Mongolian Women


Two European travelers to lands controlled by the Mongols in Central Asia leave us their documented observations. Both contain impressions about the lives of Mongol women, who at the time had more rights in Mongolia than in China, Europe, or many other cultures. Giovanni DiPlano visited the Mongols between 1245-1247 at Pope Innocent IV’s command. He is credited with being the first European to produce a firsthand report about the Mongols. Marco Polo (1254-1324) was a keen observer of the lives of the women in his detailed account of Mongol life on the steppes in chapter 47 of his book, “Il Milione,” or “The Travels of Marco Polo.”

Giovanni DiPlano Carpini:

“Girls and women ride and gallop as skillfully as men. We even saw them carrying quivers and bows, and the women can ride horses for as long as the men; they have shorter stirrups, handle horses very well, and mind all the property. The Tartar (commonly used term for Mongols) women make everything: skin clothes, shoes, leggings, and everything made of leather. They drive carts and repair them, they load camels, and are quick and vigorous in all their tasks. They all wear trousers, and some of them shoot just like men."

Marco Polo: “Chapter 47: Of the wandering life of the Tartars--of their domestic manners, their food, and the virtue and useful qualities of their women.

“...Now that I have begun speaking of the Tartars, I will tell you more about them. The Tartars never remain fixed, but as the winter approaches remove to the plains of a warmer region, to find sufficient pasture for their cattle; and in summer they frequent cold areas in the mountains, where there is water and verdure, and their cattle are free from the annoyance of horse- flies and other biting insects. During two or three months they go progressively higher and seek fresh pasture, the grass not being adequate in any one place to feed the multitudes of which their herds and flocks consist. Their huts or tents are formed of rods covered with felt, exactly round, and nicely put together, so they can gather them into one bundle, and make them up as packages, which they carry along with them in their migrations upon a sort of car with four wheels. When they have occasion to set them up again, they always make the entrance front to the south. Besides these cars they have a superior kind of vehicle upon two wheels, also covered with black felt so well that they protect those within it from wet during a whole day of rain. These are drawn by oxen and camels, and convey their wives and children, their utensils, and whatever provisions they require.

The women attend to their trading concerns, buy and sell, and provide everything necessary for their husbands and their families; the time of the men is devoted entirely to hunting, hawking, and matters that relate to the military life....Their women are not excelled in the world for chastity and decency. Of conduct, nor for love and duty to their husbands. Infidelity to the marriage bed is regarded by them as a vice not merely dishonorable, but of the most infamous nature; while on the other hand it is admirable to observe the loyalty of the husbands towards their wives, amongst whom, although there are perhaps ten or twenty, there prevails a highly laudable degree of quiet and union. No offensive language is ever heard, their attention being fully occupied with their traffic (as already mentioned) and their several domestic employments, such as the provision of necessary food for the family, the management of the servants, and the care of the children, a common concern. And the virtues of modesty and chastity in the wives are more praiseworthy because the men are allowed the indulgence of taking as many as they choose. Their expense to the husband is not great, and on the other hand the benefit he derives from their trading, and from the occupations in which they are constantly engaged, is considerable; on which account when he receives a young woman in marriage, he pays a dower to her parent. The wife who is the first espoused has the privilege of superior attention, and is held to be the most legitimate, which extends also to the children borne by her. In consequence of this unlimited number of wives, the offspring is more numerous than amongst any other people. Upon the death of the father, the son may take to himself the wives he leaves behind, with the exception of his own mother. They cannot take their sisters to wife, but upon the death of their brothers they can marry their sisters-in-law. Every marriage is solemnized with great ceremony.”
Mongol Soldier

When I was fifteen, my Chinese tribe joined the Mongols. All the tribesmen were dispersed- we were not allowed to stay together because they thought we would feel we were still just a tribe, not "true" Mongols. Without my family, I decided to join the army. My life was humble but I was content. Under Chinggis Khan, I lived as just a number in the ranks, as the army was organized and sub organized into groups. I learned through observation, for there was lots of opportunity for these soldiers to exhibit their tactics.

Soon after I joined the army, we were deployed to help in a string of conquests. First he Tanguts, then the Jin, and finally the Central Asia campaign. I honed my fighting skills through our constant fights and gradually moved up through the ranks. I was put in charge of integrating our new conquests into the Mongol society. I found myself doing to others the same thing I had done to me- I split up families and tribes and sent them across the empire. Just when my life was looking great, I was sent to lead the charge in one last battle. The army was implementing a new approach. Instead of fighting on foot, we rode into battle on horses. We were about to win the battle when a soldier, brandishing his sword, slashed my leg. Unable to walk without a cane, I retired from the army. Now I work to convince young people to become soldiers and help expand the great empire of the Mongols.

The Mongol Warriors were fierce and well schooled in the art of war. From psychological attitude and organised formations to a variety of weaponry and efficiently produced armour. The Mongols were a force to be reckoned with. Skilled archers and horse riders, the Mongolian warriors went up against better armoured opponents and used their battle wiles and tactics to give them a fight advantage. The Mongols were rightly feared opponents in battle. The Mongol learned a lot of their battle skills from their ancestors, and every Mongol, warrior or not was skilled in the use of the bow and arrow, often with deadly accuracy. The training was hard and consistent for them but was not overly strict or disciplined in its routine. Their armour for the time was not as advanced as some, but their production of steel was good and workshops were used to produce the weaponry and armour that the Mongol used in battle.

The Mongol Warrior would fight in an almost regimented fashion with the troops being divided into 10's, 1-00's and 1000's with leaders assigned. Using these formations they were able to use their ranks to separate tasks, from firing the enemy with volleys of arrows to skirmish attacks. From here they could either advance or retreat firing more arrows or move in closer to use their melee weapons to finish their enemies off. The Mongols horses were equipped with stirrups previously invented by the Huns yet relatively unused in other cultures. By having a solid grounding on the feet while riding it allowed the Mongols to twist and contort while firing their bows and arrows giving them a distinct advantage in fast ranged combat. The Various enemies called for different tactics and the Mongols would use their mobility to employ their advance and retreat bow skills to out manoeuvre stronger opponents.

The armour of the Mongol troops was a mix of materials, based on foundation layers of boiled and hardened leather. Steel plates would be added for extra strength in the chest and other parts of the body like the boots and arms. A mix of light and heavy armour would give the Mongols protection against various attacks, while allowing them the flexibility they required to handle their bows.

The Mongol armoury comprised of a variety of bows for reaching a multitude of targets with special ‘howling’ arrows used to disorientate the enemy and cause panic.
**Mongol General**

Subotai was probably the greatest Mongolian general of the period of Mongolian empire and played an important role in its establishment and expansion. He was likely from Uriyangqai, the region lying between the Onon and Kerulen Rivers, and came into the service of the young Mongol chieftain Genghis Khan (r. 1206–27) primarily through a long-term family association. Subotai was an important member of Genghis Khan’s guards by the early part of the 13th century and had already distinguished himself in the latter’s service. In 1204 Genghis Khan defeated the league formed against him by Tayang-qan of the Naiman, with the active participation of Subotai. The future khan’s enemies were now defeated or dead or had migrated out of Mongolia to flee his wrath.

Among those fleeing were a group of Naiman survivors led by Gücülük, and another group of Merkit led by their chief Toqto’a-beki. Since such groups could recuperate quickly, ally with others, and constitute a major threat to Genghis Khan’s new regime, it was vital to pursue them. Charged with the task, among others, were Jebe, another talented Mongolian general, and Subotai, initiating at first a general reconnaissance, then an advance west, extending over a decade and a half.

In 1208 Juji, the oldest son of Genghis Khan, defeated the Merkit group in a great battle on the Irtysh River. Toqto’a-beki was killed but his sons, led by Qudu, took their father’s head with them and fled south into Uighur domains. Sent in pursuit were Jebe and Subotai, securing the submission of the Bešbaliq Uighurs on the way, who participated in a battle against Qudu, who was weakened but escaped, on the banks of the Djem or Cem River (1209).

By that time the situation in eastern Turkistan, long ruled by the Qara-Khitan, was in flux, and the appearance of the Naiman Gücülük further unsettled things. He eventually seized power but even as a refugee constituted a major threat to the new Mongol regime. Faced with a situation beyond their resources, Jebe and Subotai did what good Mongol commanders almost always did: They concentrated against the enemy more easily dealt with, Qudu, and kept the other under close supervision.

Subotai went after Qudu, and Jebe pursued Gücülük as far as he could into Qara-Khitan territory, without coming into conflict with the still powerful Qara-Khitan ruler. Satisfied that his enemy was no longer an immediate threat, Jebe then joined with Subotai to defeat the Merkit survivors once and for all. By this time the Merkit were allied with a group of Qangli, a Turkic people, but they were all but destroyed in the battle (1209) at a site called Jade Valley, in the Chinese sources.

Unfortunately before they could return home, mission accomplished, the two Mongol generals encountered a new, unexpected enemy, the Khwarazm-shah Muhammad, and engaged in a clash with him, which was indecisive. The Mongols withdrew after kindling fake campfires to mask their movements. In the wake of the advances of Jebe and Subotai, the Qangli and Qarluq, another Turkic people, submitted.

Recalled home, both Jebe and Subotai participated in the general assault on the Jin (Chin) dynasty (1125–1234) in China, leading to the fall of the Jin central capital of Zhongdu (Chungtu) in 1215, the real beginning of Mongolian control in China. Sent west again, the two Mongol generals protected Mongol interests there and participated in the final pursuit of Gücülük, leading to his death in 1218. Eastern Turkistan and large chunks of southern Siberia were under Mongol control, making the latter a serious threat to the Khwarazm-shah Muhammad.

War came soon after the famous Otrar Incident (1218), in which some merchants under the protection of the Mongol ruler were massacred at the orders of a local Khwarazmian official. Faced with a general assault from, as was the Mongol custom, as many directions at once as possible, the Khwarazmian empire crumbled and the Khwarazm-shah, now a refugee, died on an island in the Caspian in 1220.

At the suggestion of Subotai, who with Jebe had actively participated in the campaign, the Mongols launched the greatest reconnaissance in force in history, an expedition through northern Iran, into the Caucasus, and then across the south Russian steppe, to link up again with other Mongol armies.
The expedition was a success, although Jebe died. On June 16, 1223, the two generals defeated a Russian allied force on the Kalkha River, the Mongols first encounter with a western power. Subotai participated as a senior commander in the final subjugation of Jin (by 1234).

Although already an old man by 1235, about 59, Subotai was now tapped for his greatest role of all, that of strategic commander for a generalized Mongol advance to secure the palimony ofJuji’s sons, who by tradition, were to receive the most distant pastures of his father in the extreme west of the Mongolian world. As part of this advance, Subotai participated in the Mongol destruction of Kievan Russia (1237–40) and then was called upon to plan an even larger assault, on eastern Europe, during 1241.

Advancing along multiple lines, with coordinated columns, the Mongols overwhelmed all their opponents although the Hungarians proved somewhat tougher than expected, even though the latter were only partially mobilized.

Only the death of Ogotai Khan (r. 1229–41), the successor of Genghis Khan, seems to have prevented an even wider advance. Returning home, Subotai spent his last years either in the Mongolian homeland or on the borders of China. His sons and grandsons continued to serve Mongol rulers, including those of China.
Kublai Khan

A fearless warrior and wise leader, Kublai Khan ruled over the Mongol Empire for many years. Kublai was born and trained in the Mongol tradition, but he came to accept many practices and ideas of his adopted home in China. Throughout his life, he tried to balance these two cultures.

Kublai was born in 1215 to Tolui, a son of Genghis Khan, and Sorghaghtani Beki, a noblewoman. Because Tolui was often away fighting wars, Kublai spent most of his childhood with his mother. According to a Persian historian, she was “extremely intelligent and able and towered above all women in the world.” She was a Christian, and Accepting other religions he learned religious tolerance from her. She was also proud and tough-minded. When Genghis Khan died, and her husband was passed over as his successor, she was determined that her four sons would never suffer that fate. Indeed, all four came to rule different parts of the Mongol Empire.

Kublai grew up to be an able Mongol warrior. He was known for both his skill as a horseman and his great courage. In 1251, his older brother became the ruler, or the Great Khan, of Mongol China. As a result, Kublai led his armies there and experienced his first major success. Following the teachings of his mother, he tolerated all religions in the area, helping to win acceptance of Mongol rule by the Chinese. Also, recognizing that his Mongol followers were better suited to conquer than to rule, he relied on Chinese advisers to help him govern. Success in North China led to greater power. During this time, Kublai also built his famous and luxurious summer palace in Shangdu. By designing the palace in the Chinese style, he showed his subjects that he was adopting Chinese culture.

In 1259, Kublai led one of three Mongol armies into southern China. During the fighting, the Great Khan was killed, and Kublai made a claim to the throne. So did another brother, though, and many Mongols supported that brother. They felt that Kublai was abandoning the old Mongol ways and becoming too Chinese. In the resulting civil war, Kublai emerged victorious but was plagued by challenges from conservative Mongol leaders throughout his reign.

To win their allegiance, Kublai continued the Mongol policy of conquest. His armies won control of southern China, ending the Song Dynasty, in part because he used artillery operated by two Muslim engineers. He also won control of Burma and present-day Vietnam. These successes gained him the support he needed. He did not lose that backing despite suffering disappointment in his attempt to conquer Korea and Japan.

In running his empire, Kublai tried to balance Mongol and Chinese cultures. He adopted the Chinese system of government, had his children given a Chinese education, and even moved the capital from Mongolia to China. However, he imposed a four-level structure on society that put the Mongols at the top and the Chinese at the bottom. He also made sure that top-level government posts were reserved for Mongols or other peoples and not the Chinese.

On the other hand, he took steps to promote the Chinese economy. He created an agency of the government to help farmers learn how to increase their crop production. In addition, he extended the Grand Canal, which made it easier to transport food. Finally, he promoted trade, an activity that traditional Chinese emperors had looked down upon. Kublai’s last years were sad, however. The failures in Japan proved costly, and his monetary policy hurt the Chinese economy. The deaths of his Economic wife and son also took their toll. He died in 1294, having lost his energy and his role in ruling his empire.
Marco Polo

In the middle 13th century the influence of the Mongol Empire established by Genghis Khan stretched from the borders of Poland in the West to the Yellow Sea in the East. Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis, became ruler of the empire in 1260 and proceeded to consolidate his power by relinquishing the Mongol conquests outside China establishing his capital at the site of modern-day Beijing.

Nicolo Polo and his brother Maffeo were Venetian merchants and the equivalent of today's entrepreneurs. In 1260 the brothers traveled overland to the Mongol capital and remained in the Khan's court until their return to Venice in 1269. In 1271, the merchants again made the hazardous journey to Kublai Khan's court this time taking Nicolo's seventeen-year-old son Marco with them. It took 3 1/2 years for the adventurers to reach their destination. They stayed with the Khan for 17 years and then endured a three-year return journey to Venice where they arrived in 1295. Marco Polo immediately impressed the Khan with his intelligence and knowledge of language and was soon providing invaluable service as the Khan's emissary and political adviser. Marco Polo's description of his travels aroused the interest of Medieval Europe in the Orient and later inspired Christopher Columbus to search for a Western sea route that ultimately led to the discovery of America.

A Great Battle

In 1287 Marco Polo accompanied Kublai Khan and his army on an expedition to destroy the forces of the Khan's uncle and rival Nayan. Nayan had gathered an army of 300,000 with the intent of wresting power from his nephew. Alerted to the threat, Kublai quickly marched north at the head of a force of some 460,000 troops surprising the usurper, as he and his army lay encamped in a shallow valley. We join Marco's story in the early morning as Kublai Khan looks down on his enemy in the valley below:

"What shall I say about it? When day had well broken, there was the Kaan with all his host upon a hill overlooking the plain where Nayan lay in his tent, in all security, without the slightest thought of any one coming thither to do him hurt. In fact, this confidence of his was such that he kept no vedettes whether in front or in rear; for he knew nothing of the coming of the Great Kaan, Owing to all the approaches having been completely occupied as I told you. Moreover, the place was in a remote wilderness, more than thirty marches from the Court, though the Kaan had made the distance in twenty, so eager was he to come to battle with Nayan.

And what shall I tell you next? The Kaan was there on the hill, mounted on a great wooden bartizan, (a wooden defensive tower) which was borne by four well-trained elephants, and over him was hoisted his standard, so high aloft that it could be seen from all sides. His troops were ordered in battles of 30,000 men apiece; and a great part of the horsemen had each a foot-soldier armed with a lance set on the crupper behind him (for it was thus that the foot-men were disposed of); and the whole plain seemed to be covered with his forces. So it was thus that the Great Kaan's army was arrayed for battle.

When Nayan and his people saw what had happened, they were sorely confounded, and rushed in haste to arms. Nevertheless they made them ready in good style and formed their troops in an orderly manner. And when all were in battle array on both sides as I have told you, and nothing remained but to fall to blows, then might you have heard a sound arise of many instruments of various music, and of the voices of the whole of the two hosts loudly singing. For this is a custom of the Tartars, that before they join battle they all unite in singing and playing on a certain two-stringed instrument of theirs, a thing right pleasant to hear. And so they continue in their array of battle, singing and playing in this pleasing manner, until the great Naccara (giant battle drums) of the Prince is heard to sound. As soon as that begins to sound the fight also begins on both sides; and in no case before the Prince's Naccara sounds dare any commence fighting.

So then, as they were thus singing and playing, though ordered and ready for battle, the great Naccara of the Great Khan began to sound. And that of Nayan also began to sound. And thenceforward the din of battle began to be heard loudly from this side and from that. And they rushed to work so doughtily with their bows and their maces, with their lances and swords, and with the arblasts of the footmen, that it was a wondrous sight to see. Now might you behold such flights of arrows from this side and from that, that the whole heaven was canopied with them and they fell like rain. Now might you see on this side and on that full many a cavalier and men-at-arms fall slain, insomuch that the whole field seemed covered with them. From this side and from that such cries arose from the crowds of the wounded and dying that
had God thundered, you would not have heard Him! For fierce and furious was the battle, and quarter there was none given.

Kublai Khan

But why should I make a long story of it? You must know that it was the most parlous and fierce and fearful battle that ever has been fought in our day. Nor have there ever been such forces in the field in actual fight, especially of horsemen, as were then engaged - for, taking both sides, there were not fewer than 760,000 horsemen, a mighty force! and that without reckoning the footmen, who were also very numerous. The battle endured with various fortune on this side and on that from morning till noon. But at the last, by God's pleasure and the right that was on his side, the Great Khan had the victory, and Nayan lost the battle and was utterly routed. For the army of the Great Kaan performed such feats of arms that Nayan and his host could stand against them no longer, so they turned and fled. But this availed nothing for Nayan; for he and all the barons with him were taken prisoners, and had to surrender to the Kaan with all their arms.

Now you must know that Nayan was a baptized Christian, and bore the cross on his banner; but this nought availed him, seeing how grievously he had done amiss in rebelling against his Lord. For he was the Great Kaan's liegeman, and was bound to hold his lands of him like all his ancestors before him."
Pope Innocent IV

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ROMAN POPE AND MONGOL GREAT KHAN

A Letter from Pope Innocent IV to the King of the Tartars

Seeing that not only men but even irrational animals, nay, the very elements which go to make up the world machine, are united by a certain innate law after the manner of the celestial spirits, all of which God the Creator has divided into choirs in the enduring stability of peaceful order, it is not without cause that we are driven to express in strong terms our amazement that you, as we have heard, have invaded many countries belonging both to Christians and to others and are laying them waste in a horrible desolation, and with a fury still unabated you do not cease from stretching out your destroying hand to more distant lands, but, breaking the bond of natural ties, sparing neither sex nor age, you rage against all indiscriminately with the sword of chastisement.

We, therefore, following the example of the King of Peace, and desiring that all men should live united in concord in the fear of God, do admonish, beg and earnestly beseech all of you that for the future you desist entirely from assaults of this kind and especially from the persecution of Christians, and that after so many and such grievous offences you conciliate by a fitting penance the wrath of Divine Majesty, which without doubt you have seriously aroused by such provocation; nor should you be emboldened to commit further savagery by the fact that when the sword of your might has raged against other men Almighty God has up to the present allowed various nations to fall before your face; for sometimes He refrains from chastising the proud in this world for the moment, for this reason, that if they neglect to humble themselves of their own accord He may not only no longer put off the punishment of their wickedness in this life but may also take greater vengeance in the world to come.

On this account we have thought fit to send to you our beloved son [Giovanni DiPlano Carpini—see Strayer, p. 336] and his companions the bearers of this letter, men remarkable for their religious spirit, comely in their virtue and gifted with a knowledge of Holy Scripture; receive them kindly and treat them with honour out of reverence for God, indeed as if receiving us in their persons, and deal honestly with them in those matters of which they will speak to you on our behalf, and when you have had profitable discussions with them concerning the aforesaid affairs, especially those pertaining to peace, make fully known to us through these same Friars what moved you to destroy other nations and what your intentions are for the future, furnishing them with a safe-conduct and other necessities on both their outward and return journey, so that they can safely make their way back to our presence when they wish.

Lyons, 13th March 1245

A Letter from Kuyuk Khan to Pope Innocent IV

By the power of the Eternal Heaven, we are the all-embracing Khan of all the Great Nations. It is our command:

This is a decree, sent to the great Pope that he may know and pay heed. After holding counsel with the monarchs under your suzerainty, you have sent us an offer of subordination which we have accepted from the hands of your envoy. If you should act up to your word, then you, the great Pope, should come in person with the monarchs to pay us homage and we should thereupon instruct you concerning the commands of the Yasak.

Furthermore, you have said it would be well for us to become Christians. You write to me in person about this matter, and have addressed to me a request. This, your request, we cannot understand.
Furthermore, you have written me these words: "You have attacked all the territories of the Magyars and other Christians, at which I am astonished. Tell me, what was their crime?" These, your words, we likewise cannot understand. Chinggis Khan and Ogatai Khakan revealed the commands of Heaven. But those whom you name would not believe the commands of Heaven. Those of whom you speak showed themselves highly presumptuous and slew our envoys. Therefore, in accordance with the commands of the Eternal Heaven, the inhabitants of the aforesaid countries have been slain and annihilated. If not by the command of Heaven, how can anyone slay or conquer out of his own strength?

And when you say: "I am a Christian. I pray to God. I arraign and despise others," how do you know who is pleasing to God and to whom He allots His grace? How can you know it, that you speak such words?

Thanks to the power of the Eternal Heaven, all lands have been given to us from sunrise to sunset. How could anyone act other than in accordance with the commands of Heaven? Now your own upright heart must tell you: "We will become subject to you, and will place our powers at your disposal." You in person, at the head of the monarchs, all of you, without exception, must come to tender us service and pay us homage; then only will we recognize your submission. But if you do not obey the commands of Heaven, and run counter to our orders, we shall know that you are our foe.

That is what we have to tell you. If you fail to act in accordance therewith, how can we foresee what will happen to you? Heaven alone knows.
Prince of Kiev

The Effects of the Mongol Empire on Russia/Kiev

Introduction

Yet before this, the Rus had a chance to change their fate. It was around 1219 when the Mongols first entered the areas nearest Kievan Russia in a move against the Polovtsy, who, in turn, asked for the assistance of the Rus princes. A council of princes convened in Kiev to consider the request, an act which worried the Mongols. According to historical sources, the Mongols declared that they had not attacked the cities or people of the Rus nor attacked their lands. The Mongol envoys requested peace of the Russian princes. Yet the princes did not trust the Mongols, suspecting that the Mongol advance would continue into Rus. Subsequently, the Mongol emissaries were promptly killed and any chance for peace was destroyed at the hands of the princes of the fractured Kievian state. Within twenty years, Batu Khan marched from Mongolia with an army of 200,000 men. One by one, Russian principalities such as Ryazan, Moscow, Vladimir, Suzdal, and Rostov fell to the Batu and his armies. The armies looted and razed the cities, slaughtered the people, and took many as prisoners and slaves. The Mongols eventually captured, sacked, and destroyed Kiev, the symbolic center of Kievan Russia. Only outlying northwesterly principalities such as Novgorod, Pskov, and Smolensk survived the onslaught, though these cities would endure indirect subjugation and become tributaries of the Golden Horde. Perhaps a decision by the Russian princes to make peace could have averted this. However, that was not the case and for their miscalculations, Russia would be forever changed in terms of its religion, art, language, government, and political geography.

The Orthodox Church

With the initial Mongol onslaught, many churches and monasteries were looted and destroyed while countless adherents to the church and scores of clergy were killed; those who survived often were taken prisoner and enslaved (Dmytryshyn, 121). The mere shock of the force and size of the Mongol army was devastating. The distress was just as political and economic in nature as it was social and spiritual. The Mongol forces claimed that they were sent by God, and the Russians believed that the Mongols were indeed sent by God as a punishment for their sins. The Orthodox Church would become a powerful beacon during the “darker” years of the Mongol subjugation. The Russian people would eventually turn inward, seeking solace in their faith and looking to the Orthodox Church for guidance and support. The shock of being conquered by this steppe people would plant the seeds of Russian monasticism, which would in turn play a major role in the conversion of such people as the Finno-Ugrian tribes and the Zyrians (now known as the Komi), as well as the colonization of the northern regions of Russia (Vernadsky, 379).

The humiliation suffered by the princes and the town assemblies caused fragmentation of their political authority. This loss of political unity allowed the Church to rise as an embodiment of both religious and national identity while filling the gap of lost political identity (Riasanovsky, 57). The unique legal concept of iarlyk (pronounced ‘yarligh’), or charter of immunity, also contributed to the strengthening of the Church. With the reign of Mönke-Temür, a iarlyk was issued to Metropolitan Kirill for the Orthodox Church in 1267. While the church had been under the de facto protection of the Mongols ten years earlier (from the 1257 census conducted under Khan Berke), this iarlyk formally decreed protection for the Orthodox Church. More importantly, it officially exempted the church from any form of taxation by Mongol or Russian authorities (Ostrowski, 19). And permitted that clergymen not be registered during censuses and that they were furthermore not liable for forced labor or military service (Hosking, 57).

As expected, the result of the iarlyk issued to the Orthodox Church was profound. For the first time, the church would become less dependent on princely powers than in any other period of Russian history. The Orthodox Church was able to acquire and consolidate land at a considerable rate, one that would put the church in an extremely powerful position in the centuries following the Mongol takeover. The charter of immunity strictly forbade both Mongol and Russian tax agents from seizing church lands or demanding any services from the Orthodox Church. This was enforced by a simple penalty – death (Vernadsky, 377).
Another prominent reason the church developed so quickly laid in its mission— to spread Christianity and convert those still practicing paganism in the countryside. To strengthen the internal structure of the Orthodox Church, metropolitans traveled extensively throughout the land to alleviate administrative deficiencies and to oversee the activities of the bishops and priests. Moreover, the relative security (economic, military, and spiritual) surrounding hermitages lured peasants from the countryside. As this heightened urban development within the periphery of church properties destroyed the peaceful atmosphere the hermitage was originally established to give, members of the monastery would move further out into the wilderness to establish a new hermitage, beginning the process anew. This system of founding religious settlements continued for some time and contributed to the augmentation of the Orthodox Church (Vernadsky, 377-8).

One last significant change that occurred was the location of the center of the Orthodox Church. Before the Mongols invaded Russian lands, Kiev was the ecclesiastical center. Following the destruction of Kiev, the Holy See moved to Vladimir in 1299, and eventually to Moscow in 1322 (Hosking, 72), helping to bolster the importance of Moscow significantly.

Art

It was during the second half of the Mongol rule in the mid-fourteenth century that Russian iconography and fresco painting began once again to flourish. Theophanes the Greek arrived in the late 1300s. He decorated and worked on various churches throughout the land, especially in Novgorod and Nizhniy Novgorod. In Moscow, he painted the iconostasis for the Church of the Annunciation as well as worked on the Church of the Archangel Michael (Martin, 233). A few decades after Theophanes’ arrival, Rublev would become one of his most aspiring and important students. Iconography came to Russia from Byzantium in the tenth century, but the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century cut Russia off from Byzantium.

Language

While the linguistic effects may seem at first trivial, such impacts on language help us to determine and understand to what extent one empire had on another people or group of people—in terms of administration, military, trade—as well as to what geographical extent the impact included. Indeed, the linguistic and even socio-linguistic impacts were great, as the Russians borrowed thousands of words, phrases, other significant linguistic features from the Mongol and the Turkic languages that were united under the Mongol Empire (Dmytryshyn, 123). Listed below are a few examples of some that are still in use. All came from various parts of the Horde.

Administration and Institutions

Images of totalitarianism spring to mind when one at first ponders that which is Russia: from the current times of Vladimir Putin’s presidency, to when the Soviet Union was still a nation, and even before to Imperial Russia. However, in Kievan Rus, a form of democracy did exist. Comprised of all free male citizens, the veche (вече) was a town assembly that met to discuss such matters as war and peace, law, and invitation or expulsion of princes to the veche’s respective town; all cities in Kievan Russia had a veche. It was essentially a forum for civic affairs to discuss and resolve problems. However, this democratic institution suffered severe curtailment under the Mongols.

By far the most influential of the assemblies were in Novgorod and Kiev. In Novgorod, a special veche bell (in other towns, church bells were ordinary used for this purpose) was created for calling the townspeople together for an assembly, and in theory, anyone could ring it. In the times after the Mongols had conquered the majority of Kievan Russia, veches ceased to exist in all cities except Novgorod, Pskov, and others in the northwestern regions. Veches in those cities continued to function and develop until Moscow itself subjugated them in the late fifteenth century. However, today the spirit of the veche as a public forum has been revived in several cities across Russia, including especially Novgorod.

Of great importance to the Mongol overlords was census tabulation, which allowed for the collection of taxes. To support censuses, the Mongols imposed a special dual system of regional administration headed by military governors, the basqaqi (баскаки), and/or civilian governors, the darugi (даругы). Essentially, the basqaqi were given the responsibility of directing the activities of rulers in the areas that were resistant or had challenged Mongol authority. The darugi were civilian governors that oversaw those regions of the empire that had submitted without a fight or that were considered
already pacified to Mongol forces (Ostrowski, 273). However, the offices of the basqaqi and the darugi, while occasionally overlapping in authority and purpose did not necessarily always rule at the same time.

As we know from history, the ruling princes of Kievan Russia did not trust the Mongolian ambassadors that came to discuss peace with them in the early 1200s; the princes regrettably put the ambassadors of Genghis Khan to the sword and before long paid dearly. Thus, in the thirteenth century the basqaqi were stationed in the conquered lands to subjugate the people and authorize even the day-to-day activities of the princes. Furthermore, in addition to ensuring the the census, the basqaqi oversaw conscription of the local populace (Martin, 150).

Existing sources and research indicates that the basqaqi had largely disappeared from the Rus’ lands by the mid-fourteenth century, as the Rus more or less accepted the Mongol overlords. As the basqaqi left, the darugi replaced them in power. However, unlike the basqaqi, the darugi were not based in the confines of the lands of the Rus; in fact, they were stationed in Sarai, the old capital of the Golden Horde located not far from present-day Volgograd. The darugi functioned mainly as experts on the lands of the Rus’ and advised the khan accordingly. While the responsibility of collecting and delivering tribute and conscripts had belonged to the basqaqi, with the transition from the basqaqi to the darugi these duties we actually transferred to the princes themselves when the khan saw that the princes could complete such tasks (Martin, 151).

The first census taken by the Mongols occurred in 1257, just seventeen years after their conquest of Rus’ lands. The population was divided into multiples of ten, a system that had been employed by the Chinese and later adopted by the Mongols who extended its use over the entirety of their empire; the census served as the primary purpose for conscription as well as for taxation. This practice was carried on by Moscow after it stopped acknowledging the Horde in 1480. The practice fascinated foreign visitors to Russia, to whom large-scale censuses were still unknown. One such visitor, Sigismund von Herberstein from Hapsburg made note of the fact that every two or three years, the prince conducted a census throughout the land (Wittfogel, 638). Census taking would not become widespread in Europe until the early 19th century. One significant observation that we must make is that the extent to which the Russians so thoroughly conducted the census was not achieved elsewhere in Europe for another 120 years or so, during the Age of Absolutism. The impact of the Mongol Empire at least in this area was obviously deep and effective and helped to create a strong central government for Russia.

One important institution that the basqaqi oversaw and maintained was the yam (a system of posts), which was constructed to provide food, bedding, horses, and either coaches or sleds, according to the season (Hosking, 89). At first constructed by the Mongols, the yam allowed relatively rapid movement of important communiqués between the khans and their local leaders, as well as a method of quickly dispatching envoys, local or foreign, between the various principalities across the vast the empire. Each post had horses ready for use by authorized persons as well as to replace tired horses for especially long journeys. Each post was usually located about a day’s ride from the nearest post. The local people were obliged to maintain the posts, to feed the horses, and to meet the needs of emissaries traveling through their posts.

The system was quite efficient. Another report by emissary Sigismund von Herberstein of the Hapsburgs stated that the yam system allowed him to travel 500 kilometers (from Novgorod to Moscow) within 72 hours – much faster than anywhere in Europe (Wittfogel, 639-40). The yam system helped the Mongols to maintain tight control over their empire. During the twilight years of the Mongol’s hold on Russia in the late fifteenth century, Prince Ivan III decided to continue the use of the idea of the system of the yam in order to keep an established system of communication and intelligence. However, the idea of a postal system as we know it today would not come into existence until after the death of Peter the Great in the early 1700s.

Some such institutions brought to Russia by the Mongols transformed to meet Russian needs over time and lasted for many centuries after the Golden Horde. These greatly augmented the development and expansion of the intricate bureaucracy of the later, imperial Russia.
Conclusion

As the evidence stands, the effects of the Mongol invasion were many, spread across the political, social, and religious facets of Russia. While some of those effects, such as the growth of the Orthodox Church generally had a relatively positive effect on the lands of the Rus, other results, such as the loss of the veche system and centralization of power assisted in halting the spread of traditional democracy and self-government for the various principalities. From the influences on the language and the form of government, the very impacts of the Mongol invasion are still evident today. Perhaps given the chance to experience the Renaissance, as did other western European cultures, the political, religious, and social thought of Russia would greatly differ from that of the reality of today. The Russians, through the control of the Mongols who had adopted many ideas of government and economics from the Chinese, became perhaps a more Asiatic nation in terms of government, while the deep Christian roots of the Russians established and helped maintain a link with Europe. It was the Mongol invasion which, perhaps more than any other historical event, helped to determine the course of development that Russian culture, political geography, history, and national identity would take.
The almost 250-year Mongol rule over Russia was precipitated by two separate invasions. Following a successful invasion of the Caucasus in 1221, the Mongols invaded a small part of Russia in 1222. Although a small contingent of the Mongol army succeeded against the ruling princes, they did not establish control over Russia and instead disappeared into the steppe. It was not until 1237 that a sizable Mongol army commenced its invasion of Russia proper, to which all of Russia fell and came under the dominion of the Golden Horde.

Having conquered the Muslim empire of the shah of Khwarazm, Jalal-ad-Din Mengubirdi, otherwise known as Sultan Muhammad II, Genghis Khan charged his capable generals Jebe and Subotai to march through the hazardous Caucasus Mountains in the direction of Russia. The Caucasian tribes, the Alans (Ossetians), the Circassians, and the Lezgians, together with the Polovsti, formed an alliance and put up a fierce resistance to the Mongol invaders on the southern Russian steppe in 1221. The first battle between the Mongols and Caucasian alliance proved indecisive, but Jebe and Subotai had no intentions of withdrawing from the engagement.

Instead the Mongol generals resorted to using the strategy of divide and conquer. Jebe and Subotai persuaded their nomadic brethren, the Polovsti, to remain neutral by reminding them of their common Turkic-Mongol fellowship and also by promising to share with them the spoils of victory over the Caucasian tribes. With the success of the subtle diplomacy, the generals returned to battle the Caucasian tribes with greater ferocity and overwhelmingly crushed the stubborn resistance.

The Mongol generals then turned against the Polovsti, who, in defeat, fled in the direction of Galacia and Kiev and appealed to the Russian princes—Mstislav Stary of Kiev, Mstislav Udaloi of Galacia, and Vladimir of Suzdal—for intervention. Two sets of crucial factors persuaded the Russian princes to join forces to help the Polovsti. First Prince Mstislav Udaloi was obliged to help because Kotian, the khan of the Polovsti, was his father-in-law. And second according to the Novgorodian First Chronicle, the Mongols were unknown to the Russians—they did not know where they came from, what religion they practiced, or what language they spoke.

Fearing that the Mongols would grow stronger if they did not intervene, the princes Mstislav and Vladimir I (Vladimir the Great), together with the Polovsti, forged the Russo-Polovsti alliance. In early 1222 the Mongols received news of the Russo-Polovsti alliance and sent a 10-member diplomatic envoy to negotiate with Princes Mstislav and Vladimir. The Mongols claimed to have no desire to war with the princes and did not harbor any intentions to conquer their lands or cities.

In the manner similar to the way they isolated the Polovsti from the Caucasian tribes, the Mongol diplomats urged the princes to defeat the Polovsti and take the spoils of victory for themselves and offered to enter into a peace treaty with the Russians. The princes, suspecting a Mongol trick, executed the diplomatic envoy, an act that was considered by the Mongols to be unforgivable.

A strong Russian-Polovsti army of 30,000 soldiers amassed on the Dnieper. Outnumbered by more than 10,000, Jebe and Subotai ordered the Mongol army to retreat. They dispatched a second diplomatic envoy to meet with the Russians and reproached the Russians for the murder of the first delegation. The second envoy returned unharmed and carried a message for the Mongol army—the Russians feared that, after conquering the Polovsti, the Mongol army would attack them. Hence, they would only be happy if the Mongol army returned to the steppe.

As the main Mongol army retreated from the forest, its rearguard kept a watchful eye on the Russian mobilization. War-hardened and accustomed to being outnumbered, Jebe and Subotai managed to evade the Russians for more than nine days. This contrasted sharply with the attitudes of the Russian princes. The Russian army lacked strategic coordination because Mstislav of Galacia and Mstislav of Kiev disputed over the ways to engage the Mongol army.

In pursuit of the Mongol army, the Russians were led farther and farther into the steppe and away from their supply lines. Prince Mstislav of Galacia, accompanied by Danil of Volhynia, commanded the first Russian battle with the Mongol army, defeating the Mongol rearguard at the east of the bend in the Dnieper. Wanting to claim the glory all for himself, Prince Mstislav Udaloi decided to pursue the main Mongol army. Without informing the rest of the Russian army or waiting for reinforcements to arrive, the prince took his army, the Volynian and Polovsti soldiers, across the river Kalka. Overconfident from his victory over the Mongol rearguard, Prince Mstislav failed to consolidate his defenses after crossing the Kalka and fell into a Mongol trap. The Mongol retreat was a strategy aimed at isolating the army commanded by Prince Mstislav of Galacia from those commanded by Prince Mstislav Stary of Kiev, which was concentrated some distance away from the river Kalka.

In mid-June 1222 Jebe and Subotai seized the advantage and ordered an all-out assault on the Russian front and flanks. Prince Mstislav of Kiev watched from the western banks of the Kalka as the Mongols launched a ferocious attack against the forces of Mstislav of Galacia. As the Polovsti fled and confusion set in within the Russian ranks, the army of Prince Mstislav of Galacia, unable
to maneuver effectively in the marshy terrain, was cut into pieces. The prince, along with the wounded Prince Daniil of Volhynia, a small remnant of his troops, and what remained of the Polovst, managed to escape.

Realizing that a hasty retreat from a swift army is guaranteed to be fatal, Prince Mstislav of Kiev ordered his forces to fortify themselves on a commanding hilltop. But before the prince could securely establish his defenses, Jebe and Subotai attacked. After three days of ferocious Mongol assault, Prince Mstislav of Kiev surrendered on the condition that he and his army would be permitted to return to Kiev unharmed. The Mongol army accepted, but, as soon as the Russian army disarmed, Prince Mstislav of Kiev was executed and his forces slaughtered.

Fearing that the Mongols would cross the Dnieper, Prince Mstislav of Galacia and his remaining forces destroyed all the ships. The forces of Jebe and Subotai never crossed the Dnieper and, instead, returned to join the main Mongol army stationed in the steppes east of the Syr Darya River. Thus by the end of 1222 the first invasion of Russia ended as swiftly as it had begun. In the winter of 1227, well after the death of Genghis Khan in 1227, the Mongol army returned. In the context of a greater invasion of Europe, the Mongol army, headed by the veteran Subotai, amassed some 150,000 to 200,000 warriors.

The large army crossed the frozen Volga and attacked the Russian eastern principality of Riazan because it was considered the weakest. As the Mongol army advanced, Prince Roman rushed to Suzdal to ask Prince Yuri for help, which was denied. Instead Grand Prince Yuri suggested that the four princes of the vassal state, Princes Yuri, Oleg, Roman, and Yaroslav, end their squabbling and join forces against the Mongols. After defeating the Russian army at Riazan, the Mongol army constructed a wooden palisade that encircled the town capital of Riazan.

After five days of bitter fighting, Riazan was finally captured. The trapped princes and their families were executed, the young women and nuns were systematically raped, and the entire population was massacred. In the winter of 1237–38, under the command of Batu Khan, the Mongol army attacked Suzdal and its capital Vladimir. Although his territory and city came under siege, Grand Prince Yuri did not intervene. Batu Khan targeted Novgorod while Subotai attempted to draw Grand Prince Yuri into battle. Novgorod, particularly the fortress of Torzhok, fought and resisted the forces of Batu Khan.

The ensuing battle lasted two weeks, enough time for an early spring to arrive. The spring thaw flooded most of the southern terrain and made it impossible for Batu Khan to advance. Batu Khan was forced to abandon his siege on Novgorod and retreat to the southern steppe. In March 1238 Grand Prince Yuri and the Suzdalian army perished at the decisive battle against Subotai on the river Sit. With the strongest section of Russia conquered within several months, the Mongolian army sacked the state of Chernigov.

Through the summer of 1239 and for one and a half years, the Mongol army rested and sought comfort in the lush steppeland of western Ukraine, in preparation for another campaign. In summer 1240 the Mongol army resumed their offensive against Russia. The cities of Chernigov and Pereyaslav were captured. On December 6, 1240, Batu Khan arrived with his army at Kiev to reinforce the Mongol vanguard commanded by Mongke Khan.

After Dimitri, the governor of Kiev, had executed the Mongol ambassadors, the Mongol army stormed the city. Apart from the cathedral of Saint Sophia, the entire city was leveled and its population exterminated. By 1242 the Mongol army had captured all of Russia. Batu Khan chose Old Sarai, in the lower Volga, to establish the headquarters of the Mongol dominion over Russia, which became known as the Golden Horde.

The Golden Horde, as a center for the Mongol administration of Russia, endured for almost 250 years. A daruga handled Russian political affairs and the collection of an annual tribute. To become eligible to take office, Russian princes had to journey to the Golden Horde to pay obeisance to Mongol overlords. Contented with being overlords, the Mongols never established a dynasty in Russia.

Occasionally, Russian military units had to serve alongside the Mongol army. Despite an attempt by Prince Dimitri of Moscow to wrestle Russia from Mongol control in 1330, they managed to rule and exact tribute for a further century. Ivan III of Moscow finally broke Mongol rule over Russia in 1480. Failing to check the emergence and rise of the Muscovite state, the seed of modern Russia, the Mongols ceded control.
For 200 years, the Russian nation was submerged as a part of the Mongol empire, the largest land empire in his

Many debates have been registered concerning the legacy of colonial rule, it might be sufficient to say that occupation by force under the papacy would have been more destructive, and would have eliminated the Orthodox faith forever, at least as a social and political force. The Eurasian movement has sought to tease out the more positive elements in Mongol overlordship, and have largely depended on the rather deferential treatment of the Orthodox church as a result.

According to medieval Chinese sources, the Mongols were considered a violent, warlike and a-cultural people. They were dedicated solely to the raising of horses, herding and marauding. But sometime in the early 13th century, a gifted leader named Genghis the Khan (1154-1227) rose and unified the scattered tribes of the Mongolian plain. The central tribes of this plain destroyed the southern groups, and slowly, this disconnected group of herders were molded into a band of horsemen that the world had never seen.

The unified Horde moved South, into China, and then west, through India, Central Asia and the Middle East. The Turks, threatened, made a hasty alliance with some of the major Russian cities. Russia’s disunity, again, served the country poorly. The alliance did not wait for the Kievan reinforcements in 1224, the divided Russian principalities could not decide on a proper chain of command, and the results are known to all. At the death of Genghis in 1227, the Horde disappears for about 13 years. However, the Horde was merely electing another ruler, and the return of the Mongols this time was meant to be permanent. The major Mongol targets were Riazan and Suzdal, who fell in succession, taking some of the best troops from the Russian coalition. By 1240, most of Russia had been taken, and the southern regions of the country were absorbed into the empire of the Khan. Novgorod was never taken, largely due to the marshy approaches to the city, but they were still forced to pay a substantial tribute for their shaky independence. The Holy City of Kiev was sacked in 1240.

The reasons for the defeat of Russia are many. The Mongols had a huge advantage in numbers. Various estimates of Mongol troop strength hover between 300,000 and up. These forces were massive for the time. The Mongol horsemen were completely unified under the Khan, and operated as a single unit. Russia herself was the polar opposite, ruled by jealous princes, divided and as concerned about precedent as about military victory.

The fact that nearly all adult males were horseman warriors, and were taught horseman shop from toddlerhood, the Mongol forces moved quickly. This speed, as much as their martial skill, make it impossible for a concerted defense to be erected, and was too fact for the formation of any alliances. By the time the horsemen had reached Slavic lands, they comprised a hardened, experienced group of men whose bond with their horses was nearly an extension of their body. By 1250, the Mongols were quite literally invincible. The Horde was settled on the Volga, making money through water based trade, and was called the Golden Horde, with its capital at Sarai (literally, the castle). Within less than a generation (by 1260), Khan Uzbek declared independence from Mongolia, and ruled a prosperous trading empire on the Volga.

The influence of the Horde is another matter, and we might give short summary of some of the literature in this field. Most scholars agree that there was little direct political change. Overwhelmingly, the Mongols were encamped permanently in the south, and would only venture north if taxes and tributes were not paid on time.
What is normally considered in lectures such as this is the role of Russians under the indirect sovereignty of Sarai. And here, several issues can be summarized. Firstly, the Khan at the castle was the final arbiter of all political disputes. Given the absurdity and fratricide of the old system, this is far from a negative attribute. If anything, the Khan gave the Russian nation its social salvation in that only a single ruler can provide the necessary military unity to survive in the tough neighborhood of central Eurasia.

Secondly, the Khans were convinced of their worldwide mission. Genghis, in his correspondence with the papacy, was firm in that his military conquests came into existence because God had provided such victory’s to him.

Thirdly, the Khans regularly played their Russian territories and interests off the European powers of the day. The Khans were major European players as much as Asian ones, partially because of their long standing relations with the Genoese, Armenians and Greek merchants. Many European players, including the papacy, had a financial interest in the friendship of Sarai on the Volga, a point often played down in the literature.

Fourthly, the Mongols developed the head tax, rather than the land tax, a practice to be resurrected later by Peter I. This tax was far heavier than Russians had been used to, and therefore, it was largely these payments that sparked off local revolts. The Mongols used local nobles and princes as their tax gatherers, and it is this practice that will see the end of Mongol domination, but it will also create synergy between Russian and Mongol elites, a synergy that will give birth to modern Russia.

Fifth, there was some limited intermarriage between Russians and Mongols, showing that race was not a factor in Russian elite marriage choices, but political expediency and class might well have been at the center. The Mongols also used the death penalty, a practice rare in early medieval Russia. The peasant classes remained unchanged under Mongol rule, though their tax burdens grew. Russians were forced to supply military forces to Mongol rulers.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this: Russia was now alien from the west and its ways. While this is true, it can be overdrawn: Sarai was too close to western merchant interests for this statement to be true absolutely, however, it is true in the sense that Russia will always be “different” from the west. It remains true that the best writers and craftsmen in Russia were forcibly resettled in China and along the southern Volga (i.e. Astrakhan) to work for Mongol lords, a significant “brain drain” that harmed Russian development over the next 200 years. The capital that might have gone for economic development was now going for the financial needs of the increasingly bureaucratic anc sedentary horde in Sarai, again, leading to a state of underdevelopment. However, the later centralization of power at Moscow as given its genesis under Mongol rule, and the justification for the weakening of boyar power as well. The Mongols made certain that Moscow would win its fight with Novgorod, which itself separated Russia from the west in many respects. Had Novgorod won the war with the Muscovites, it is conceivable that Slavic peoples would have become satellites of the German, Dutch, Swedish and Danish merchant classes.

The church remained the one institution free of Mongol influence and free, more importantly, of Mongol taxatio. Some local chroniclers even hinted that the Mongols were intimidated by the popularity and holiness of Orthodox monastics, and sought their prayers and intercessions. If true, this shows, without a doubt, of the immense, holy presence of Orthodox monks. No one else made such an impression in the Mongol horsemen.
The Mongols gave strong support to the peasants and peasant economy of China, believing that the success of the peasant economy would bring in additional tax revenues and ultimately benefit the Mongols themselves.

Relief measures — including tax remissions, as well as granaries for the storage of surplus grain — were thus provided for peasant farmers in North China, in the areas that had been devastated during the war between the Mongols and the Chinese. And early in their reign, in 1262, the Mongols prohibited the nomads' animals from roaming in the farmlands and thereby undermining the peasant economy.

The Mongols also sought to help the peasants organize themselves and initiated a cooperative rural organization — a self-help organization comprising about 50 households under the direction of a village leader.

These rural cooperatives had as their principle purpose the stimulation of agricultural production and the promotion of land reclamation. The village/cooperative leader had the task of guiding and helping his organization through everything from farming, planting trees, and opening up barren areas, to improving measures for flood control and increasing silk production. In addition, the cooperatives conducted a periodic census and assisted in surveillance over recalcitrant Chinese and other possible saboteurs of Mongol rule. They also served as a kind of charity granary to assist the unfortunate during poor harvests or droughts, providing food and other supplies to orphans, widows, and the elderly.

The Mongols also devised a fixed system of taxation for the peasants. Rather than having to anticipate unpredictable and extraordinary levies, as in the past system they had much resented, peasants under the Mongol system could know exactly how much would be required of them.

Perhaps the one area in which the Mongols did not much take into account the interests of the peasantry was labor obligations. During their rule the Mongols embarked on a series of extraordinary public works projects throughout China, including the extension of the Grand Canal to Daidu (present-day Beijing), a vast postal-station system, and the building of a capital city in Daidu. All these projects required vast investments of labor, and most of this labor was recruited from the peasantry. This policy became one that generated much animosity from the peasant ranks.
Until about 20 years ago, most scholars of Mongol-era China emphasized the destructive influence of Mongol rule.

One major scholar of Chinese history even wrote: "The Mongols brought violence and destruction to all aspects of China's civilization. [They were] insensitive to Chinese cultural values, distrustful of Chinese influences, and inept heads of Chinese government." This assessment fits in with the traditional evaluation of the Mongols as barbarians interested primarily in maiming, plundering, destroying, and killing.

As a 13th-century Persian historian wrote of the Mongol campaigns: "With one stroke a world which billowed with fertility was laid desolate, and the regions thereof became a desert, and the greater part of the living, dead, and their skin and bones crumbling dust, and the mighty were humbled and immersed in the calamities of perdition."

It is true that the Mongols, in their conquest of both North and South China, did considerable damage to these territories, and that great loss of life certainly ensued. The population of North China did decline somewhat, though earlier estimates that there was a catastrophic decline in population have subsequently been revised.

It is also true that the Mongols eliminated one of the most basic of Chinese institutions — the civil service examinations. The examinations remained banned until 1315, and even after the ban was lifted, they were no longer the only means to officialdom for the Yuan Dynasty, the dynasty that the Mongols founded in 1271 C.E., as they had been in the past.

The Mongols perceived China as just one section of their vast empire. And they classified the population of their domain in China into a hierarchy of four groups — with the native Chinese at the bottom. The Mongols, of course, were at the top; then came the non-Han, mostly Islamic population that was brought to China by the Mongols to help them rule; third were the northern Chinese; and at the very bottom of the rung were the southern Chinese.

The Mongol rulers were somewhat distrustful of the Confucian scholar-officials of China because they represented a different path for China than that which they themselves had conceived. These scholars, and other native Chinese, thus were not eligible for some of the top positions in the ruling government.
Chinese Bureaucrat

The structure of the Yuan government took shape during the reign of Kublai Khan (1260–1294). While some changes took place such as the functions of certain institutions, the essential components of the government bureaucracy remained intact from the beginning to the end of the dynasty in 1368.

The system of bureaucracy created by Kublai Khan reflected various cultures in the empire, including that of the Han Chinese, Khitans, Jurchens, Mongols and Tibetan Buddhists. While the official terminology of the institutions may indicate the government structure was almost purely that of native Chinese dynasties, the Yuan bureaucracy actually consisted of a mix of elements from different cultures. The Chinese-style elements of the bureaucracy mainly came from the native Tang, Song, as well as Khitan Liao and Jurchen Jin dynasties. Chinese advisers such as Liu Bingzhong and Yao Shu gave strong influence to Kublai's early court, and the central government administration was established within the first decade of Kublai's reign. This government adopted the traditional Chinese tripartite division of authority among civil, military, and censorial offices, including the Central Secretariat (Chinese: 中書省) to manage civil affairs, the Privy Council (Chinese: 樞密院) to manage military affairs, and the Censorate (Chinese: 御史臺) to conduct internal surveillance and inspection. The actual functions of both central and local government institutions however showed a major overlap between the civil and military jurisdictions, due to the Mongol traditional reliance on military institutions and offices as the core of governance. Nevertheless, such a civilian bureaucracy, with the Central Secretariat as the top institution that was (directly or indirectly) responsible for most other governmental agencies (such as the traditional Chinese-style Six Ministries), was created in China. At various times another central government institution called the Department of State Affairs (Chinese: 尚書省) mainly dealt with finance was established (such as during the reign of Külüg Khan or Emperor Wuzong), but usually became abandoned shortly afterwards.

While the existence of these central government departments and the Six Ministries (which had been introduced since the Sui and Tang dynasties) gave a Sinicized image in the Yuan administration, the actual functions of these ministries also reflected how Mongolian priorities and policies reshape and redirect those institutions. For example, the authority of the Yuan legal system, the Ministry of Justice did not extend to legal cases involving Mongols and Semuren, where there were separate courts of justice for them. Cases involving members of more than one ethnic group were decided by a mixed board consisting of Chinese and Mongols. Another example was the insignificance of the Ministry of War compared with native Chinese dynasties, as the real military authority in Yuan times resided in the Privy Council.
Caliph of Baghdad

The Mongol Assault On The Islamic Heartlands

After the Mongol conquest of the Khwarazm Empire, it was only a matter of time before they struck westward against the far wealthier Muslim empires of Mesopotamia and North Africa. The conquest of these areas became the main project of Hulegu, another grandson of Chinggis Khan and the ruler of the Ilkhan portions of the Mongol Empire. As we saw in Chapter 12, one of the key results of Hulegu's assaults on the Muslim heartlands was the capture and destruction of Baghdad in 1258. The murder of the Abbasid caliph, one of some 800,000 people who were reported to have been killed in Mongol retribution for the city's resistance, brought an end to the dynasty that had ruled the core regions of the Islamic world since the middle of the 8th century. A major Mongol victory over the Seljuk Turks in 1243 also proved critical to the future history of the region, because it opened up Asia Minor to conquest by a different Turkic people, the Ottomans, who would be the next great power in the Islamic heartlands.

The opening sieges of Hulegu's campaigns had also destroyed the Assassins, who had posed a major threat to Sunni Muslims for centuries. The hundreds of mountain fortresses of the sect were captured and destroyed. One of these, Alamut, held out for three years despite the Mongol siege engines. Finally, the leader of the sect was taken prisoner and sent to the khaghan at Karakorum. Refused an audience, the last of the Assassins' commanders was murdered by his captors.

Despite the removal of the Assassin menace, it is understandable that Muslim historians treated the coming of the Mongols as one of the great catastrophes in the history of Islam. The murder of the caliph and his family left the faithful without a central authority; the sack of Baghdad and numerous other cities from central Asia to the shores of the Mediterranean devastated the focal points of Islamic civilization. The Mongols had also severely crippled Muslim military strength, much to the delight of the Christians, especially those like the Nestorians who lived in the Middle East.

Some Christians offered assistance in the form of information; others, especially the Nestorians from inner Asia, served as commanders in Hulegu's armies. One contemporary Muslim chronicler, Ibn al-Athir, found the tribulations the Mongols had visited on his people so horrific that he apologized to his readers for recounting them and wished that he had not been born to witness them. He lamented that:

. . . in just one year they seized the most populous, the most beautiful, and the best cultivated part of the earth whose inhabitants excelled in character and urbanity. In the countries that have not yet been overrun by them, everyone spends the night afraid that they may yet appear there, too. . . . Thus, Islam and the Muslims were struck, at that time, by a disaster such as no people had experienced before.

Given these reverses, one can imagine the relief the peoples of the Muslim world felt when the Mongols were finally defeated in 1260 by the armies of the Mameluk, or slave, dynasty of Egypt at Ain Jalut. Ironically, Baibars, the commander of the Egyptian forces, and many of his lieutenants had been enslaved by the Mongols some years earlier and sold in Egypt, where they rose to power through military service. The Muslim victory was won with the rare cooperation of the Christians, who allowed Baibars's forces to cross unopposed through their much diminished, crusader territories in Palestine. Hulegu was in central Asia, engaged in yet another succession struggle, when the battle occurred. Upon his return, he was forced to reconsider his plans for conquest of the entire Muslim world. The Mameluks were deeply entrenched and growing stronger; Hulegu was threatened by his cousin Berke, the new khan of the Golden Horde to the north, who had converted to Islam. After openly clashing with Berke and learning of Baibars's overtures for an alliance with the Golden Horde, Hulegu decided to settle for the sizeable kingdom he already ruled, which stretched from the frontiers of Byzantium to the Oxus River in central Asia.

The Mongol Impact On Europe And The Islamic World

Though much of what the Mongols wrought on their westward march was destructive, some benefits were reaped from their forays into Europe and conquests in Muslim areas. By example, they taught new ways of making war and impressed on their Turkic and European enemies the effectiveness of gunpowder. As we have seen, Mongol conquests facilitated trade between the civilizations at each end of Eurasia, making possible the exchange of foods, tools, and ideas on an unprecedented scale. The revived trade routes brought great wealth to traders such as those from north Italy, who set up outposts in the eastern Mediterranean, along the Black Sea coast, and as far east as the Caspian Sea. Because the
establishment of these trading empires by the Venetians and Genoese provided precedents for the later drives for overseas expansion by peoples such as the Portuguese and English, they are of special significance in global history.

Perhaps the greatest long-term impact of the Mongol drive to the west was indirect and unintended. In recent years a growing number of historians have become convinced that the Mongol conquests played a key role in transmitting the fleas that carried bubonic plague from central Asia to Europe and the Middle East. The fleas may have hitched a ride on the livestock the Mongols drove into the new pasturelands won by their conquests or on the rats who nibbled the grain transported by merchants along the trading routes the Mongol rulers fostered between east and west. Whatever the exact connection, the Mongol armies unknowingly paved the way for the spread of the dreaded Black Death across the steppes to the Islamic heartlands and from there to most of Europe in the mid-14th century. In so doing, they unleashed possibly the most fatal epidemic in all human history. From mortality rates higher than half the population in some areas of Europe and the Middle East to the economic and social adjustments that the plague forced wherever it spread, this accidental, but devastating, side effect of the Mongol conquests influenced the course of civilized development in Eurasia for centuries to come.

The Fall of Baghdad (1258 C.E)

By 1251 the horsemen of the steppe were united once again, under the authority of three brothers, grandsons of Genghis Khan: Mongke, Kubilay and Hulegu. It was the ambition of the third, who had settled in Persia, to conquer the entire Muslim east to the shores of the Mediterranean, perhaps even to the Nile. Initially interested in philosophy and science, a man who sought out the company of men of letters, he was transformed in the course of his campaigns into a savage animal thirsting for blood and destruction. His religious attitudes were no less contradictory. Although strongly influenced by Christianity, his mother, his favourite wife, and several of his closest collaborators were members of the Nestorian church, he never renounced Shamanism, the traditional religion of his people. In the territories he governed, notably Persia, he was generally tolerant of Muslims, but once he was gripped by his lust to destroy any political entity capable of opposing him, he waged a war of total destruction against the most prestigious metropolises of Islam.

His first target was Baghdad. At first, Hulegu asked the Abbasid caliph, al-Mutasim, the thirty-seventh of his dynasty, to recognize Mongol sovereignty as his predecessors had once accepted the rule of the Seljuk Turks. The prince of the faithful, overconfident of his own prestige, sent word to the conqueror that any attack on his capital would mobilize the entire Muslim world, from India to north west Africa. Not in the least impressed, the grandson of Genghis Khan announced his intention of taking the city by force. Towards the end of 1257 he and, it would appear, hundreds of thousands of cavalry began advancing towards the Abbasid capital. On heir way they destroyed the assassin’s sanctuary at Alamut and sacked it’s library of inestimable value, thus making it for impossible for future generations to gain any in-depth knowledge of the doctrine and activities of the sect. When the caliph finally realized the extent of the threat, he decided to negotiate. He proposed that Hulegu’s name be pronounced at Friday sermons in the mosques of Baghdad and that he be granted the title sultan. But it was too late, for by now the Mongol had definitely opted for force. After a few weeks of courageous resistance, the prince of the faithful had no choice but to capitulate. On the 10th of February 1258 he went to the victor’s camp in person and asked if he would promise to spare the lives of all the citizens if they agreed to lay down there arms. But in vain. As soon as they were disarmed, the Muslim fighters were exterminated. Then the Mongol horde fanned out through the prestigious city demolishing buildings, burning neighbourhoods, and mercilessly massacring men, women, and children- nearly eighty thousand people in all. Only the Christian community was spared, thanks to the intercession of the Khan’s wife. The prince of the faithful was himself strangled to death a few days after his defeat. The tragic end of the Abbasid caliphate stunned the Muslim world. It was no longer a matter of a military battle for control of a particular city, or even a country: it was now a desperate struggle for the survival of Islam.
Mamluk General

Today in Military History: September 3, 1260 Today’s spotlight conflict is another of those macro-historical battles that changed the course of human history. The Mongols conquered an empire that threatened all of human civilization. A nation ruled by slave-warriors met them in battle near Jerusalem, and beat the Asian horsemen at their own game… Background to the Battle

In the 30+ years since the death of Genghis Khan, the Mongol Empire continued to expand. In eastern Asia, nearly all of China and Korea fell to the steppe armies. The Abbasid Caliphate was conquered in the Middle East. [For an earlier BurnPit post, kindly see February 12, 2010: “Mongol Siege of Baghdad Ends, Pillage Begins.”] To the west, Russia was invaded, Hungary and Poland raided and their armies defeated. Finally, in about 1258 the Ayyubid Dynasty of Syria was conquered by Hulagu Khan, grandson of Genghis and chosen general of Mongke Khan, the reigning “Great Khan.” The next victim on the Tatars list of kingdoms to conquer was the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt.

However, in 1259 fate stepped in, as it always seemed to do with the Mongols. In that year, Mongke Khan died during the siege of a Song Chinese city (various chronicles state he died either from disease or a projectile from a Chinese counter-siege weapon). Under Mongolcustom, all princes of the royal blood were required to immediately return to their homeland and select a new “Great Khan.” Word of Mongke Khan’s death did not reach Syria until the next year. Taking the bulk of his army with him, Hulagu left between one to three tuman (10,000-30,000 men) behind to continue his policy of subjugation. Their commander was Kitbuqa Noyan, a Nestorian Christian Turk, who had the complete confidence of Hulagu. Prior to leaving for Mongolia, Hulagu sent several emissaries to Kotuz, ruler of the Bahri mamluk sultanate of Egypt, with a message. It stated: From the King of Kings of the East and West, the Great Khan. To Kotuz the Mamluk, who fled to escape our swords. You should think of what happened to other countries and submit to us. You have heard how we have conquered a vast empire and have purified the earth of the disorders that tainted it. We have conquered vast areas, massacring all the people. You cannot escape from the terror of our armies. Where can you flee? What road will you use to escape us? Our horses are swift, our arrows sharp, our swords like thunderbolts, our hearts as hard as the mountains, our soldiers as numerous as the sand. Fortresses will not detain us, nor arms stop us. Your prayers to God will not avail against us. We are not moved by tears nor touched by lamentations. Only those who beg our protection will be safe. Hasten your reply before the fire of war is kindled. Resist and you will suffer the most terrible catastrophes. We will shatter your mosques and reveal the weakness of your God and then we will kill your children and your old men together. At present you are the only enemy against whom we have to march. Messages similar to this one had persuaded many other rulers to submit to the Mongol yoke. However, Sultan Kotuz was made of sterner stuff. He killed the emissaries (one historian says he cut them in half at the waist) then beheaded them, displaying their heads on one of the city gates of Cairo. He then proceeded to gather his forces to confront the Mongol army that would soon be marching to Egypt. Historical Background: Mamluks

Mamluks were a part of the military forces of Muslim rulers from the ninth through the nineteenth century. [The word comes from the Arabic “mamālīk” meaning “owned.”] The Koran states that the only legitimate sources for slaves are the children of slaves and prisoners of war. Mamluks were slaves bought from certain conquered areas of the Middle East and western Asia, primarily Circassians and Armenians from the Caucasus, and Kipchak Turks north of the Black Sea. These slaves were forcibly converted to Islam, then trained as cavalry soldiers. Mamluks had to follow the dictates of furusiyya, a code that included values such as courage and generosity, and also cavalry tactics, horsemanship, archery and the like. [The code of furusiyya was very similar to the European concept of chivalry.] When their training was completed, they were officially discharged and freed. However, they still owed a personal bond to the sultan and all mamluks continued their service with their former masters. The mamluks eventually achieved a heightened status in Egyptian society. Many Egyptians sold themselves into slavery in order to become mamluk soldiers.

Many Muslim rulers sought mamluk slave-soldiers because they were loyal to their new masters personally, rather than to their tribes or families. The mamluk slave-troops were strangers of the lowest possible status who could not conspire against the ruler and who could easily be punished if they caused trouble, making them a great military asset. Every Mamluk worked his way up from recruit to his eventual position based on merit alone. Every commander of the army and nearly all of the Mamluk sultans started life in this manner. The result was a succession of rulers of unrivaled personality, courage and ruthlessness. After the Mamluks made themselves master of Egypt and Syria, they continued the same policy of recruitment. Agents were sent to buy and import boys from Central Asia for their armies. Mamluks looked on their Egyptian-born sons as socially inferior and would not recruit them into regular Mamluk units, which only admitted boys born on the steppes. In addition to their military duties, many mamluks were skilled administrators, earning positions of trust and power. In fact, in the year 1249, the sultan of Egypt died, but his wife Shajar al-Durr (which means “string of pearls” in Arabic) kept the news quiet for four months, issuing orders in her dead husband’s name. She turned the reins of state over to her step-son, who was not up to the task of defending the realm, so he was assassinated a month later. At that point, Shajar married Izz al-Din Aybak, who founded the first Mamluk sultanate of Egypt.

Early Campaign Moves With the bulk of the Mongol army traveling back home to settle dynastic problems, Kitbuqa resumed Hulagu’s campaign against the Egyptian sultanate in August of 1260. He led his 20,000-man force from the city of Baalbek in modern-day Lebanon, traveling southward. He kept his army east of the Sea of Galilee and the northern tributary of the Jordan River. He sent small raiding parties throughout Palestine, attacking Jerusalem and possibly as far south as Gaza, the very gateway into Egypt proper. During this time period, Kitbuqa also tried to form an alliance with the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, which was now centered on the coastal cities of Acre, Tyre and Sidon. Some of the Crusader leaders had made their homage to Hulagu, and had even sent some soldiers to join his army prior to Hulagu’s trip back to his homeland. [There is no evidence that any European Christians were in Kitbuqa’s force.] However, Pope Alexander IV had forbidden any further contact with the Tartars. Even so, the Crusaders realized that the Mongols now posed the bigger threat to their existence than did the nearby Mamluks of Egypt. Sultan Kotuz gathered together his
available forces, which totaled about 12,000 soldiers altogether. [Some historians have exaggerated the size of the Mamluk force to 120,000, but this is probably the result of a mis-translation of the original source.] In addition, to his Mamluk heavy cavalry, he also recruited some Bedouins, some Turcoman Mamluks and Arabs who had deserted the Mongol forces, and members of the semi-barbarous Hawwarah tribe of Libya. In a calculated and risky move, Kotuz sent emissaries to the Crusaders, asking for permission to camp and re-supply near one of their cities before attack the Tatars. On July 26, 1260 Kotuz and his force began marching toward Palestine to meet Hulagu’s army. In late August, the Crusaders contacted the Mamluks, and gave them permission to camp near the city of Acre, to rest and re-provision their forces. Several days later, scouts reported to Kotuz that the Mongols had crossed the Jordan River and were headed toward Egypt. Kotuz broke camp and head southeast to intercept the Mongols.

The Mamluk force managed to get ahead of the advancing Tatars. Kotuz and his emir Baibars, his lead general, selected the Plain of Esdraelon to the north of Jerusalem as the chosen ground for their fight. The plain was dominated by Mount Gilboa to the south, and the hills of Galilee to the north. The hills were cut through with a variety of deep valleys. The most singular landmark of the plain was the Wadi Ain Jalut, the “Spring of Goliath.” [It was believed by both Christians and Muslims that this fresh-water well was the site of the Biblical encounter between David and Goliath.] Kotuz arranged the bulk of his force near Ain Jalut, giving command of this vanguard to Baibars. He then concealed units of his Mamluk heavy cavalry in valleys of the surrounding hills, out of sight of the Mongols. Before the start of the fighting, Kotuz gave a speech to his men, which historians said brought tears to the eyes of his men. He reminded them of the nature of Tatar savagery. There was no alternative to fighting, he said, "except a horrible death for themselves, their wives and their children." It steeled the souls of the Mamluks for the coming battle against an enemy that had never tasted defeat. The composition and even actual size of the Mongol force is very speculative. There is evidence to suggest that besides regular Mongol horsemen, Kitbuqa’s army also included Armenian horsemen, Christians who had submitted to Hulagu within the previous years. There were also probably some Syrian Mamluks, who joined the Tatar army when the major cities of Syria surrendered to Hulagu. If Kitbuqa’s army had been launching raids throughout Palestine prior to the final encounter, his two tournas were probably understrength and numbered between 10,000 and 15,000 effectives. The Battle Baibars advanced quickly and made contact with Kitbuqa's force coming towards Ain Jalut. Seeing Baibars' force, Kitbuqa mistook it for the entire Mamluk army and ordered his men to charge, leading the attack himself. For several hours, the Mamluk army held off the attacks of the Mongols, using a variety of hit-and-run attacks between showers of arrows to keep the Asiatic horsemen off balance. Finally, Baibars ordered his command to retreat in the direction of the springs. The Mongols rode triumphantly in pursuit, victory seemingly in their grasp.

When they reached the springs, Baibars ordered his army to wheel and face the enemy. Only then did the Mongols realize they had been tricked by one of their own favorite tactics: the feigned retreat. As Baibars re-engaged the Mongols, Kotuz ordered his Mamluk reserve cavalry out from its hiding places in the foothills and slopes and against the flanks of the Tatar army. In a matter of moments, the Mongols were completely surrounded. [Baibars is credited with forming the battleplan which tamed the Mongols, as it was said he had grown up in the region. The Mamluk emir also had the additional knowledge of Mongol strategy and tactics, as he had once been captured and enslaved by the Tatars as a youth, before behind sold to Egypt] Realizing that he was now committed to a battle with the entire Mamluk army, Kitbuqa ordered his heavy cavalry to charge the Muslim left flank, where some of the lesser Mamluk troops were likely place. The flank initially held, wavered, held again but eventually was turned, cracking under the ferocity of the Mongol assault.

As the Mamluk left wing threatened to dissolve and it appeared the entire army might be routed, Sultan Kotuz rode to the site of the fiercest fighting and threw his helmet to the ground so the entire army could recognize his face. "O Muslims" he shouted three times in loud, stentorian tones. His shaken troops rallied and the flank held. As the line solidified, Kotuz led a countercharge sweeping back the Mongol squadrons. Kitbuqa was now faced with a deteriorating situation. When one subordinate suggested a withdrawal his response was brief: "We must die here and that is the end of it. Long life and happiness to the Khan." Despite the relentless Mamluk pressure, Kitbuqa continued to rally his men. Then his horse took an arrow and he was thrown to the ground. He was quickly swarmed and captured by nearby Mamluk soldiers. As the battle continued, he was taken to the Sultan amidst the sounds of battle. Kotuz was ecstatic at this turn of events. According to Muslim histories, Kotuz said to the captured Tatar commander, "After overthrowing so many dynasties you are caught at last I see." Kitbuqa, for his part, was still defiant, replying, "If you kill me now, when Hulegu Khan hears of my death, all the country from Azerbaijan to Egypt will be trampled beneath the hoofs of Mongol horses." In a move calculated to insult his captor, Kitbuqa then added "All my life I have been a slave of the khan. I am not, like you, a murderer of my master." Kotuz then ordered Kitbuqa executed and his head sent to Cairo as proof of the Muslim victory. With their leader gone, the remaining Mongols fled 7 miles to the town of Beisan where they drew up to face the pursuing Mamluk cavalry. The resulting clash broke the remnants of the Mongol force, as they continued to run until they crossed the Euphrates River. Within days the victorious Kotuz re-entered Damascus in triumph, and the Egyptians moved on to liberate Aleppo and the other major cities of Syria. The Mongols never seriously threatened Egypt again.