

BIOGRAPHY FROM
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
LEGENDS, FOLKLORE, AND STORIES OF ANCIENT WORLDS

The Life and Times of
GENGHIS KHAN



Jim Whiting

BIOGRAPHY FROM
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
 LEGENDS, FOLKLORE, AND STORIES OF ANCIENT WORLDS

The Life and Times of

GENGHIS KHAN

Chapter 1	A Mighty Empire	7
	FYInfo*: Other Important Empires	11
Chapter 2	Struggle for Survival.....	13
	FYInfo: Mongol Religion	19
Chapter 3	The Name That Would Make History	21
	FYInfo: The Mongols' Mobile Homes.....	29
Chapter 4	"I Am the Punishment of God"	31
	FYInfo: The Mongol Army	35
Chapter 5	The Emperor Dies, the Empire Lives On	37
	FYInfo: Marco Polo	42
Chronology		43
Timeline in History		44
Chapter Notes		45
Glossary		46
For Further Reading		47
	For Young Adults	47
	On the Internet	47
	Works Consulted	47
Index		48
	*For Your Information	

BIOGRAPHY FROM
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
LEGENDS, FOLKLORE, AND STORIES OF ANCIENT WORLDS

CHAPTER
ONE

A MIGHTY EMPIRE

One of the most famous conquerors in history is Alexander the Great. He is among a handful of leaders who have been honored with the title “the Great” after their names. Born in 356 B.C. in Macedon, a region in northern Greece, Alexander became king at the age of twenty. Within the span of just over a decade, he and his army seized control of more than two million square miles of territory. His empire stretched from Greece and Egypt in the west to India in the east. Yet this sprawling empire couldn’t survive its founder’s death at the age of thirty-three. Alexander’s generals soon began quarreling. Within a few years, the empire split up.

About fifteen centuries later, another conqueror emerged from the steppes and mountains of central Asia. This was Genghis Khan. Unlike Alexander, Genghis Khan’s empire continued to expand after his death. Eventually it encompassed about 12 million square miles. It stretched nearly a quarter of the way around the globe—from China’s coast to Hungary, from Russia in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south. Its vast size could easily have swallowed Alexander’s empire. It could also have held the entire Roman Empire at its greatest extent, with room left over to add present-day Canada and the United States.

This mighty empire was established by a man, whose father was murdered. He was one of seven children of a suddenly widowed mother who was abandoned by her husband's kinsmen. For several years the boy and his family lived a desperate life in one of the planet's harshest climates, the Asian steppes, eating mice and scrounging for berries during winters when the temperature dropped well below freezing.

On a personal level, he showed few signs of future greatness. "As a child, he feared dogs and he cried easily," writes Jack Weatherford, a professor of anthropology whose studies have focused on Genghis Khan. "His younger brother was stronger than he was and a better archer and wrestler; his half brother bossed him around and picked on him."¹

Somehow the boy managed to overcome these limitations and survive this precarious existence. In the decades to come, he did much more than just survive.

What is especially astonishing is that Genghis Khan and his successors amassed their empire with one of the smaller conquering armies in history. Researchers estimate that the size of the Mongol army was only between 100,000 and 130,000 men. Nearly all of them could have fit into the spectator seating in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, with the rest standing on the football field. Very rarely did they all fight as one large group, and they were hundreds—and often thousands—of miles from home.

Leading this army, Genghis Khan acquired a gruesome reputation. He is alleged to have perpetrated some of the worst massacres in world history. When he captured the city of Bukhara in central Asia in 1219, his men killed all 30,000 defenders and drove the rest of the city's inhabitants in front of them as human shields in their next battle. Four years earlier, his troops had almost completely destroyed Zhongdu (modern Beijing). Later, travelers to the site found little besides human bones and skeletons of horses. According to contemporary chroniclers, millions of people perished at Genghis

Khan's direct command. However, many historians believe that these numbers are exaggerated. Genghis Khan understood psychological warfare. He knew that inflated estimates of casualties could strike fear in the hearts of his opponents. That could cause them to surrender or flee without a fight.

Whether their reputation for savagery is accurate or inflated, the Mongol armies hardly ever resorted to torturing their victims during their campaigns. And in another way, they "fought fair." Many of their attacks were against walled cities. They gave their intended victims two options. If the city surrendered without a fight, the inhabitants would be spared. If it chose to resist, the Mongols would attack and kill without mercy.

What is less well known is the flip side to this fearsome reputation. Once Genghis Khan's conquests were completed, most people lived in peace. He devised a code of laws that encouraged a high standard of morality. And his influence extended even beyond the empire's borders. While trade routes such as the Silk Road had been in existence before the rise of Genghis Khan, they were often dangerous. Genghis Khan and his successors instituted what historians call the *Pax Mongolica* (Mongolian Peace).

As historian Urgunge Onon notes, "The Mongols opened a transcontinental road between East and West along which, for the first time in one thousand years, humans and cultural objects and influences could once again be safely exchanged."² Technologies such as gunpowder, movable type, and printing made the long trek from east to west. So did new types of food, clothing, art, literature, and music. Some historians believe that these influences contributed to the Renaissance, the rebirth of learning that blossomed in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century.

Long before the invention of the telegraph and telephone in the nineteenth century, Genghis Khan realized that swift, reliable communications gave armies a big advantage over potential enemies. They also made it possible to govern his vast empire. He established a

system that in its basic concept was similar to the Pony Express. In reality, it was much more complex and lasted far longer than its American counterpart, which folded after less than two years of operations. A system of relay stations spaced about 25 miles apart allowed riders on horseback to cover distances of up to 100 miles a day. In emergencies, they rode up to 250 miles. It was hard on the messengers. They forced themselves to stay on their horses for hour after hour, frequently fastening themselves to their saddles so that they wouldn't tumble off if they fell asleep.

As the centuries went by and the vast empire he founded—and its memories—began to fade, so did the reputation of Genghis Khan. Perhaps the low point came during the nineteenth century when Western scientists classified some non-European ethnic groups as “mongoloid.” According to this classification, such people were not only very primitive but also suffered from genetic faults such as mental retardation.

The rise of Western imperialism was probably one primary reason for this disrespect. As countries such as France, Great Britain, and Russia began to dominate the globe, they felt that it was necessary to downplay the previous accomplishments of the people they were ruling. These countries believed that they were giving the benefits of “civilization” to the people who had fallen under their control. Their “civilized” behavior, much of which descended from Alexander the Great, was in contrast to the lifestyle of “barbarians” such as Genghis Khan.

In recent years, Genghis Khan's reputation has begun to increase again, especially among Asians. A book about him entitled *The No. 1 Man of the Last 1,000 Years* was published in China in 2003. He had achieved a similar standing a few years earlier when the *Washington Post*—one of the largest and most prestigious newspapers in the United States—asked many historians to name the “Man of the Millennium.” The vote wasn't close. Two-thirds of them chose Genghis Khan.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>