

# The Mongols!

Or How the Known World Was Won

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One cannot look at the medieval world without looking to the Mongols. The Mongol Empire, founded by your friend and mine Temuchin (Genghis Khan), had one of the greatest impacts on history. It had a greater affect then both Roman Empires, their buddies the Celts and the Crusades. And if you were to ask a Mongolian today they'll more then likely tell you that Genghis and his Mongols conquered the World. And that one phrase, conquered the World, sums it all up. Until the death of Mongke in 1259, it was the closest history had yet witnessed to a centralized world empire. But how did they do it? And why? We'll take a brief look at both. The "how" is pretty easy. But the "why" is not that easy. So I think we'll do the easy stuff first, then move on to the hard part.



## A Mongol Way of Doing Things Part 1: Arms, Armor and Warfare

So you want to know how they did it? Well let's start out with the master of it all, Genghis. Now this guy knew how to make an empire. First off he eliminated his rivals, including his half brother Bekter. With fewer leaders to choose from, other Mongols found it easier to choose Genghis as their leader. Secondly he would reward his followers. So much so that he was known to give his own property to those that were faithful to him. This was the foundation in which Genghis could unite all of his people and some of the neighbors to boot. And it only took him about five years to do it. Not bad for a guy who couldn't read.



Then there were tactics to win the battles. The most famous of them was called the nerge. This was a hunting technique involving a huge ring of horsemen gradually drawing together, forcing trapped animals into a small space where, after the leader had loosed his first arrow, the killing would begin. I think you can see the usefulness of this one in battle.

There was the "Fooled You" move. This is one of my favorites. This was a move that seems based on the nerge. You take a few horsemen, have them "chase down" the enemy, then have said horsemen retreat. The enemy looks at this and says "Hey, look at this! Let's get 'em!" and goes after the horsemen who are now heading into a small space. Can you see where this is going? Soon the enemy has the horsemen cornered. But all of the sudden they notice that they are being rained upon with arrows. Thus ruining their fun. There were also light horse archers that attacked and wheeled away, one unit replacing another so that the enemy was constantly barraged by arrows.

Then there was demoralization. This included tactics such as big, loud drums brought into battle, slaughtering all but a few of the inhabitants and letting them go just so others could learn of the Mongols handiwork, mounting straw dummies to spare horses to overawe their enemies by numbers alone and destroying all of the food supplies and crops.

Battle tactics alone will not win your wars. You'll need technology. And the Mongols' best was the composite bow. But this was not just any old bow. This thing was made for power. It needed greater strength to pull than the English long bow. It also had a more regular release of tension when loosed. This meant its arrows had about twice the range and better accuracy than that of the English long bow. Where the long bow relied on weight, the composite bow relied on velocity.

The Mongol composite bow was made especially for their kind of warfare, strong and light. Its core was made of wood. Then either four pieces of ram's horn or a single piece of water-buffalo horn was added. The belly of the bow consisted of strands of sinew. Fish glue was used to keep it all together. Many of the Mongol bows had angled "ears" reinforced with bone. These were often angled so far forward that the string rested on them, but the reasons for this are a bit unclear. But most important was its size. The Mongol composite bow was made to be used on horseback more than not. And there's nothing worse than a bunch of horse archers with attitude.

The arrow and arrowheads were just as important. Most arrows were made of hollow reeds. This meant the shaft could absorb the shock of release very quickly, thus the arrow straightened out faster and flew more accurately. And there were a multitude of varied arrowheads. Some were designed to whistle as they flew, used to signal others. There were chiseled shaped arrowheads to make broad wounds. Many were multi-bladed, barbed or designed to penetrate armor and shields.

And let's not forget the most important thing to a Mongol - his pony. This small fry was as tough as its owner. The Mongol pony was strong, had a dense coat, lots of endurance, steadiness and sureness of foot, making it perfect not only on the steps but also for the Mongol style of warfare. The pony thrived on the grassy plains and even did well in the Russian forests and the Alpine regions. On the other hand, it was not good in the heat of the Middle East or the humidity of India. And that made things a bit rough when trying to conquer these regions.

Mongol armor was not too elaborate. It was mostly made of steel, iron, leather, or some combination of each. Styles varied but most consisted of a helmet, lamellar cuirass, a type of girdle, shoulder protection and a silk kaftan called a del that was worn loose under the armor. And it is this one item that sparks a lot of conversation. Was the silk del that they wore underneath their armor to help stop arrows from penetrating the skin? The answer is this; it was meant to help minimize the damage an arrow could cause. When an arrow made it through the armor, the silk del would wrap itself around the arrowhead instead of tearing. So instead of cutting into the skin, the arrowhead punctured the skin. The Mongol would then pull on the silk del, pulling out the arrowhead without causing serious damage.

But what the Mongols didn't have was siege technology. And that was a problem after a few goes at the Chinese. So how does one fix that kind of problem? Well, you force your prisoners the are siege crafters to make and operate the weapons. This proved to be a lethal tactic for the Mongols. Not only did they use such weapons against the cultures that made them, the Mongols even got creative. In one siege the Mongol army catapulted the rotting heads of the dead into a walled city. This promoted the spread of disease, and caused demoralization. Within a week the city surrendered to the Mongols.



All in all the Mongol way of warfare was the first form of "Total Warfare". Not only did they destroy and slaughter masses of people (like one group, the Ismailis, who almost became extinct), they orchestrated mass relocations of many populations and put to ruin great buildings and vast lands. But once their empire was established, the Mongols achieved many great things. And these achievements will be looked at part two of this missive; Running an Empire.

Until then...

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