



History 101

Genghis Khan

Although he's the national hero of Mongolia, he was one of the most bloodthirsty conquerors in history...and the most successful. The empire he built still holds the record today for the largest land empire ever built.

His real name was *Temujin*, meaning *iron smith*, and he was born in 1167, in Mongolia. When he was still a boy, perhaps when he was 13, he succeeded his father as chief of a small Mongolian tribe. He began to expand his rule by conquering neighboring tribes. He was proclaimed *Great Khan* after he defeated two of the many politically influential Mongolian clan-confederacies of his time.

In 1206, he took the title of *Genghis Khan*. He united all of the Mongolian tribes and established his empire in the area of the *steppes* (central Asian plains), where he organized the wandering inhabitants into a rigid military system. And into this system, he also incorporated non-Mongol peoples such as the Kirghiz. For these steppe people, Genghis Khan established the *Yassa*, the first Mongolian code of laws.

He then turned his attention to the rest of the world! He claimed that he was commanded to do so by the 'eternal blue sky', the highest supernatural power recognized by the Mongols. Between 1205 and 1215, Genghis Khan conquered China, and in 1218 his forces crushed the empire of Kara Kitai. This conquest brought Mongolian power to the borders of the Moslem state of Khorezm, which he then attacked and destroyed. In 1220 and 1221, he conquered and utterly destroyed Bukhara, Samarkand, and Gurgan, then the centers of Moslem-Persian culture. He sent his generals with two smaller armies

into southern Russia, where they defeated the Cuman empire. Eventually his Tartar soldiers, the *Golden Horde*, conquered all of Medieval Russia, introducing feudalism there before they were finally pushed out in the 1300s

Genghis Khan died in 1227. He was buried in the Burkhan Khaldun Mountains. The actual grave site has never been discovered and thus remains unknown today. Each of Genghis Khan's four sons received part of the Mongolian Empire under the condition that they recognize the Great Khan's authority, but it was not until his grandson, *Kublai Khan*, that the glory of the Mongol Empire was recaptured.

Perhaps not surprisingly, your greatest sources of Genghis Khan covers are going to be Mongolian and Chinese restaurants. I currently have five, but you know there are more than that.

[Hmmmm! How about a Conquerors category? —Caesar, Napoleon, Genghis Khan, etc...]

