

CHAPTER 17-NOMADIC EMPIRES AND EURASIAN INTEGRATION

One of the great world migrations was that of the Turkish peoples from the Central Asian steppes. Nomadic herders, these people were organized in clans who traveled with their herds in migratory cycles and lived mainly on animal products. They also created pottery, leather goods, and iron for both trade and their own use, especially iron weapons. These goods were not only used by the nomads but also traded with others along the caravan routes. This was a society with two social classes, nobles and commoners, but still allowed for movement between the two. The society practiced several religions, including Buddhism, Nestorians, and shamanism. Being a horse-centered society, these nomads had formidable cavalry forces organized by a “khan” into confederation of tribes.

As these peoples migrated, they came to the borders of other empires, as when the Seljuq Turks arrived at the borders of the Abbasid Empire. From the mid-eighth to mid-tenth century, the Seljuq Turks merely lived on the borders of the Abbasid Empire. Later they moved into the empire and into society, serving in the army. By the mid-eleventh century they had taken control of the empire and extended their rule. The Seljuq Turks were conquered by another group of Turks, the Ottomans, who would eventually topple the Byzantine Empire.

In the late 1100s, another nomadic people began to influence world history, the Mongols under Chinggis Khan. He organized the Mongols into military units, used the skills of horsemanship and archery for his battle tactics, and chose leaders based on talent and loyalty. The Mongols controlled northern China by 1220 and then moved west into Persia, destroying Persian urban centers and their irrigation systems.

Chinggis died in 1227, but set the foundation for a great empire. His heirs then divided his empire. His grandson, Kubilai Khan, consolidated Mongol rule in China and founded the Yuan dynasty. Mongol rule in China was different from rule in the past, in that the Mongols do away with civil service examination and dismiss Confucian scholars, bringing in foreigners in to administer China. Although the Mongols separated themselves from Chinese society, they were tolerant of Chinese religion and social customs, while the Mongol elite turned to Lamaist Buddhism.

The rest of Chinggis Khan’s empire was ruled by others. In Persia, Kubilai Khan’s brother captured Baghdad in 1258. He controlled Persia by using Persians as local governors and converting the people to Islam. Another of the divisions, the Golden Horde, overran Russia in the early 1200s and then moved into eastern Germany. The Golden Horde ruled in Russia until the mid-fifteenth century.

While viewed as conquerors, the Mongol worked to extend trade, reviving the silk roads, sent missions to Korea, Vietnam, India, and Europe. The Mongol also brought in many different peoples into their empire such as artisans, educators, and administrators.

The Mongols declined for a number of reasons. They were brought down by financial problems, internal power struggles, and the ravages of the Black Death. Following the Mongols, Tamerlane built a central Asian empire that stretched as far as northern India. Like Chinggis Khan, his heirs divided his empire after his death.

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

- I. Improved transportation technologies and commercial practices led to an increased volume of trade, and expanded the geographical range of existing and newly active trade networks.

Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

- II. Interregional contacts and conflicts between states and empires encouraged significant technological and cultural transfers, for example between Tang China and the Abbasids, across the Mongol empires and during the Crusades.