subjugation—and massacre—of the Tanguts, because he died in 624/1227, during the battle. He was buried with great pomp, but the location of his tomb has been a mystery ever since.

Chinggis Khān died ruling over the territory that extended from northern China to the Caspian Sea, the largest territory

ever conquered by one person. In his transformation from successful chieftain to world conqueror, the invasion of the Muslim world was a turning point, not only because it greatly enlarged his territory, troops, and riches, but also because it exposed him to administrative traditions different from China’s and convinced him, and everyone else around him, that he was destined by Heaven to rule the earth. In addition to his spectacular military success, Chinggis Khān also laid the institutional foundations for an empire that continued to expand for several generations, up to the 670s/1270s. One of his main achievements was the reorganisation of the army: he retained the traditional Inner Asian decimal units (of ten, one hundred, one thousand, and ten thousand men) but eliminated its connection to the tribal system. Tribes, or their remnants, were divided among the different units, which were headed by Chinggis Khān’s *nökors*, elected for their loyalty and skills. They replaced the former tribal elite and became a focus of loyalty and identification for their troops. This disciplined, professionally led, and mobile army was also armed with an ideology, according to which Heaven entrusted Chinggis Khān with the mission of world conquest, its blessing attested by his spectacular success.

Chinggis Khān also created for his people a legal system (called *yasa* in Turkic and *jasag* in Mongolian), the exact form and contents of which are still debated. He also established a juridical system, which benefitted from his earlier decision to adopt literacy (he chose the Uighur script for writing the Mongolian language). Other institutions that he initiated, which were later systematised by his heirs, such as the postal system (Mongolian *jam*), affected future Muslim institutions. Chinggis Khān borrowed administrators and administra-



Map 2. The Asia of Chinggis Khān and His Successors.

tive techniques from the conquered states, benefitting from the talents and experience of various ethnic groups, notably post-nomadic people such as Khitans, Uighurs, and Khwārazmians, but also Chinese, Iranians and others, including many Muslims. The combination of the newly organised army, the unprecedented devastation wrought on conquered lands, and the Mongol willingness to learn from others, were among the main reasons for Chinggis Khān’s success. Recently, climate change—an especially wet period in Mongolia from 608/1211 to 627/1260—has also been suggested as contributing to the unprecedented Mongol conquests (Pederson et al.).

Despite his tolerant attitude towards Islam and religion in general, Chinggis Khān’s violent invasion of the Muslim world, and especially the annihilation, in 656/1258, of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate by his grandson, Hülegü (r. 654–63/1256–65), earned him the reputation of an arch-enemy of Islam. With the Islamisation of his descendants—in Iran in the late seventh/thirteenth century and in southern Russia and Central Asia in the early to middle eighth/fourteenth century—however, Chinggis Khān became also the revered father and a source of political legitimacy of various Muslim dynasties in the Turco-Iranian world, the Chinggisids. The Chinggisid principle according to which

only descendants of Chinggis Khān may bear the title of *khān* remained in force in Central Asia until the twelfth/eighteenth century, despite various manipulations, and the *yasa* ascribed to him, as well as Mongol political culture and institutions, influenced the legal and political systems of the Uzbeks, the Mughals, and even the Ottomans. The history of Chinggis Khān and his heirs became an integral part of Muslim historiography, and he was recorded in various literary genres and in paintings. With the rise of nationalism in the Muslim world, Chinggis Khān was again made an arch-enemy of Islam, as he is still seen in Arab and Iranian lands. In Turkey and Central Asia, however, his achievements receive greater recognition; in present-day Kazakhstan, he is even considered the father of the nation.

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