Pastoral Peoples on the Global Stage: The Mongol Moment
1200–1500

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• To make students aware of the significance of pastoral societies in world history
• To examine the conditions of nomadic life
• To investigate the impact of the Mongol Empire on world history
• To consider the implications of the Eurasian trade sponsored by the Mongols

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette
   A. Legacy of Chinggis Khan in Mongolia
      1. celebration of the Great Khan in 2012
      2. late twentieth-century revival of Chinggis Khan’s memory
      3. 2012 was 850th anniversary of Chinggis Khan’s birth
   B. The story of the Mongols is an important corrective to historians’ focus on agriculturalists.

II. Looking Back and Looking Around: The Long History of Pastoral Nomads
   A. Economies focused on livestock production emerged around 4000 B.C.E.
      1. dependent on horses, camels, goats, sheep, cattle, yaks, reindeer
      2. pastoral societies developed in:
         a. grasslands of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa
         b. Arabian and Saharan deserts
         c. subarctic regions, Tibetan plateau
         d. not in Americas: lack of large animals for domesticating, except for llamas and alpacas in the Andes
   B. The World of Pastoral Societies
      1. standard features of pastoral societies:
         a. generally less productive than agricultural societies
         b. needed large grazing areas
         c. populations much smaller than in agricultural societies
         d. lived in encampments of related kinfolk, usually common ancestry in male line
         e. clans sometimes gathered as a tribe; could absorb unrelated people
f. more egalitarian than sedentary societies, but sometimes distinguished between nobles and commoners
g. women usually had higher status and greater freedom than in sedentary societies
h. mobility between distinct ecological niches
2. pastoralists had deep connections to agricultural neighbors
   a. sought access to foodstuffs, manufactured goods, luxury items
   b. especially in inner Eurasia, longing for civilized products encouraged formation of pastoralist states
3. formation of nomadic states was difficult
   a. charismatic leaders like Chinggis Khan could make a series of tribal alliances that became powerful states
   b. when formed, almost the whole male population (and some women) became warriors
   c. held together as long as wealth flowed into pastoral states
4. cultural interaction with agricultural lands
   a. inner Eurasian pastoralists adopted Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Manichaeism at various times
5. mastered environments unsuitable for agriculture
   a. brought food-producing revolution and significant human presence to fringe regions
   b. life changed significantly for Inner Asian steppe peoples with introduction of horseback riding ca. 1000 B.C.E.
C. Before the Mongols: Pastoralists in History
1. mounted warfare made pastoral empires possible
2. the Xiongnu (in Mongolian steppes north of China) formed an important early confederacy (from Manchuria to central Asia) in third to second centuries B.C.E.
3. ruler Modun (r. 210–174 B.C.E.) revolutionized nomadic life
   a. created a more centralized, hierarchical political system
   b. divinely sanctioned ruler
   c. distinction between “junior” and “senior” clans became more important
   d. exacted tribute from other nomads and from China
4. Xiongnu Empire was a model copied by Turkic and Mongol empires
D. The Arabs and the Turks
1. pastoralists made their greatest impact on world history between 500 and 1500 C.E.
   a. Arabs, Berbers, Turks, and Mongols created largest empires of that millennium
   b. Islam derived from largely pastoralist Arabs, carried by Turks
   c. Byzantium, Persia, and China were all controlled at least for a time by formerly nomadic people
2. Bedouin Arabs became effective fighters with development of a good camel saddle (sometime between 500 and 100 B.C.E.)
   a. made control of trade routes through Arabia possible
   b. camel nomads were shock troops of Islamic expansion
3. Turkic-speaking pastoralists (homeland in Mongolia and southern Siberia)
   a. gradual southward/westward spread
   b. series of short-lived pastoralist empires 552–965 C.E.
   c. spread of Turkic language and culture over much of Inner Asia and beyond
   d. Turkish conversion to Islam between tenth and fourteenth centuries
   e. Seljuk Empire (eleventh to twelfth centuries): Turks began to claim the Muslim title sultan; exercised real power
   f. carried Islam to India and Anatolia
4. Berber societies of North Africa and the Sahara emerged with introduction of camel to region
5. adopted Islam
6. Sanhaja Berbers in the western Sahara built Almoravid Empire in 1000s
   a. encompassed much of northwestern Africa and southern Spain
   b. collapsed by the mid-twelfth century

III. Breakout: The Mongol Empire
A. The Mongols formed the greatest land-based empire in history following their breakout from Mongolia in the thirteenth century.
   1. extensive linkage of pastoralists of inner Eurasian steppes with agricultural civilizations
   2. created far greater contact between Europe, China, and Islamic world than ever before
   3. total Mongol population was only about 700,000
   4. did not have a major cultural impact on the world
      a. did not try to spread their ancestor worship/shamanism to others
      b. mostly interested in exploiting conquered peoples
      c. Mongol culture today largely confined to Mongolia
      d. Mongol Empire was the last great nomadic state

B. From Temujin to Chinggis Khan: The Rise of the Mongol Empire
   1. Temujin (1162–1227) created the Mongol Empire
   2. Mongols before Temujin were unstable collection of feuding tribes and clans
   3. Temujin’s rise
      a. father was a minor chieftain, but was murdered before Temujin turned ten
      b. Temujin’s mother held family together by hunting and fishing after they were deserted by the clan
      c. when Temujin grew up, he drew together a small following of friends, allied with a more powerful tribal leader
      d. shifting series of alliances, betrayals, military victories
      e. won a reputation as a great leader

4. 1206: Mongol tribal assembly recognized Temujin as Chinggis Khan (“universal ruler”)
5. Chinggis Khan then began expansion to hold his followers together
   a. major attack on China in 1209 started 50-year Mongol world war
   b. Chinggis Khan, Ogodei, Mongke, and Khubilai created an empire that included China, Korea, Central Asia, Russia, much of Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe
   c. setbacks marked outer limits of Mongol Empire

C. Explaining the Mongol Moment
   1. Mongol Empire grew without any grand scheme
   2. by the time of his death, Chinggis Khan saw conquests as a mission to unite the whole world
   3. Mongols were vastly outnumbered by their enemies
   4. good luck and good timing played a role
      a. China was divided
      b. Abbassid caliphate was in decline
   5. Key to Mongol success was their well-led, organized, disciplined army
      a. military units of 10, 100, 1,000, and 10,000 warriors
      b. conquered tribes were broken up and scattered among units
      c. tribalism was also weakened by creation of imperial guard
      d. all members of a unit were killed if any deserted in battle
      e. leaders shared the hardships of their men
      f. elaborate tactics: encirclement, retreat, deception
      g. vast numbers of conquered peoples were incorporated into army
   6. Mongol reputation for brutality and destructiveness
      a. those who resisted were destroyed
      b. kingdom of Khwarizm murdered Mongol envoys
7. ability to mobilize resources
   a. elaborate census taking and systematic taxation
   b. good system of relay stations for communication and trade
   c. centralized bureaucracy began
   d. encouraged commerce
   e. gave lower administrative posts to Chinese and Muslim officials
   f. practiced religious toleration

IV. Encountering the Mongols: Comparing Three Cases

A. China and the Mongols
   1. Mongol conquest of China was difficult, took from 1209 to 1279
   2. began in northern China (ruled by dynasties of nomadic origin), was vastly destructive
   3. conquest of southern China (ruled by Song dynasty) was far less violent
      a. more interest in accommodation of local populace
      b. landowners were guaranteed their estates in return for support
   4. Mongols unified a divided China, made many believe that the Mongols had been granted the Mandate of Heaven
   5. Mongols didn’t know how to govern an agricultural society, so they used many Chinese practices
      a. gave themselves a Chinese dynastic title, the Yuan (“great beginnings”)
      b. built a new capital—Khanbalik (“city of the khan”; now Beijing)
   6. Khubilai Khan (r. 1271–1294) had a set of ancestral tablets made
      a. undertook some policies that evoked values of a benevolent Chinese emperor
   7. still, Mongol rule was harsh, exploitative, and foreign
      a. Mongols did not become Chinese and Marco Polo said they treated the Chinese like slaves
      b. “Forbidden City” in the capital was set up like the steppes

B. Persia and the Mongols
   1. conquest of Persia: first invasion led by Chinggis Khan 1219–1221; second assault under his grandson Hulegu 1251–1258
   2. massive impact of invasion
      a. unprecedented destruction
      b. shook faith: how could Muslims be savaged so badly by infidels?
      c. sacking of Baghdad in 1258 ended the Abbasid caliphate
      d. profound damage to Persian/Iraqi agriculture
      e. increase in wine and silk production
   3. Mongols were transformed far more in Persia than in China
      a. extensive use of Persian bureaucracy
      b. Ghazan (r. 1295–1304) tried to repair some of their earlier damage
      c. Mongols in Persia converted to Islam on a large scale
      d. Mongol elites learned some Persian
      e. some Mongols took up agriculture
   4. Mongol dynasty collapsed in 1330s

C. Russia and the Mongols
   1. Mongol devastation of Russia 1237–1240
      a. Russia was a number of independent principalities
      b. could not unite against Mongol threat
      c. destruction of cities, widespread slaughter, and deportation of skilled workers
   2. Russia was integrated into Mongol Empire as the Kipchak Khanate (Russians called it the “Khanate of the Golden Horde”)
      a. but Mongols did not occupy Russia
b. instead, they remained on steppes north of Black and Caspian seas and collected tribute and heavy taxes
c. also raided for slaves
3. some Russian princes and the Russian Orthodox Church flourished
4. Moscow became primary tribute-collector for the Mongols
5. Mongol rulers of Russia were far less assimilated or influenced
6. Russian princes adopted Mongol weapons, diplomatic rituals, court practices, tax system, and military draft
   a. Moscow became the core of a new Russian state
   b. used the Mongol mounted courier service
7. Russians broke free of Mongol rule by the end of the fifteenth century

V. The Mongol Empire as a Eurasian Network
   A. Toward a World Economy
      1. Mongols produced little for distant markets; were not active traders
      2. but they promoted international commerce as source of tax revenue
      3. made it relatively safe to travel across Central Asia
      4. Mongol trading circuit was central to larger Afro-Eurasian commercial network
   B. Diplomacy on a Eurasian Scale
      1. Mongol encroachment into Eastern Europe led both the pope and European rulers to dispatch diplomatic missions to the Mongols
         a. had no diplomatic or religious consequences
         b. but brought back valuable information about the East
      2. Persian and Chinese courts developed close relationships
   C. Cultural Exchange in the Mongol Realm
      1. thousands of craftsmen and educated people were forcibly relocated by the Mongols
      2. Mongol religious tolerance and support of merchants drew foreigners
         a. westward flow of Chinese technology and art (painting, printing, gunpowder weapons, compass navigation, high-temperature furnaces, medical techniques, etc.)
         b. Muslim astronomy spread to China
c. circulation of plants and crops
d. Europe benefited particularly from new contact with Asia
   D. The Plague: An Afro-Eurasian Pandemic
      1. the plague (a.k.a. pestilence, Black Death) spread across trade routes of the Mongol Empire in early fourteenth century
         a. probably originated in Central Asia
         b. carried by rodents and transmitted by fleas
      2. the plague broke out in northeastern China in 1331
         a. reached Middle East and Western Europe by 1347
         b. Mongol siege of Caffa (in the Crimea) in 1346: Mongols catapulted plague-infected corpses into city
         c. in 1409 reached East Africa
d. massive death toll, half of Europe’s population perished 1348-50, perhaps a third of the population in the Middle East
e. periodic returns of the plague for centuries
      3. India and sub-Saharan Africa were much less affected
      4. Black death changed European society in the long term
         a. labor shortages undermined the practice of serfdom
         b. may have fostered greater technological innovation
         c. for a time created more employment opportunities for women
      5. the plague was a primary reason for the breakdown of the Mongol Empire in fourteenth to fifteenth centuries
a. with population contraction, volume of trade was reduced
b. by 1350, the Mongol Empire was in disarray
c. within a century, Mongols had lost control of China, Persia, and Russia
d. the Central Asian trade route largely closed

6. disruption of land routes to the east encouraged Europeans to seek trade routes by sea
   a. European naval technology gave them an advantage
   b. similarity of sixteenth-century Europeans to Mongols: people on the periphery who were economically less developed and who forcibly plundered wealthier civilizations