

★★★ HISTORY

TURNING POINTS

Paul Demko



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3 Rise of the Mongols



Almost 600 years after the Battle of Walaja, someone made a big mistake. It happened

in Otrar, a city near the middle of Asia. The year was 1218, and the city was about to be destroyed. Nobody knew that at the time.

This city was part of a big country called Khwarizmia (kwa•RIZ•mee•uh). The Silk Road from China to Europe went through the city. People traveling on the road came to buy and sell things. However, armies could use the road and attack the city. The map in this chapter shows where the road was.

There was one person whose job it was to worry about Otrar. He was the **governor** (GUV•er•ner). A *governor* controls part of a country.

The governor worried about a strange thing. Hundreds of men had come to the city from Mongolia, north of China. The governor of the city was worried about all these Mongols coming to his city.

The Mongols

The Mongol leader was called Genghis Khan (JENG•gis KON). *Genghis Khan* means “leader of the world.” When he was young, he was called Temujin (tem•OO•jin).

His people were **nomads**, people who move from place to place. Like other *nomads*,

they lived in small groups and kept animals.

The Mongols had horses and other animals. These animals lived by eating grass. The people lived by drinking animals' milk and eating their meat. A lot of people living together would need a lot of milk and meat. They would need a lot of animals, and the animals would eat a lot of grass.

That meant that when their animals ate all the grass around, they had to move. It also meant that other nomads sometimes wanted to use the same land. Temujin's father was killed when two groups fought about land. This was when Temujin was a boy.

The Mongols were good at riding horses and shooting arrows. Temujin saw them fighting each other. The fighting kept them from getting strong and rich. He knew that other people did not fight so much. He decided to find a way to keep them from fighting each other.

Temujin became a leader. When his soldiers won a battle, he split up the people they had beaten. He sent them to live in different villages with his family and friends. They could no longer fight against him. There was less fighting, and the young leader's family

and friends grew stronger. This is how he became the leader of all the Mongols.



A Mongol archer

Then he led the Mongols in wars against other people. They split up the people they beat, as young Temujin had done. These people couldn't fight any more. They made the country stronger and richer.

Making Peace

Genghis Khan conquered all the nomads he knew about. Then he attacked China and

other areas that had cities. He was ready to stop fighting. He knew that there was a big country called Khwarizmia to the west. He wanted to have peace with that country. The khan decided to send gifts to the emperor of that big country.

So the Mongols who came to Otrar were carrying gifts to the emperor of Khwarizmia.

The people of Khwarizmia knew that Genghis Khan had won many wars. The governor of the city thought some of the men carrying gifts were **spies**. Armies send *spies* to find out how to beat an enemy in war. If the governor let these men go free, the Mongols might attack his city. That's why he put the Mongol men in prison.

The emperor heard about what happened in the city. He could have told the governor to let the men out of prison, but he didn't. He was even more afraid of spies than the governor was. What he did next really hurt his country.

The khan didn't hear from the men he had sent. He sent three more men to Khwarizmia to ask about them. That's when the emperor made his mistake.

The emperor was sure these three men

were spies, too. He had his soldiers cut off one man's head. He sent the other two back to Genghis Khan, carrying the head. He wanted to make the Mongol leader afraid of Khwarizmia.

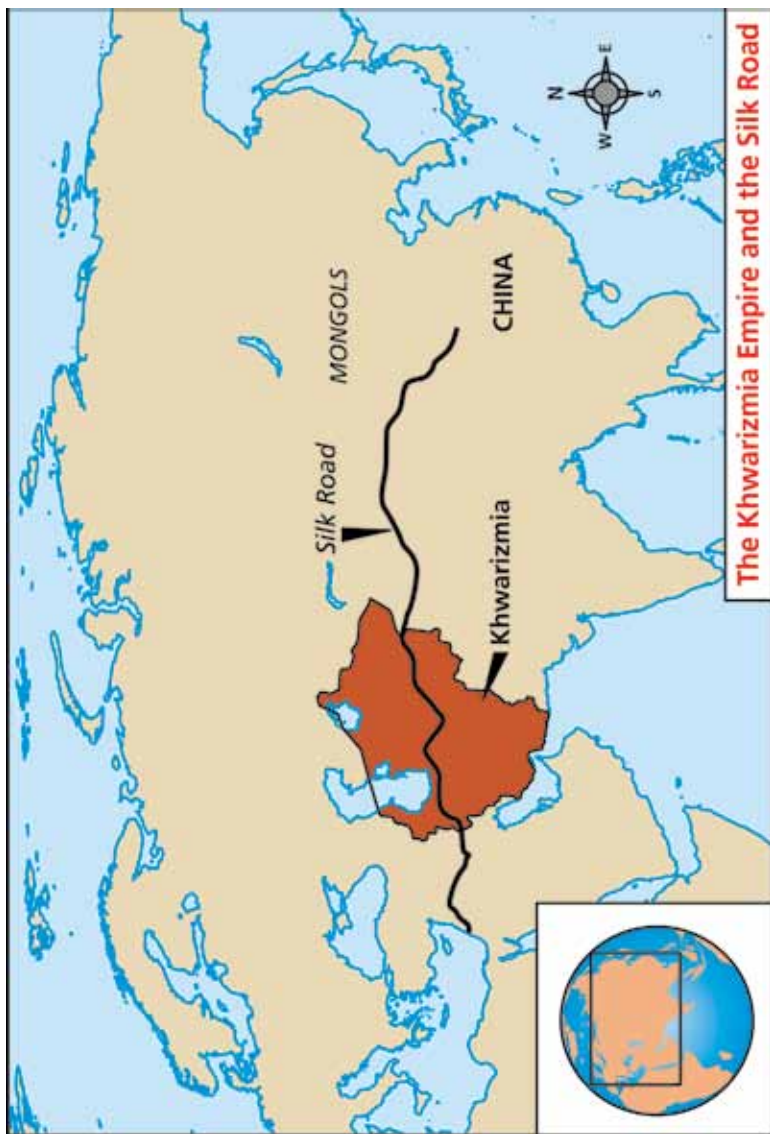
Then he made an even bigger mistake. He had his soldiers kill the hundreds of Mongols who had brought gifts. When the khan heard about the killing, he decided to go to war.

A Different Kind of War

Usually, the Mongols would kill only soldiers. They would let everyone else live, but send them to different families and towns. Sometimes, they wouldn't even take them from their homes. It was part of the khan's idea of making his people stronger.

This time Genghis Khan was really angry. The emperor of Khwarizmia had killed hundreds of Mongols. So he sent his armies to kill as many people in Khwarizmia as they could. They burned down whole cities.

By 1221, the Mongols had won the war against Khwarizmia. They took control of all of its land. At this point, they controlled about half of Asia. The empire kept growing for many years.



After the War

Thousands of miles away, people heard about the war against Khwarizmia. They heard that the Mongols killed everyone in cities they attacked. The stories were not always true, but they did make people afraid. The statue on page 16 shows what many people thought of Genghis Khan.

Some of those people who were afraid did fight the Mongols. For many years, though, the Mongols won almost all of their battles.

Other people who were afraid of the Mongols decided not to fight. The Mongols took control of those lands without killing the people there.

The Mongols made changes in the lands they controlled. People in some of these lands were poor. Like the Mongols, they had been fighting against each other. After the conquest, many small countries were part of a big empire. They didn't have any more wars.

With less war, people could travel more. People bought and sold more things. They grew more food because they were safe, and more people could buy things. People the Mongols beat in war became richer and stronger in peace.

Travelers didn't just buy and sell things; they also shared ideas. People from China and Europe used the Silk Road. They learned about each other.

Genghis Khan brought writing to his empire. He said that people could not steal each other's animals. He protected women. He said people could follow any religion they wanted.

The story of Khwarizmia shows how a terrible mistake became a *turning point*. The killing of Genghis Khan's people made him angry. He started a war and burned the cities of Khwarizmia to the ground. People became afraid and helped the Mongols take control.

Being part of a big empire meant not having to fight as many wars. Without wars to fight, people became richer. Cities grew, and so did trade. Everyone was safer. The Mongols weren't perfect, and their government had a lot of problems. However, for years, it made life better for many people.

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