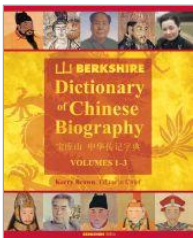


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Chinggis (Genghis) Khan Chéngjísīhán 成吉思汗 c. 1162–1227—Mongol leader and world conqueror **Alternate name: birth name: Temüjin**

Summary

Chinggis (often spelled Genghis) Khan was an illiterate nomad who created a world empire that is still remembered today. Chinggis Khan's later success as a world conqueror was based on his skills in organizing men in the nomadic society into which he was born. He was seeking political and commercial relations with the large Islamic state of Khwarazm when he sent a delegation to the shah in 1218; unfortunately the entire trade delegation—except one—was murdered on the way, thus bringing on the full wrath of Chinggis Khan. That event heralded the first full push by Chinggis and his sons westward to extend his nascent empire, which only ended at the gates of Europe and not by any military defeat experienced by the Mongols.

Introduction

Most people probably know something about the battles fought by Chinggis (Genghis) Khan (c. 1162–1227), or his infamy as a world conqueror. Examples abound, such as the five-month siege of the city of Otrar and the razing of the famed city of Samarkand. Less well known is the world into which he was born that shaped his views and actions. To get a better understanding of how an illiterate nomad with few resources created—in the space of twenty short years—a world empire that is still remembered today, one must look at the steppe and its tribes from which Chinggis Khan emerged. He was above all a supreme organizer and pragmatist who tapped the best parts of his nomadic, tribal society in creative ways to form one of the most efficient military and administrative organizations the world has ever known.



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Fourteenth-century image of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan.

National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan.

The Mongol Tribes

The people who would become known as the Mongols (Měnggǔ 蒙古) emerged out of the forested area of northeastern Asia known as Manchuria. According to Chinese sources, these tribal peoples migrated southwest from their original homeland to eventually settle in northeastern Mongolia, between the Onon and Kerulen rivers. Since this new area was mixed forest and steppe, the former forest dwellers took up herding. What prompted these forest tribes to migrate away from their homeland? It may well have been the consolidation of Khitan (Qidān 契丹) tribes to form the Liao Empire in northern Asia. The Khitan confederation resulted in the dispersal or rearrangement of many tribal units in northern Asia at that time, and the Mongols were only one among many groups to feel the effects of that imperial project.

The history of the Mongol tribes in the tenth century is not easy to disentangle from that of other tribes in the area, not least because the sources are not consistent in which tribes or groups were known as or claimed the name of “Mongol.” We know considerably more about the identity and role of the Mongols by the early twelfth century when the Manchurian Jurchen (*Nǚzhēn* 女真) peoples had replaced the Khitans as lords of northern Asia with their Jīn 金 (“Golden”) dynasty (1127–1234). Around the 1120s many tribes, including the Mongols, had become members of that new empire, serving to keep the peace in the steppe. It was around that time that the first leader of the united Mongol tribes was known; Khabul Khan was bound to the Jurchens in a type of tributary relationship by 1147, where Jin supplied the Mongols with supplies and an official title to Khabul Khan.

All were not happy, however, among the various tribes that served the Jin state; in particular, the Jurchens were all too happy to promote differences between the Tatars and Mongols, and by the 1160s the Mongols were again divided among themselves as a result of partisan infighting and Jurchen-Tatar alliances. It was also this fratricidal atmosphere that had a great impact on the future of Chinggis Khan when he eventually formed his own tribal confederation. One aspect of that tribal infighting was the fact that the most promising young men often left their natal tribes to seek out an up-and-coming leader of another tribe, who appeared to be the best bet for upward mobility. Once found, they attached themselves to that leader by means of a vow to become a companion and servitor, performing all sorts of functions that included household duties, administrative tasks, and military service as the chief’s bodyguards. In return for their loyal service, these companions (Mongolian *nököd*) would receive a share of all booty captured in raids, as well as the leader’s favor. By this

means a capable tribal leader could attract the best and brightest from other tribes, who would otherwise not naturally lend their loyalty to him. This was the nucleus of any successful tribal confederation.

The Young Temüjin

Chinggis Khan's father was a descendant of the twelfth century Mongol leaders, their "royal clan" the Borjigin clan. Yesügei was actually the descendant of the eldest son of that clan's ancestor, so he had a true claim to leadership of the Mongol tribes. Yesügei's wife, Ho'elun, gave birth to their first son somewhere near the Onon River, and some sources report that the boy was born with his fist around a blood clot. In Asian folklore this is commonly seen as a sign that the child will grow up to be a great warrior. The baby boy was named Temüjin because Yesügei had just captured a Tatar chief named Temüjin Öge. This probably occurred sometime between 1162 and 1167. Temüjin was eventually joined by four siblings who were born to Yesügei's first wife, his brothers Khasar, Khachi'un, and Temüge Otchigin, and a sister named Temülün. Yesügei's second wife also provided two brothers, Begter and Belgutei.

When his son Temüjin was about nine years old, Yesügei decided that it was time for him to be married. Marriages were commonly arranged with other tribes to secure providential alliances, and this one was no exception; Yesügei had it in mind to marry off his eldest son to a daughter of his first wife's tribe. Along the way, however, Yesügei and Temüjin happened to stop with a chieftain of another tribe, the Onggirat, named Dai Sechen, who had a very attractive and lively daughter named Börte (Bèi'értiē 李兒帖), and was probably a year older than Temüjin. According to the custom, Yesügei left Temüjin in Dai Sechen's camp to work for his future father-in-law as a bride price. This was also providential for Yesügei, since it enabled him to renew a tribal alliance with the Onggirat.

While traveling back to his own tribe after depositing young Temüjin into the hands of Dai Sechen, Yesügei stayed with some Tatars as steppe hospitality demanded. By the time he reached home he was deathly ill, presumably from food poisoning by his Tatar hosts. That, at any rate, was the story related to Temüjin, who was brought back home. This disaster brought on a lot of suffering for Temüjin and his family, but was also the crucible that forged Temüjin's qualities as a leader of his tribe and family.

When Yesügei died, the tribal alliance he headed broke up, and the chieftain of a rival tribe, the Tayichi'ut, assumed leadership. Some sources state that Ho'elun was cut out of Yesügei's family by the Tayichi'ut tribe after his death, while others assert that one of Yesügei's brothers stayed with Ho'elun, following the custom of levirate marriage that demanded a younger brother or son by another wife of the deceased marry the widow. What we do know is Ho'elun worked very hard under trying circumstances and with minimal resources to keep her family together, and the children grew up on various wild plants and animals as they scrounged for a living near the Onon River.

Temüjin was not to remain there for long. The leader of the rival Tayichi'ut tribe, Tarkhutai, rode into Ho'elun's small camp one day and demanded that she hand over Temüjin to him. This was undoubtedly his attempt to forestall Temüjin's claim of leadership over the united tribes from his dead father and on behalf of his father's tribe, the Borjigin. That claim was made stronger by the fact that Temüjin and his small family had survived being left alone by the Tayichi'ut. Temüjin was taken back to Tarkhutai's camp where he was held prisoner. He was lucky, however, since a man from another tribe—who were subjects to the Tayichi'ut—named Sorkhan Shira, helped him escape. Sorkhan and his sons would one day become loyal followers of Temüjin when he began his imperial project.

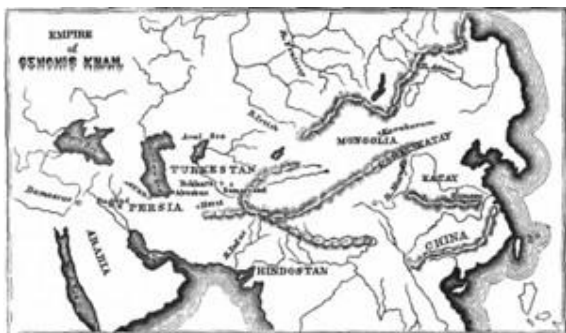
The matter of Temüjin's bride had not yet been settled, and after returning to his mother's encampment, he then returned to Dai Sechen's camp to claim Börte. Temüjin was by that time about sixteen years of age, and this marriage would further support Temüjin's newly reclaimed leadership of his father's tribal alliance. One story about the marriage bears repeating; after the new bride had returned to her husband's camp she presented her mother-in-law with a gift of unusual value, a black sable coat. This was a gift that far exceeded normal expectations and it confirmed to the Borjigins Börte's importance as Temüjin's first wife.

Emergence of Chinggis Khan

Once his marriage was settled, it was time for the young Temüjin to start building alliances with other tribal leaders and a set of followers on whom he could depend. At this point Temüjin and his small family were living deep in the Hentai Mountains on a mountain called Burkhan Khaldun, near the Onon River. It is in this mountainous area that the steppe rivers Kerulen, Tula, and Onon have their headwaters. West of these mountains lies the great Lake Baikal and lands controlled by the Naiman, Merged (Miè'érqǐ 蔑儿乞), and Kereit tribes. East of this location roamed the Tatar tribes, and south of the area was controlled by Onggirat tribes. Much further south and east lay the Jin and Song empires. While Temüjin's gaze may not have stretched that far, he certainly was mindful of the need to reunite all of the tribes that had once been led by his father. One obvious alliance was to be had with one of his father's old sworn blood-brothers (Mongolian *anda*), Toghrlil Khan, who headed the Kereit group of tribes. At that time Toghrlil was camped on the Tula River west of Temüjin. Temüjin went to Toghrlil's camp and presented him with a reminder that Toghrlil and Yesügei were sworn blood-brothers. On that basis Temüjin presented the black sable coat to Toghrlil, in effect becoming his adopted son. Toghrlil thereupon promised to help Temüjin reunite the people formerly led by his father.

Now Toghrlil was not the most trustworthy man, as events show. Temüjin's subordination to this strong player in steppe politics, however, was a canny move that certainly provided what Temüjin was seeking: followers. One important man to join Temüjin at that time was Jelme, the son of a tribal chief who had been a subordinate to Yesügei. Jelme would eventually become one of Chinggis Khan's most fierce and loyal warriors. Another *anda* was the young man Bogurchi, who had helped the young Temüjin recapture several horses that thieves had stolen from his camp some time earlier. It was also about this time that Börte was taken captive by the Merged tribes in a raid on Temüjin's camp. Temüjin avoided them by hiding on Burkhan Khaldun, a place he would later come to view as sacred. The Merged tribe took her to their camp and made her the wife of the chief. Temüjin appealed to his newly adopted father, Toghrlil, for help in retrieving Börte, and he was happy to help. Toghrlil also brought with him another childhood friend of Temüjin's, a man named Jamukha. The three led a combined force to the rescue, and a now-pregnant Börte was reunited with her husband.

This action, probably in the early 1180s, had several long-ranging consequences for the future Chinggis Khan. First, Börte's pregnancy by a rival chieftain did not pose a personal threat to Temüjin. It did, however, throw into question the legitimacy of his eldest son, Jochi (Zhúchì 朮赤, c. 1180–1227), whose descendants were never considered successors to the leadership of the united Mongol tribes after Chinggis Khan's death. Second, this affair began the fateful relationship between the three men Temüjin, Toghrlil, and Jamukha. The eventual breaks in their friendship would prove critical to Temüjin's election as grand khan of the Mongol tribes.



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Historical map showing Chinggis Khan's empire. From *Ghengis Khan* by Jacob Abbott.

The precise break came a couple of years after the combined campaign against the Merged to rescue Börte. While Toghrlil was obviously the strongest man in terms of loyal troops at the time, he chose to place Jamukha in charge of the whole campaign. The battle plan laid out by Toghrlil called on each of the three to provide for ten thousand men; while this was easy for him, it is far less clear how either of the two younger men, especially Temüjin with his still-small group of family and retainers, could have done so. In any case, Toghrlil and Temüjin were late in arriving at the meeting place, whereupon Jamukha became petulant. The outcome, as already observed, was a good one, and the Merged possessions and women were divided among the three men

as spoils. Thereafter Temüjin and Jamukha joined forces while Toghrlil returned to his usual grazing grounds on the Tula River. A year or so later, as the combined group was setting out for their summer grazing grounds, Jamukha made an odd remark about where to strike camp for the night. Börte suggested that his remarks showed that he had grown tired of them,

and that Temüjin and his company should part ways with Jamukha. This uneasiness was undoubtedly due at least in part to the fact that Jamukha had in his company the same Tayichi'ut tribes that had treated Temüjin's mother so badly after his father had died. It could also have been a strategy put into play by Börte to make sure that her husband did not end up the loser in a potential rivalry between these two strong, young leaders. In any event, Temüjin took this opportunity to set out on his own. Shortly after, Temüjin's followers and allies elected him as their Grand Khan.

Building the Mongol Confederation

We do not know precisely when Temüjin was elected to the position of Grand Khan, but it was most likely between 1184 and 1189, and he was about twenty-eight years of age. He likely did not receive or assume the title Chinggis Khan until 1206, so this election by his small group of family and followers set the stage for his full election to lead the larger confederation of Mongol tribes in 1206. The immediate outcome was resentment within Jamukha's camp.

One of the first things that the Grand Khan Temüjin did was to organize his followers into a rudimentary administrative group, as a household staff. The titles and duties of this group included cooks, quiver bearers, herders, provisioners, guards, and secretaries, all essential tasks to support the nomadic khan and his royal clan. This system did not distinguish civil from military functions and authority, and was common in nomadic confederations. It was adopted in all of the states they conquered and ruled.

Toghril was still, at that time, nominally in authority over both Temüjin and Jamukha, and he does not appear to have been disturbed by Temüjin's election as leader by his close followers. Soon, however, the incipient rivalry between the two young leaders came out into the open. The sources are divided over who started the fight and what specific actions each side took (claims of boiling in oil and cannibalism are attributed to both men). The immediate outcome was a growing rivalry between the two leaders. At that same time, Toghril was overthrown by his brother with support from the Naiman tribes. Toghril fled into the Gobi Desert and sought Temüjin's help, which was readily forthcoming. Then the Jurchen Jin emperor brought Toghril and Temüjin together to fight another old enemy, the Tatar tribes, who were causing trouble on Jin's northern frontier zone. Naturally, this proved a golden opportunity to Temüjin since he could eliminate one of his longstanding enemies. Jin attacked from the southeast while Toghril and Temüjin attacked from the west, and the Tatar chief was captured and executed in 1196. As a result, the Jin conferred the high honorary title of Prince (*wáng* 王) on Toghril, and gave Temüjin a lesser honorary title (in Jin eyes Temüjin was a subordinate and vassal to Toghril). Feeding on their joint success, Toghril and Temüjin continued their alliance for the next several years, attacking and defeating rival tribes such as the Naiman and the Tayichi'ut (even killing Targhulai in 1200). This provoked some envy among neighboring tribal units, who formed a confederation led by none other than Jamukha to bring down this successful operation. Jamukha's alliance disintegrated in 1201 after a brief engagement with the Toghril-Temüjin forces that was halted by a snowstorm. Jamukha then fled to the Kereit tribes to bide his time.

By that time Toghril was quite old and looking to secure his successor. All indications are that he favored Temüjin, which did not sit well with his natural son, Senggüm, who was beholden to Jamukha. In an effort to secure his association with Toghril, Temüjin in 1203 proposed that his eldest son, Jochi, be married to one of Toghril's daughters, and that one of his daughters marry a son of Senggüm, which he refused. Senggüm and Jamukha were both now allied with the Kereit tribes, and they accused Temüjin of arranging an attack on Toghril's camp. Toghril sided with his son and Jamukha, who was put in charge of the army of his followers, which had joined the Kereit. After one unsuccessful attempt to lure Temüjin into a trap, Jamukha and Senggüm led a major force to attack Temüjin and his army. There were too many men for the Mongols to handle, and Temüjin and some loyal followers fled—after retrieving his severely wounded son, Ögödei—into a marshy area in southeastern Mongolia. Encamped by a lake called Baljuna, several leading figures who had followed Temüjin all swore an oath of allegiance to defeat the Kereit forces by drinking of the bitter Baljuna water. It is unclear whether this oath-swearing actually occurred, but it quickly developed into a potent myth that was used by later writers to enhance the prestige of these same men.

By the summer of 1203 Temüjin and his followers had left the Baljuna area for their traditional grazing areas at the Onon River. Temüjin put out the word for his friends and allies to join him. He also took the opportunity to organize his military forces into groups of thousands, hundreds, and tens. This decimal system of organization had been used successfully by other nomadic leaders and, in fact, Toghrlil's Kereit forces were so organized. It was a most successful way to quickly dispatch orders from top down, and to ensure the complete loyalty of everyone. Mongol cavalry were divided into light and heavy units. The latter used lances and axes, and wore full body armor, while the former relied on the bow and their mobility. At the same time, Temüjin was reorganizing his rudimentary household and administrative staff to better prepare for the coming conflict and potential for great enlargement of his numbers. He reorganized some of his personal staff into a system of day and night bodyguards. These guards (Mongolian *keshig*) were recruited from the sons of chiefs of the allied tribes and eminent military men, and they served as the core of his growing military machine.

In May of 1204, the newly reorganized and strengthened Mongol army rode west along the Kerulen River to confront their enemies. By this time, Jamukha and company had made no less than three separate attempts to assassinate Toghrlil, each of which was foiled. Temüjin and his troops first marched on Toghrlil's group, who were located near to the headwaters of the Kerulun River. Most of the Kereit troops were trapped on a narrow cliff and perished there, but Toghrlil and his son, Senggüm, managed to escape the onslaught and fled further west to find shelter with the Naiman tribes. Jamukha had yet again fled the scene of battle rather than fight. He joined up with the Merged tribes. As mentioned earlier, it was the Merged who had kidnapped Temüjin's wife, Börte, and its chief was undoubtedly the biological father of Jochi, their eldest son. So Temüjin now had two potent scores to settle.

Temüjin never got the opportunity to mete justice to his former chief, however, since Toghrlil was killed as he was entering Naiman tribal territory by a tribesman who did not recognize him. Senggüm kept going west, hoping to find protection among the settled Uyghurs who lived in the Tarim Basin area in present-day Xinjiang. He was eventually killed there. The deaths of both men occurred in late 1203, by which time Temüjin held the eastern part of present-day Mongolia in his power. The most important tribes that he still faced were to his west, the Naiman, Oirat, Merged, and Onguts. Temüjin had integrated the remaining Kereit into his own growing tribal alliance, distributing them among these other tribes. The Ongut realized their position and made an alliance with Temüjin and the Mongols, while the Naiman, Oirat, and Merged tribes allied to fight Temüjin. The two forces met in battle in 1204, and the Mongols were the victors. It actually took several more years, however, to completely wipe out the Merged and Naiman holdouts; another successful battle against remaining Naiman and Merged units occurred in 1208, and it was not actually until about 1218 that the last Naiman leader was tracked down and killed.

There are different accounts of the end of Temüjin's former *anda* and nemesis Jamukha. By that time he had descended to leading a roving band of robbers and ne'er-do-wells. His followers actually handed him over to Temüjin, who, according to the *Secret History of the Mongols* (De Rachewiltz, 2004) account, even pled with Jamukha to join him again as an ally. Jamukha refused and instead begged to be put to death because he had broken his oath to his blood-brother. He was then either killed without shedding his blood, the normal style of execution reserved for nomadic nobility, or was hacked to death by Temüjin's youngest brother. This probably occurred in 1205, which left Temüjin free to consolidate his power over the tribes on the Mongolian plateau.

Chinggis Strikes Out on His Imperial Project

In 1206 the successful Temüjin summoned his tribe, his close companions, and the commanders and leaders of all of the tribes who had come into an alliance with him as subordinates to a *quriltai* (*külitai dàhuì* 库力台大会) at the Onon River, where they all elected him as their grand khan. It was at this time that he was given, or claimed for himself, the name Chinggis (Mongolian *fiere*), and exclusive use of a white standard with streamers of nine yak tails (some sources report earlier usage of this name by Temüjin). In fact, this latter device was a most important symbol of his legitimacy as supreme tribal leader, since the color white and number nine are both ancient auspicious symbols to steppe peoples. Most of the sources relate that a Mongol shaman named Teb Tenggeri actually coined the name Chinggis for Temüjin. The 1206

quriltai culminated a long process of tribal consolidation under Temüjin's power, and signaled to everyone that this man was now the ruler of "all tribes living in felt tents" (De Hartog 1999, 24–34) and the true start of his imperial project, the Great Mongol Nation (Mongolian *Yeke Mongol Ulus*).

It is unlikely that Chinggis Khan at this point had in mind the conquest of China and other great settled states, but his immediate task of consolidating and unifying all of the remaining tribes in the northern steppe brought him naturally to confront the Jurchen Jin state. It is interesting to see how quickly other tribes fell in line with Chinggis's growing power after 1206. Along with tribes such as the Kirgiz and Oirats to the west, one of the most important results was the voluntary submission to Chinggis by the Uygur state in 1209. The literate and multicultural Uygurs were perhaps the epitome of high civilization as experienced by tribal peoples, and their acquisition brought Chinggis a good deal of cultural capital, not least because he had adopted the Uygur writing system to represent spoken Mongolian by the year 1204.

Along with this consolidation of power, Chinggis expanded the ranks of his military and administrative machinery after 1206. He inducted several recently submitted tribes into his army, creating regiments of one thousand men in three separate divisions (Right Wing, Left Wing, Center). Most of these peoples were distributed among new military formations to bolster the growing Mongol army, and to create new loyalties to Chinggis and his own tribe. He also increased his personal guard troops to ten thousand. It was also at this time that the Mongols first began to use written documents, which were necessary as the Mongol administration grew to accommodate the peoples who had been, and would continue to be, folded into the growing Mongol empire. The first such written tools were a court record that included legal declarations and official records of imperial decisions called the "Blue Book" (Mongolian *kökö debter*), and a compilation of legal pronouncements of Chinggis known as the *Yasakh* (the existence of this set of sayings in written form is still questioned). It is important to note here that the famous *Secret History of the Mongols* was produced long after Chinggis's death by writers who wanted to enhance the heavenly ordained nature of Chinggis Khan's rulership.

Chinggis Khan's first adventure beyond the steppe came with an attack on the Tangut (Dǎngxiàng 党项) state to his southwest in 1209. The Mongols penetrated as far as the Tangut capital, Zhongxing (present-day Yinchuan City, Ningxia), which they tried to capture. The siege did not go as planned, however, when the intended flood of the city flooded their own camps instead. After negotiations, the Tangut emperor (Li Anquan, r. 1206–11) in 1210 essentially agreed to become a vassal of Chinggis, giving a daughter in marriage to Chinggis Khan and promising to provide supplies to the Mongol armies in future. Chinggis then turned to his real target, the Jin state.

Ever since taking part in the raids on the Tatar tribes in 1198, Chinggis had been considered by the Jin court as a vassal. By 1211 he was ready to renounce that relationship, and convened a *quriltai* to plan the coming war. His reasons for going to war were, first to avenge the murder of two of his clan members by the Jin, and second, to avenge the defeat of the Khitans by the Jurchens. It was cast as the first national war of the united Mongol tribes. Initial advances into Jin territory occurred in 1211, as far as the main Jin capital at present-day Beijing. Then Chinggis withdrew his troops to the steppe for resupply. The attack recommenced in late 1212, and a year later the Mongols had the Jin capital blockaded. The Jin emperor only got the siege lifted by providing one of his daughters to Chinggis in marriage as well as tribute gifts. Chinggis and his main army then returned north. When the Jin emperor and court fled south to the Jin southern capital Kaifeng, Chinggis ordered his troops back to their main capital. Another siege was commenced in late 1214, Chinggis himself took charge of the assault in 1215 and the city surrendered in May 1215. Mongol troops burned and looted the city for a full month. At the same time, Mongol troops had occupied Manchuria and the rest of north China that had been in the Jin state. By 1216 events further west claimed Chinggis Khan's attention, and he left the finishing up of Jin to his trusted general, Mukhali. It took another twenty years to fully conquer Jin.

Chinggis was really looking for good political and commercial relations with the large Persian state of Khwarazm when he sent a delegation to the shah of that state in 1218, in response to an earlier visit by Khwarezmian envoys in 1215. Unfortunately for the Khwarezmian state, the entire trade delegation—except one—was murdered by the governor of Otrar, the first place for the delegation to enter Khwarezmian lands. Not only was it an international crime to kill an imperial envoy, but Muhammad II, the Khwarezm shah, brought on himself and his people the full wrath of Chinggis Khan. That

event also heralded the first full push by Chinggis and his sons westward to extend his nascent empire, which only ended at the gates of Europe and not by any military defeat experienced by the Mongols.

In late 1218, Chinggis began to plan the conquest of the Khwarezmian state. The combined Mongol forces, now greatly strengthened with Chinese, Khitan, Uygur, and other peoples, and led by Chinggis and his sons Jochi, Tolui, Chaghadai, and Ögödei (Wōkuòtái 窩闊台, c. 1186–1241), set out in 1219 to the center of the Khwarezm state in Transoxania, present-day Uzbekistan and parts of the surrounding nations. This Islamic state was a fusion of Turkic and Persian cultures, but the people there had only recently come under Muhammad's rule, and he was not especially liked. The first city in the Mongols' path, Otrar, fell after a five month siege, and the centerpieces of that state, the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, fell within a year. This opened up eastern Persia to Chinggis, into which he advanced in 1220. After a series of successful campaigns over the next two years, Chinggis Khan and his armies had reunited with other Mongol forces and returned to the steppe to rest, to visit with an invited Daoist (Taoist) adept from China, Cháng Chūn 长春, and to plan his next move on the Tanguts.



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The siege of Zhongdu (Beijing) in 1215 CE by Chinggis Khan and his troops as depicted in the historical chronicle *Jami' al-tawarikh* by the scholar Rashid-al-Din Hamadani (1430).

Chinggis Khan's End

The Tanguts were obligated to supply Chinggis's troops when called upon, but in 1222 a contingent of Tangut troops sent to help the Mongols in northern China rebelled. This coincided with a new alliance between the Jin and Tangut courts, which further eroded Chinggis's confidence in the reliability of the Tanguts to his own cause. It was to quell this possible trouble spot that Chinggis finally set out in 1226 with his army towards the Tangut realm. Late in 1226 they began their siege of important Tangut cities on the east bank of the Huang (Yellow) River in present-day Ningxia. The Mongol campaign stopped in winter, and was resumed in February 1227. Sometime in 1227 Chinggis's horse bolted and he fell in battle, subsequently falling into a high fever. His generals wanted to call off the attack, but Chinggis refused, and the campaign continued. By summer of 1227 the Tangut king knew his situation was hopeless and he bargained with Chinggis for a month to collect tribute and surrender, which was granted. By the time he arrived in September of that year Chinggis had died, but this was not revealed to the Tangut king, whose execution had been ordered by Chinggis on his deathbed. It was also shortly before he died that he instructed his son, Tolui, about the best way to finish the campaign against the Jin state, since his eldest son, Jochi, had already died earlier in the year.

All accounts report that Chinggis Khan's body was taken to the sacred mountain, Burkhan Khaldun, where he was buried. The site is now the focus of intensive expeditions in Mongolia. It is fitting that it has never been found; this great leader of

men and empire builder went out the way he came in, a nomad who was comfortable in the wide expanse of the steppe where the water runs clear and the grazing is good.

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