

History Level 8

Chapter 5 — Asia and the Pacific, c. 600–1750 CE

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What continued and what changed in ways of life and group roles

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8K24 (Historical Knowledge and Understanding, Asia and the Pacific, c. 600–1750 CE).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export, final ids over substantive elaborations):

- **Mongol expansion (default path, D9):** .E08 (nomadic life and Temujin’s rise to 1206); .E09 (the steppe way of life: herding, food, housing). The section is authored end-to-end on the Mongol case: first the steppe environment and the nomadic way of life (E09), then the groups within that society, then the rise of Temujin to the 1206 kurultai (E08), and finally the continuities and changes that unification brought to the way of life and to the roles and relationships of those groups — which is the CD itself. Note .E09 uses “agriculture” loosely to mean the keeping of animals; this section names that and treats it as pastoral herding (Part 2).
- **Alternative paths (join key, remain available to a teacher or a D9 sign-off swap):** .E01 (one Polynesian society’s way of life — the ariki’s role); .E02 (Rapa Nui investigated: fishing, exchange, stone tools); .E03 (feudal Japan: Bushido and the samurai code); .E04 (why the shogun’s power grew); .E05 (how emperor, shogun, daimyo, samurai and workers related); .E06 (mapping Khmer features that shaped everyday life); .E07 (Khmer life: stone carvings and Zhou Daguan’s writings). Each alternative reuses this section’s spine: environment → way of life → groups and roles → a moment of change → continuity/change sorted across the five areas → source close study → interpretation → questions. The mapping figure (Figure 5a_steppe_map.png) joins the spatial-skills line named in §4 for 5A.

Achievement standard coverage: this section serves the standard’s aims of explaining worldwide patterns of change and continuity, and the historical evidence for the period; of recognising and explaining the varied forms that continuity and change took in the societies studied; and of identifying and explaining the significant events, people, ideas and developments behind continuity and change. The continuity/change concept language is applied here and is owned by 7A (VC2HH8S07); perspectives from sources is applied in the Rubruck close study and owned by 6E (VC2HH8S05); source features and value are owned by 6C/6D (VC2HH8S03/VC2HH8S04).

First Nations disposition (§2A): none — the CD and all nine of its elaborations carry no First Nations content. Nothing in this section is excluded.

Cross-references: 5B (the decimal army organisation, the codified law, the expansion of trade and the consequences of Mongol expansion for China are explained there — the mechanisms behind some changes named in Part 5 are cross-referenced to 5B, not re-explained), 5C (Kublai Khan’s Yuan-dynasty government and the Silk Road — the later stage of the same story), 5D (Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan compared as individuals; the Secret History close study lives in 5D), 5E (interpretations of the Mongols and the contested death-toll claims — the human cost of conquest is named here without detail and verified there, not here), 6E (reading perspectives from sources), 7A (continuity and change language), 7C (significance criteria). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): way of life, continuity, change, nomadic, pastoral/pastoralist, steppe, tribe, clan, khan, kurultai, ger/yurt, empire, social group, role, relationship, companion (nökör), primary source, secondary source (the last two re-established in one sentence, owned by 6C). Contested-term handling per CONTESTED_TERMS.md: “unification” and “conquest” are treated as frame-dependent at first use (whose word is it?); “change” is separated from “improvement” (a change can help one group and hurt another). The two opposed readings of how much unification changed everyday life are steelmanned (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4), and marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (Rule 5, stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. Frame the CD: what a “way of life” is, and what continuity and change mean (What you will learn). 2. The environment first: the Mongolian steppe and how its land and climate shaped a herding life (Part 1; Figure 5a_steppe_map.png). 3. The nomadic way of life: the five herds, food that travels, and the ger (Part 2; Figures 5a_five_snouts.png, 5a_ger.png, 5a_food.png) — the exact content of E09. 4. The groups within that way of life and their roles and relationships before 1206 (Part 3; Figure 5a_groups.png). 5. The

rise of Temujin to the 1206 kurultai (Part 4; Figure 5a_temujin_timeline.png) — the exact content of E08. 6. What unification changed and what stayed the same, sorted across the five areas of the CD and across the groups (Part 5; Figures 5a_roles_changed.png, 5a_continuity_change.png). 7. Primary-source close study: William of Rubruck’s outsider description of the Mongol way of life (Figure 5a_rubruck_source.png) — features, content, context, perspective. 8. Secondary-source interpretation: how much did everyday life really change — the continuity/change debate, steelmanned (Figure 5a_steelman.png). 9. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6, unscaffolded Q7–Q10. The chapter’s evidence-based extended response lives in the Skills chapters, not here (per-section volume, §3).

Common misconceptions to address: that nomads wandered at random (they moved on set seasonal circuits between known pastures); that the steppe was an empty, poor place (it supported a rich herding economy and its own social order); that “agriculture” in E09 means growing crops (here it means keeping animals — pastoral herding); that Temujin’s rise only changed who was in charge (it changed the roles and relationships of whole groups); that change means improvement (the same changes that brought order to some brought loss to others); that once the empire came, the old way of life vanished (most herders kept herding — outsiders like Rubruck still found the same life decades later).

What you will learn in this section

Long before there was an empire, there was a way of life. On one of the widest, coldest grasslands on Earth, people lived with their animals, moving with the seasons, turning the grass that humans cannot eat into food, warmth and shelter. This is the story of that way of life — and of the moment it was changed from within, when one man, **Temujin**, united the peoples of the grasslands and became **Genghis Khan** in 1206.

This section is about **continuity and change**. Every society has both: some things stay much the same across long stretches of time (continuities), and some things shift (changes). Historians sort change by its area of life — **social** (how people are grouped and ranked), **cultural** (beliefs, customs, skills), **economic** (how people make a living), **environmental** (the land and how they treat it) and **political** (who rules and how). They also ask *who* a change helped and who it hurt, because a single change is rarely good or bad for everyone.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **way of life** — the whole pattern of how a people live: how they get food and shelter, how they are organised, what they believe and value, and how they treat the land around them.
- **nomadic** — moving from place to place rather than living in one fixed home. The Mongols were nomadic herders: they moved their animals to fresh grass rather than staying still.
- **pastoral** — to do with keeping grazing animals. A **pastoralist** lives mainly from herds. (Note: the curriculum’s elaboration calls this “agriculture”, but here it means keeping animals — herding — not growing crops.)
- **steppe** — the great open grasslands of central Asia, where Mongolia sits.
- **tribe** and **clan** — groups of families who believed they shared ancestors and who looked after one another. On the steppe before 1206, tribes often fought each other.
- **khan** — a title for a chief or ruler among the steppe peoples.
- **kurultai** — a great meeting of chiefs and leading men, held to make big decisions, including choosing a ruler.
- **ger** — the round felt tent Mongols lived in (many English books call it a *yurt*, a word that came through Russian). It could be taken down, loaded on carts and moved.
- **empire** — a large state in which one power rules over many peoples and lands.
- **continuity** — something that stays much the same over time. **Change** — something that shifts. Note: change is not the same as improvement. A change can be a gain for one group and a loss for another, so every judgement of change should say *for whom*.

We will also keep using words you have met in other sections: **source**, **evidence**, **primary source** (made at the time, by someone there or close to it), **secondary source** (made later by someone who was not there), **cause**, **consequence**, **perspective** and **significance**.

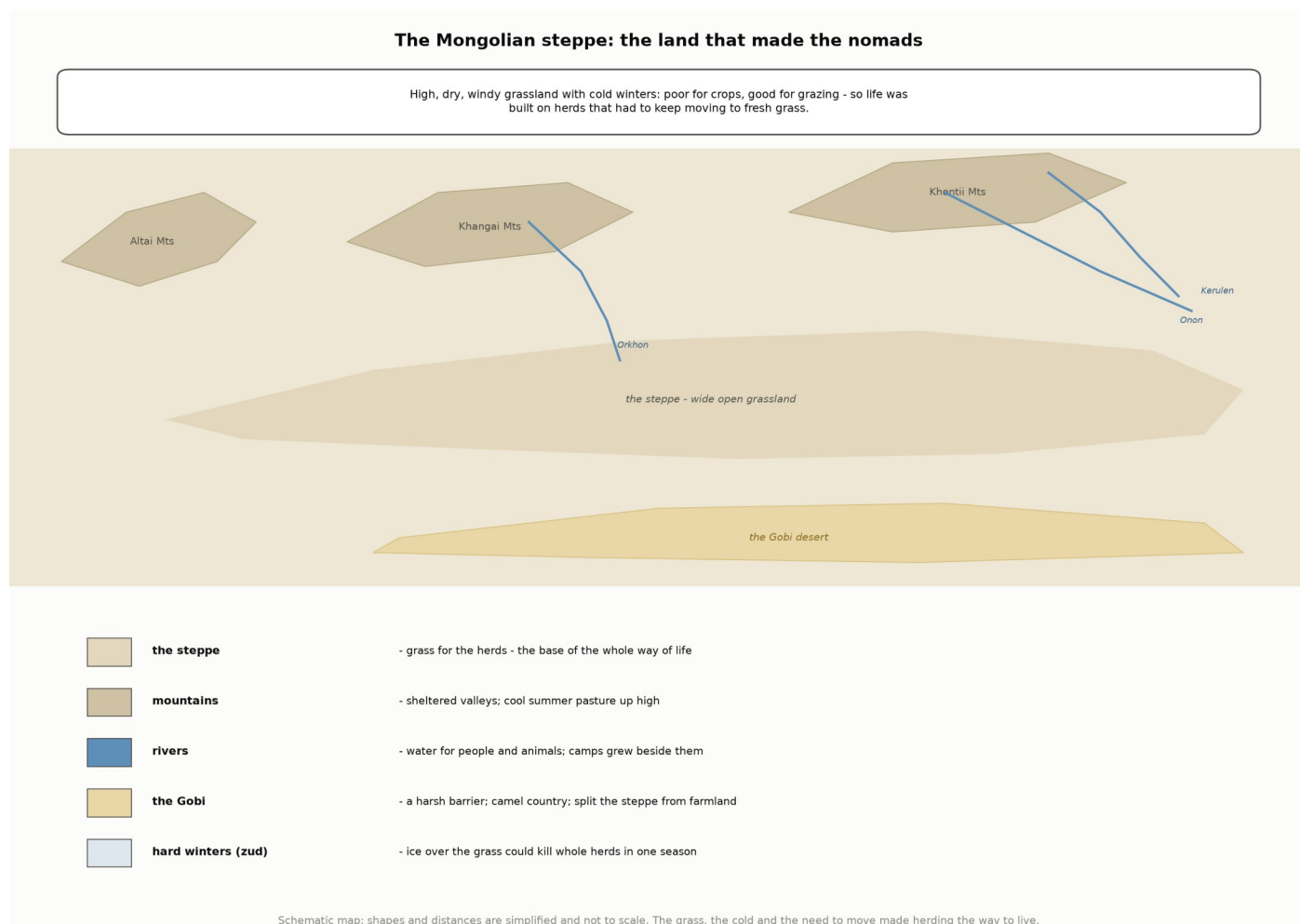
Key ideas

Part 1: The land that made the nomads — the Mongolian steppe

Every way of life begins with the land. Mongolia sits high in central Asia, on a vast grassland called the **steppe**. It is ringed by mountains — the Altai to the west, the Khangai and the Khentii ranges — and bordered to the south by the **Gobi**, one of the world's great deserts. Wide rivers — the Onon, the Kerulen and the Orkhon — run from the hills across the grass. The climate is harsh: short, warm summers and long, bitter winters, when the wind cuts across the open plain and temperatures can fall far below freezing.

That land set the terms of life. Most of it is dry, windy grassland — poor for growing crops, but good for grazing animals. So the people of the steppe built their lives not on farming one fixed field but on keeping animals and moving them to fresh grass. The environment made herding the way to live, and herding made movement the way to live. This is the **environmental** root of the whole way of life: the grass shaped the people as much as the people shaped the grass.

Life also had to survive the steppe's worst years. In a **zud** — a winter disaster when ice or deep snow covers the grass — animals cannot feed and whole herds can die. A herder's wealth could vanish in one hard season. That risk made the people mobile, careful about pasture, and ready to help or raid their neighbours. Keep these facts in mind: they explain almost everything in this section.



Schematic map of the Mongolian steppe showing the Altai, Khangai and Khentii mountains, the Gobi desert, the Onon, Kerulen and Orkhon rivers, and notes on how each feature shaped a herding way of life

Figure 1. The steppe and its features. The land did not just hold the Mongols — it made their way of life. (Section 6B shows how to read maps like this; the spatial skills join the Geography line named for this section.)

Part 2: A life on the move — herds, food and the ger

The heart of the Mongol way of life was the herd. Mongols kept five kinds of animal, often called the “**five jewels**”: **horses, camels, cattle, sheep** and **goats**. Each had a job, and together they turned grass into everything a family needed (Figure 2). Animals were wealth: a person’s standing rose and fell with the size and health of their herds.

The 'five jewels': the herds that fed, clothed and moved the Mongols		
Animals were wealth - a family's standing rose and fell with its herds.		
Animal	What it provided	Most valued for
 Horse	riding, travel and war; mares' milk for the drink called airag; a mark of status	riding and war
 Camel	carrying heavy loads across dry, stony ground; wool; linked the steppe to far trade	heavy transport
 Cattle	meat, milk and hides; pulled the carts that carried homes and goods	meat and cart-pulling
 Sheep	the main food animal - meat, fat and wool; wool was pressed into felt for homes	food and felt
 Goat	milk and fine soft wool; hardy on rough ground; helped eat up rough grazing	milk and fine wool

Together the five animals turned grass that people cannot eat into food, shelter, clothing and transport - the whole economy of the steppe.

Table of the five herd animals kept by the Mongols — horse, camel, cattle, sheep and goat — and what each provided, from riding, milk and meat to wool, felt and transport

Figure 2. The “five jewels”: what each animal gave to the way of life.

Because the animals had to keep finding grass, the people moved. This was not wandering with no plan. Families followed **set circuits** between known pastures — up to summer grazing in the highlands, down to sheltered winter camps — moving when the grass was used up. A household’s wealth, food and shelter all moved with it.

Food came from the herds and had to last and travel. Meat — mostly mutton, and horse at times — was eaten fresh when it could be, and saved for winter as **dried meat**: strips frozen and dried in the cold air, then pounded into a light powder that rode easily in a bag and became a hot broth when water was added. Milk was just as important. Mares’ milk was fermented into a slightly sour drink called **airag**, and milk was also made into yoghurt and into hard dried curds that kept for months. These foods needed no fields, no ovens and no storehouses — they were made by and for a moving people (Figure 3).

Food that travels: a diet built for a moving life

Everything came from the herds and had to keep and move - no fields, ovens or storehouses.

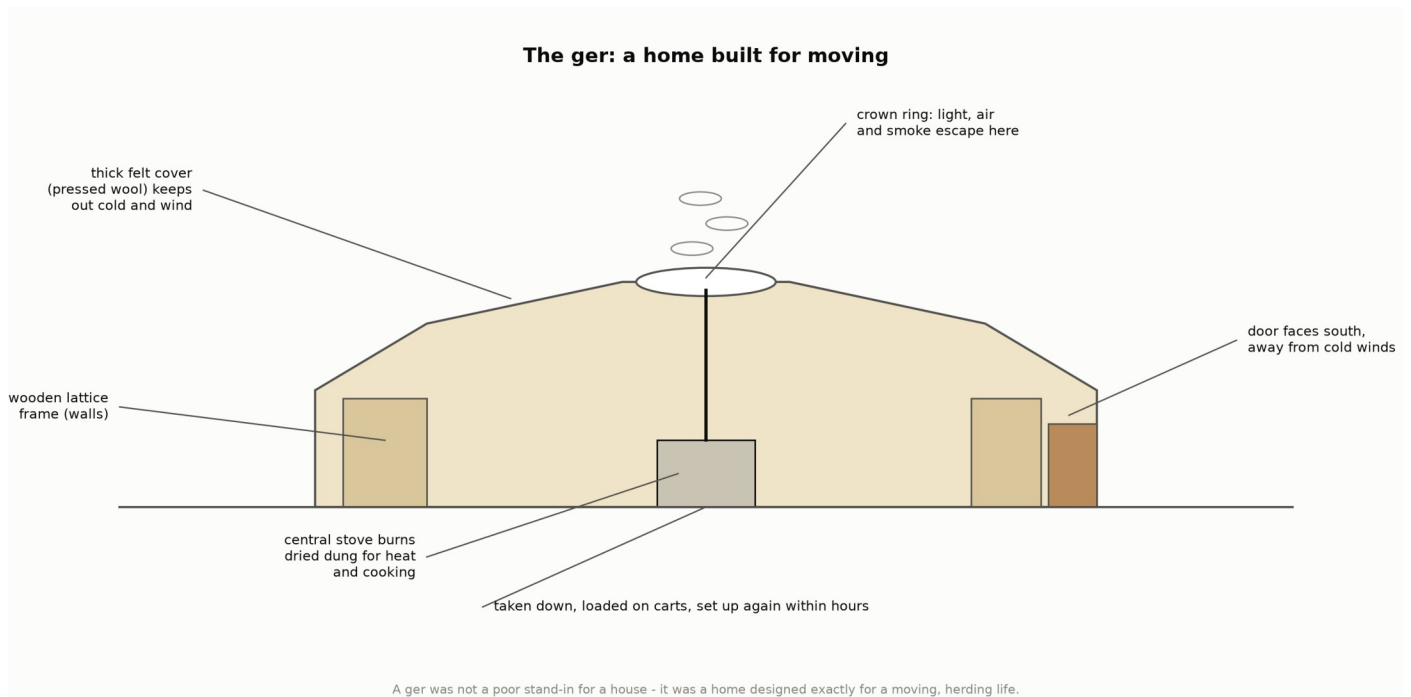
Dried meat (borts)	Fermented mares' milk (airag)	Yoghurt and dried curds
meat frozen and dried in the winter cold, then pounded into a light powder	mares' milk made sharp and sour by fermenting in a skin bag	milk set into yoghurt, then dried into hard little curds
Why it suited a moving life: rode in a saddlebag; became a hot broth when water was added	Why it suited a moving life: a daily drink on the move; milk kept better than fresh meat	Why it suited a moving life: kept for months; light to carry between camps

Because food could keep and travel, the people could follow the grass.

Diagram of the foods of the Mongol steppe: dried meat pounded into powder and re-made as broth, fermented mares' milk called airag, yoghurt and dried curds, with notes on why each suited a moving life

Figure 3. Food that travels: the steppe diet was built to move.

Shelter had to move too. The **ger** was a round tent of a wooden frame covered with thick **felt** (pressed wool). A central stove burned dried dung for heat and cooking, and the door usually faced south, away from the worst winds. A ger could be taken down, loaded onto carts, and set up again within hours (Figure 4). Inside, space was arranged by custom: a place of honour opposite the door, and sides set aside for men's and women's work. The ger was not a poor substitute for a house — it was a home built exactly for the life its people lived.



Labelled diagram of a Mongol ger in cross-section: the wooden lattice frame, the felt cover, the central stove, the south-facing door, and notes on how quickly it could be moved

Figure 4. The ger: a home built for moving.

Taken together, herds, moving food and the moving home make up the **economic** and **cultural** heart of the way of life the curriculum asks you to describe.

Part 3: Who was who on the steppe — groups and their roles before 1206

A way of life is not just land and herds; it is also people and how they are organised. Before 1206 the peoples of the steppe were not one nation. They were many **tribes** and **clans** — Kereit, Naiman, Merkit, Tatar, and the Mongol tribes themselves among them — who spoke related languages and shared much of one way of life, yet often raided one another for animals, people and old scores.

Within and between these groups, people had different **roles** and stood in different **relationships** to one another (Figure 5):

- **Chiefs and nobles** led tribes and clans, owned the largest herds, and called men to follow them in peace and in war.
- **Common herders** made up most of the people. They tended the animals, moved camp, and owed their chiefs service and support.
- **Companions** (in Mongol, *nökör*) were men who swore personal loyalty to a chosen leader, following him in return for food, gifts and protection. This bond of personal loyalty — not just family ties — would matter greatly in Temujin’s rise.
- **Women** ran much of daily life: they managed the camp, made the felt and the ger, milked the animals and cared for the young herds. In a culture of frequent raids, women and children could be carried off, so families and alliances existed in part to protect them.
- **Captives and servants** — often people taken in raids — worked for the households that held them.
- **Shamans** were religious specialists who spoke to the spirits and the sky. Most steppe peoples honoured **Eternal Blue Heaven** and sacred mountains, and shamans gave that belief a voice.



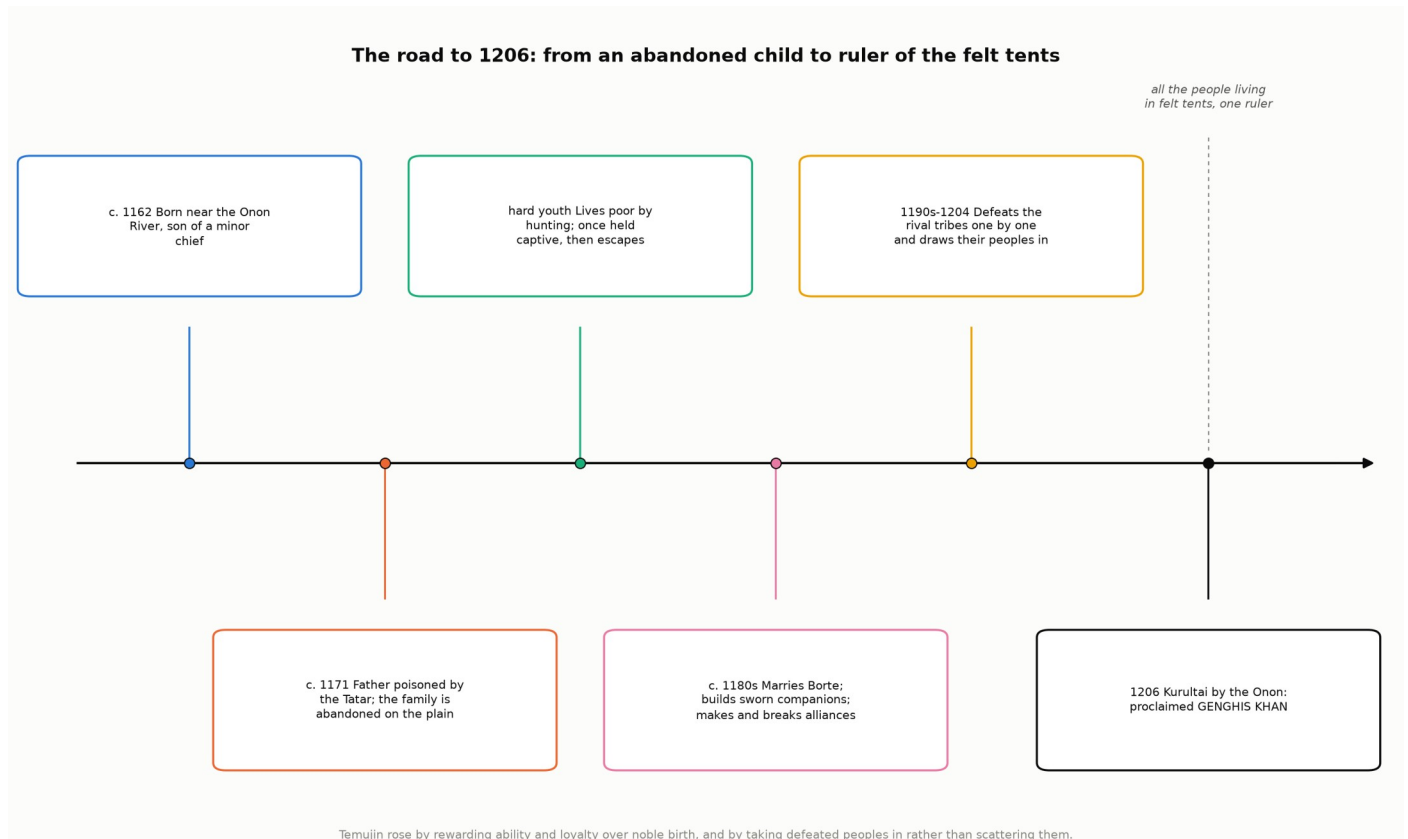
Diagram of the groups of steppe society before 1206 — chiefs and nobles, common herders, sworn companions, women, captives and servants, and shamans — with each group’s role and how the groups related before unification

Figure 5. Steppe society before 1206: many groups, many roles, and no single ruler over them all.

Notice two things about these relationships. First, loyalty ran mostly through **family and tribe**: you followed your kin and your chief. Second, the tribes' raiding of one another was a settled part of life — a cause of endless revenge. Both of these facts are about to matter, because Temujin's rise changed them.

Part 4: From outcast to khan — the rise of Temujin

Into this divided world, near the Onon River about 1162, **Temujin** was born, the son of a minor chief named Yesükhei. His early life was hard, and its turns shaped the leader he became (Figure 6). When Temujin was about nine, his father was poisoned by enemies, the Tatar. Then his own tribe abandoned the family on the open plain, and Temujin grew up poor, living by hunting and gathering, and at one point held captive by rivals before escaping.



Timeline of the rise of Temujin from about 1162 to 1206: his birth near the Onon River, his father's poisoning and the family's abandonment, his hard youth and escape from captivity, his marriage to Börte and the winning back of her home, his first alliances and his first break with rivals, and the kurultai of 1206 where he is proclaimed Genghis Khan

Figure 6. The road to 1206: from an abandoned child to ruler of the felt tents.

Temujin rose by doing things the old way of life had not rewarded. He built up **companions** — men bound to him by personal loyalty, not just by tribe. He rewarded **ability and faithfulness** rather than noble birth. And when he beat a rival tribe, he often took its people in instead of driving them off or scattering them. He made alliances, and he broke with old ones when they turned against him — most painfully with **Jamuqa**, once his sworn blood-brother, who became his rival. Through the late 1100s Temujin defeated the Tatar, the Kereit, the Naiman and the Merkit, one by one, drawing their peoples under his rule.

In **1206**, at a great **kurultai** by the source of the Onon River, the gathered chiefs proclaimed Temujin ruler of “all the people living in felt tents” and gave him a new title: **Genghis Khan**, often understood as “universal ruler”. The tribes of the steppe were now one people under one khan.

A word about that word. Was 1206 a **unification** or a **conquest**? The two words frame the same events in a different way, and the choice tells you whose eyes you are seeing them through. From the point of view of Temujin and his followers, and of the later Mongol court, it was a unification — the warring tribes made one people. From the point of view of the Tatar, Naiman and others he defeated, it was a conquest — their own chiefs and independence taken from them. Neither word is simply wrong, but each carries a perspective. In this section we will name which view we are using when it matters, and your tasks will ask you to do the same.

Part 5: What changed, what stayed — a way of life after 1206

Now we can answer the question this section owns: after 1206, what were the **continuities and changes** in everyday life, and in the roles and relationships of the different groups?

How the roles and relationships of groups changed. Unification re-made the links between people (Figure 7):

- **Loyalty moved from tribe to khan.** Genghis Khan broke up the old tribe loyalties and mixed the people into new units of ten, hundred, thousand and ten thousand, putting different tribes side by side on purpose. Section 5B explains this army organisation in full; the point here is the change in relationship — a herder now owed service to the khan and his new unit, not only to his old chief.
- **Birth mattered less, service more.** Men were raised for ability and loyalty, not noble blood. Some of Genghis Khan's most trusted generals had once been his enemies. A common herder could now rise.
- **The law applied to everyone.** Genghis Khan had rules set down that punished raiding and the carrying off of people, among other things. The constant tribal raiding that had marked the old relationships was made a crime.
- **Women's position was touched.** The new law forbade the carrying off of women, one of the old dangers of steppe life. (Their full story is hard to hear, because the sources were mostly written by and about men — see the close study below.)
- **Religious men were honoured but watched.** Shamans and holy men of several faiths were freed from some burdens, but no religious leader was allowed to stand above the khan.

The same people, new relationships: roles before and after 1206			
Group	Before 1206	After 1206	
 Chiefs and nobles	Led their own tribe; power came from birth and kin.	Many lost their separate power; the khan stood over them all.	
 Common herders	Owed service to their own tribe chief.	Now owed service to the khan in new mixed units of ten and hundred.	
 Sworn companions	Followed a chosen leader for gifts and protection.	Became the khan's trusted guard and officers; loyalty to one ruler.	
 Able men of low birth	Birth set their ceiling; noble blood was needed to rise.	Raised for ability and loyalty; some former enemies became generals.	
 Women	Ran camp and herds, but raids could carry them off.	The new law forbade carrying off women, an old danger of raiding.	
 Religious men	Shamans spoke for the spirits and swayed tribes.	Honoured and freed from some burdens, but no leader stood above the khan.	

Loyalty moved from tribe and kin to the khan; service began to matter more than birth.

Table showing how the roles and relationships of the different groups changed after 1206: chiefs and nobles, common herders, sworn companions, women, conquered peoples, and religious men — each with their role before and after unification

Figure 7. The same people, new relationships: roles before and after 1206.

What stayed the same. Here is the continuity side, and it is just as real. For most families, daily life kept its old shape. People still kept the same five animals, moved on the same seasonal circuits, lived in the same gers and had the same dried meat and airag. The horse stayed at the centre of life. Belief in Eternal Blue Heaven continued — Genghis

Khan himself claimed his rule was willed by Heaven. And the **kurultai** remained the way a ruler was confirmed in public. So the deepest layer of the way of life — the herding itself — carried on, while the layers of rule, law and loyalty above it were re-made.

Figure 8 sorts all of this across the five areas named in the content description, with one continuity and one change for each.

Continuity and change after 1206, across the five areas of life		
No area changed wholly or stayed wholly the same - the skill is saying what changed, how much, and for whom.		
Area	Continuity - what stayed much the same	Change - what shifted
Social	Herding families stayed the base of society.	Loyalty moved from tribe and kin to the khan; service began to matter more than birth.
Cultural	Belief in Eternal Blue Heaven and sacred mountains continued.	The Mongol language was written down for the first time; decrees were recorded.
Economic	The five herds stayed the measure of wealth.	Service and tribute now flowed to one ruler; trade routes were guarded.
Environmental	People still moved their herds with the seasons.	Rules now protected the herds and pasture, such as bans on killing animals in the breeding season.
Political	The kurultai still confirmed a ruler in public.	One khan now ruled all the tribes under one law, instead of many rival chiefs.

This table is the heart of the section's question: every society has both continuity and change at once.

Table sorting the continuities and changes after 1206 across the five areas of the content description (social, cultural, economic, environmental, political), each with one thing that stayed the same and one thing that changed

Figure 8. Continuity and change across the five areas of life. This is the heart of the section's question.

Read Figure 8 the way a historian does: no area changed wholly or stayed wholly the same. The skill is in saying *what* changed, *how much*, and *for whom*.

Primary source close study: William of Rubruck sees the Mongols

One of the clearest outside pictures of the Mongol way of life was written by a European friar, **William of Rubruck**. In 1253–1255 he travelled from France to the court of the Great Khan — about fifty years after 1206 — and on his way he lived among the Mongols and wrote down what he saw. His account is a **primary source**: a description by someone who was there. The passage below is a fresh rendering made for this section from his Latin account, not a copy of any published translation.

“They make their houses with a frame of thin sticks and cover it with black felt ... the door always faces south. They set the houses on great carts so that a whole household can be moved at once ... The women drive the carts and load and unload them, and they make the felt. The men look after the herds — horses, cattle, sheep and goats — and hunt. They drink the milk of mares, which they make sharp and sour ... In winter they slaughter animals and dry the meat so it will keep.”

— from the account of William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium* (“The Journey”), c. 1255, rendered into English by the author for this section

Run your source questions over it (Figure 9):

- **Features and context:** a travel account in Latin by a Christian friar, written soon after his journey for his king. He saw the life with his own eyes, decades after the Mongols had already built their empire.
- **What it shows:** the heart of the way of life you met in Part 2 — the felt houses on carts, the south-facing door, the moving households, the split of work between men and women, and the diet of milk and dried meat. Notice: this is the *same* life described fifty years earlier. The empire had not made the herding vanish. That makes Rubruck valuable evidence of **continuity**.
- **Perspective and limits:** Rubruck was an outsider and a Christian, writing for readers far away who knew almost nothing of the steppe. He is full of sharp detail, but he also judges what he sees by the standards of his own world, and he does not understand everything. Outsiders of his time often called nomads “barbarians” — a word that says more about the speaker than about the people described. The Mongols had their own ordered, skilled way of life, as this section shows.
- **Whose voices are missing:** like most sources, it tells us more about what men did than about women’s own words, and nothing from a Mongol’s own point of view. For the inside story, historians turn to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, which section 5D studies in full.

Primary-source close study — Rubruck on the Mongol way of life

From the Itinerarium of William of Rubruck, c. 1255

“They make their houses with a frame of thin sticks and cover it with black felt; the door always faces south. They set the houses on great carts so that a whole household can be moved at once. The women drive the carts and load and unload them, and they make the felt. The men look after the herds — horses, cattle, sheep and goats — and hunt. They drink the milk of mares, which they make sharp and sour. In winter they slaughter animals and dry the meat so it will keep.”

Rendered into English by the author for this book from the Latin, written about 50 years after 1206.

Read it like a historian (Sections 6C–6D)

Who speaks?

A Christian friar from France who lived among the Mongols and saw it himself.

What does it show?

The felt homes on carts, the south-facing door, the men’s and women’s work, the milk and dried meat.

Why does it matter?

Written decades after 1206, it shows the herding way of life carried on — continuity.

What are its limits?

An outsider’s eyes: he judges by his own world’s standards, and no Mongol’s own voice is heard.

Same facts, an outsider’s eyes: sharp on what he could see, quiet on what a Mongol would have felt about it.

Primary source panel presenting a shortened rendering of William of Rubruck’s description of Mongol houses on carts, the south-facing door, the division of work between men and women, and the diet of mares’ milk and dried meat, beside questions about features, content, context, perspective and whose voices are missing

Figure 9. An outsider’s eyes: Rubruck on the Mongol way of life. Read it the way Sections 6C–6D teach: who speaks, to whom, why, and what is left out.

Secondary source interpretation: how much really changed?

Historians agree on the facts in this section. Where they differ is in the **weighing** — and the difference is worth seeing, because it is exactly the continuity/change skill this section teaches. The question is: **how much did everyday life really change when Temujin united the steppe?**

Reading A — unification re-made society. Some historians stress the change. In a few years, they point out, the whole way the people were organised was torn up: old tribes were broken and mixed into new units, birth gave way to

service, raiding was made a crime, and one law and one ruler bound everyone together. On this reading, 1206 was a true turning point — the moment scattered herders became a single state, and the change in roles and relationships was deep, not shallow.

Reading B — the herding life carried on. Other historians stress the continuity. The great majority of people, they note, were still herders who kept the same five animals, moved on the same circuits, lived in the same gers and had the same food — as Rubruck could still see decades later. Rulers and laws changed above them, but the deep economic and environmental base of life shifted very little. On this reading, for most families 1206 changed who collected their service, not how they lived day to day.

Both readings rest on real evidence, and each answers the other: Reading A must admit that the herding base carried on; Reading B must admit that law, loyalty and the chances of rise were genuinely re-made. Your job is not to pick the “right” side but to weigh the evidence and say how much change you think there was, and for whom. Different students, reasoning well, may reach different judgements — that is expected, and it is the reasoning that is marked.

How much did everyday life really change after 1206?

Same facts, two weighings. Steelman each side before you judge (Section 6F).

Reading A: unification RE-MADE society	Reading B: the herding life CARRIED ON
The case In a few years the whole way the people were organised was torn up and rebuilt - so 1206 was a true turning point. Its evidence Old tribes were broken up and mixed into new units. Birth gave way to service and ability. Raiding was made a crime under one law. One ruler bound everyone together. It must answer The herding base carried on - most families still kept the same animals and lived in the same felt homes.	The case For most people the deep base of life barely shifted - rulers and laws changed above them, not how they lived day to day. Its evidence The five herds, the seasonal circuits, the ger and the diet all continued. Rubruck still saw the same life decades later. Belief in Eternal Blue Heaven went on. It must answer Law, loyalty and the chance to rise really were re-made - the change above was real, not just a change of names.

The mark goes to the weighing, not the side you choose: how much change, and for whom?

Two-panel steelman of the debate over how much everyday life changed after 1206: Reading A, that unification re-made society, and Reading B, that the herding life carried on, each with its evidence and the objection it must answer

Figure 10. Same facts, two weighings: how much did 1206 change everyday life? Steelman both before you judge (Section 6F practises this method).

Practice tasks (with help)

- Q1.** Use Figure 1. (a) Name the desert to the south of the steppe, one mountain range that rings it, and one of its rivers. (b) In one sentence, explain why the land pushed the Mongols towards herding rather than growing crops.
- Q2.** Use Figure 2. Match each animal to one main use: horse, camel, sheep, goat. Then explain in one sentence why animals counted as wealth.
- Q3.** Use Figures 3 and 4. Give two ways the Mongols’ food and their home were each built for a moving life.

Q4. Use Figure 5. Name the group that fits each description: (a) men who swore personal loyalty to a chosen leader; (b) the people who made up most of steppe society and tended the herds; (c) religious specialists who spoke to the spirits; (d) the group that managed the camp and made the felt.

Q5. Use Figure 6. Put these in order, first to last: (a) Temujin is proclaimed Genghis Khan at the kurultai; (b) Temujin is born near the Onon River; (c) Temujin's father is poisoned and the family is abandoned; (d) Temujin defeats the rival tribes one by one. Give the date of the kurultai.

Q6. Use Figure 7. For each group, give one way its role or relationship changed after 1206: (a) common herders; (b) a man of ability but no noble birth; (c) women.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Using Figure 8 and Part 5, write a paragraph of 5–7 sentences that gives one continuity and one change for **three** of the five areas (social, cultural, economic, environmental, political). Finish with one sentence saying which area you think changed the most, and why.

Q8. “For most Mongol families, 1206 changed who ruled them, not how they lived.” “1206 re-made the roles and relationships of every group on the steppe.” Give the strongest evidence for each claim, then write your own reasoned judgement of two or three sentences saying how much you think everyday life changed — and for whom. You are marked on the reasoning, not on which side you land on.

Q9. Read the Rubruck passage in Figure 9. (a) Give two details from it that match the way of life in Part 2. (b) Give one sign that Rubruck is an outsider describing people not his own. (c) In one sentence, explain why his account is useful evidence of continuity even though he was not Mongol.

Q10. Extended practice: choose ONE group from Figure 5 (chiefs and nobles, common herders, companions, women, captives and servants, or shamans). Write two short paragraphs: the first on that group's role and relationships **before** 1206, the second on how unification changed them. Use at least two dated facts or details from this section in each paragraph, and end with one sentence on whether the change was, on balance, a gain or a loss for that group — and why.

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (a) The Gobi desert; any one of the Altai, Khangai or Khentii ranges; any one of the Onon, Kerulen or Orkhon rivers. (b) Accept reasoned variants: much of the steppe is dry, windy grassland that is poor for crops but good for grazing, so keeping animals and moving them to fresh grass was the reliable way to live.

Q2. Horse — riding, travel, war, and mares' milk for airag; camel — carrying heavy loads and crossing dry country; sheep — meat, wool and fat (the main food animal); goat — milk and fine wool. Animals were wealth because a family's food, shelter, clothing and standing all came from them, and their size showed a person's riches.

Q3. Food: dried meat was light, kept for months and became a quick broth; airag, yoghurt and dried curds were made from milk with no fields or storehouses. Home: the ger was a wooden frame under felt that could be taken down and set up in hours; it rode on carts; the south-facing door kept out the worst wind. Accept any two each.

Q4. (a) companions (nökör); (b) common herders; (c) shamans; (d) women.

Q5. Order: (b) about 1162 → (c) about 1171 → (d) late 1100s → (a) 1206. The kurultai was in 1206.

Q6. (a) Common herders now owed service to the khan and their new mixed unit, not only to their old tribe chief. (b) An able man of no noble birth could be raised for his ability and loyalty — birth mattered less than service. (c) The new law forbade the carrying off of women, one of the old dangers of raiding. Accept reasoned variants.

Q7. Mark on: one clear continuity and one clear change in each of three areas, drawn from Figure 8/Part 5, and a closing judgement of which area changed most with a reason. Example pairs — social: herding families stayed the base of life (continuity) / loyalty moved from tribe to khan (change); cultural: belief in Eternal Blue Heaven continued (continuity) / Mongol was written down for the first time (change); economic: the five herds stayed the wealth

(continuity) / service and tax now flowed to one ruler (change); environmental: people still moved herds with the seasons (continuity) / protected grazing rules now backed the herds (change); political: the kurultai still confirmed rulers (continuity) / one khan now ruled all the tribes (change). Any reasoned “changed most” judgement is acceptable with a tied reason.

Q8. Mark on the strength of each side’s evidence and the student’s own reasoned judgement. Claim 1 (little change for most): the five herds, the seasonal circuits, the ger and the diet all carried on, as Rubruck still saw decades later. Claim 2 (deep change): the mixing into new units, promotion by ability over birth, the law against raiding, and the change in women’s safety. Both claims are partial — claim 1 underplays the re-made law and loyalty; claim 2 underplays the carried-on herding base. Do not mark the conclusion itself; two opposed judgements can both earn full marks (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 5). An answer that says “it depends on the group — a common herder saw less change than a chief” is exactly the frame-aware response to reward.

Q9. (a) Any two matching Part 2: felt houses on carts; the south-facing door; moving households; men herding horses, cattle, sheep and goats; women making the felt; drinking sour mares’ milk; drying meat in winter. (b) Accept reasoned signs: he describes the people from outside, in his own terms, for readers far away, and judges what he sees; he does not give a Mongol’s own words. (c) Because he was there and saw the same herding life fifty years after 1206, his account shows the deep way of life carried on through the change of rule — good evidence of continuity, read with care for his outsider perspective.

Q10. Mark on: accurate before/after roles for the chosen group, two dated facts or details from the section in each paragraph (e.g. 1162, 1206, the five jewels, the mixing into units of ten, promotion by ability, the law against raiding, Rubruck’s visit 1253–55), and a closing gain/loss judgement tied to that group with a reason. Example — common herders: before, they tended herds and owed service to their tribe chief, living in felt homes and moving with the seasons; after, they still herded the same animals and lived in the same gers, but they now owed service to the khan in a mixed unit, raiding was no longer a way of life, and an able man had a new chance to rise. Whether that was a gain or a loss for them is the student’s to argue — reward reasoning, not conclusion.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium* (“The Journey”)** — account of his mission to the Mongols, 1253–1255, written in Latin soon after his return for King Louis IX of France. Standard English version: Peter Jackson (trans.), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (Hakluyt Society, 1990). The passage on houses, carts, the division of work and the diet in the close study is rendered in my own words from the Latin, not copied from any published translation. Subject of Figure 5a_rubruck_source.png.
- **The Secret History of the Mongols** — composed in Mongol around 1240; the main inside source for Temujin’s rise and the 1206 kurultai; standard translation Francis Woodman Cleaves (Harvard, 1982). Cited here as evidence of the rise; its close study belongs to section 5D, where its features and limits are studied in full.
- **John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*** — from his papal embassy of 1245–1247; a second outsider account of the Mongol way of life, named so students know Rubruck is not the only such witness.
- **The “five jewels” (tavan khoshuu mal), the ger, borts (dried meat), airag and aaruul (dried curds), the zud, the nökör companion and the kurultai** — described from the standard record of Mongol life in my own words, not quoted.
- **David Morgan, *The Mongols* (1986; 2nd ed. 2007)** — the secondary interpretation in the “how much changed” discussion is framed against his careful reading of Mongol society and the limits of the evidence; the two readings are my own steelman summaries of positions historians hold, not quotations.
- **Dates** follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. Temujin’s birth (about 1162), his father’s death (about 1171) and the kurultai (1206) are the standard dates. No First Nations content appears in this section (none exists in this CD or its elaborations). The human cost of the conquests that built the empire is named without detail per the age-appropriateness rule (CONTENT_POLICY.md); the contested death-toll claims are the subject of section 5E’s verification task, not this one.

One turning point: its causes and its consequences

In this section we follow one event — the **Mongol expansion**, c. 1206–1368 — to see how a single turning point can carry causes and consequences at once. We ask *why* the steppe turned outward, *what changed* across Asia and Europe as a result, *what carried on*, and *what changed back* — the full language of continuity and change (Section 7A).

Curriculum focus — VC2HH8K25 Students learn about: how one significant event or turning point carried causes and consequences, and drove continuity and change

This section delivers the Mongol elaborations (the chapter plan makes the Mongol expansion the end-to-end case study; the other topics' elaborations, .E01–.E10, stay as comparison points):

- VC2HH8K25 .E11 — how the Mongols joined Europe and Asia
- VC2HH8K25 .E12 — the decimal army and the khan's governing policies
- VC2HH8K25 .E13 — consequences of the Mongol expansion, including for China

Skills joined here: ordering events on timelines (Section 6B), causes and consequences (Section 7B), sources and interpretations (Sections 6C–6F).

Key terms

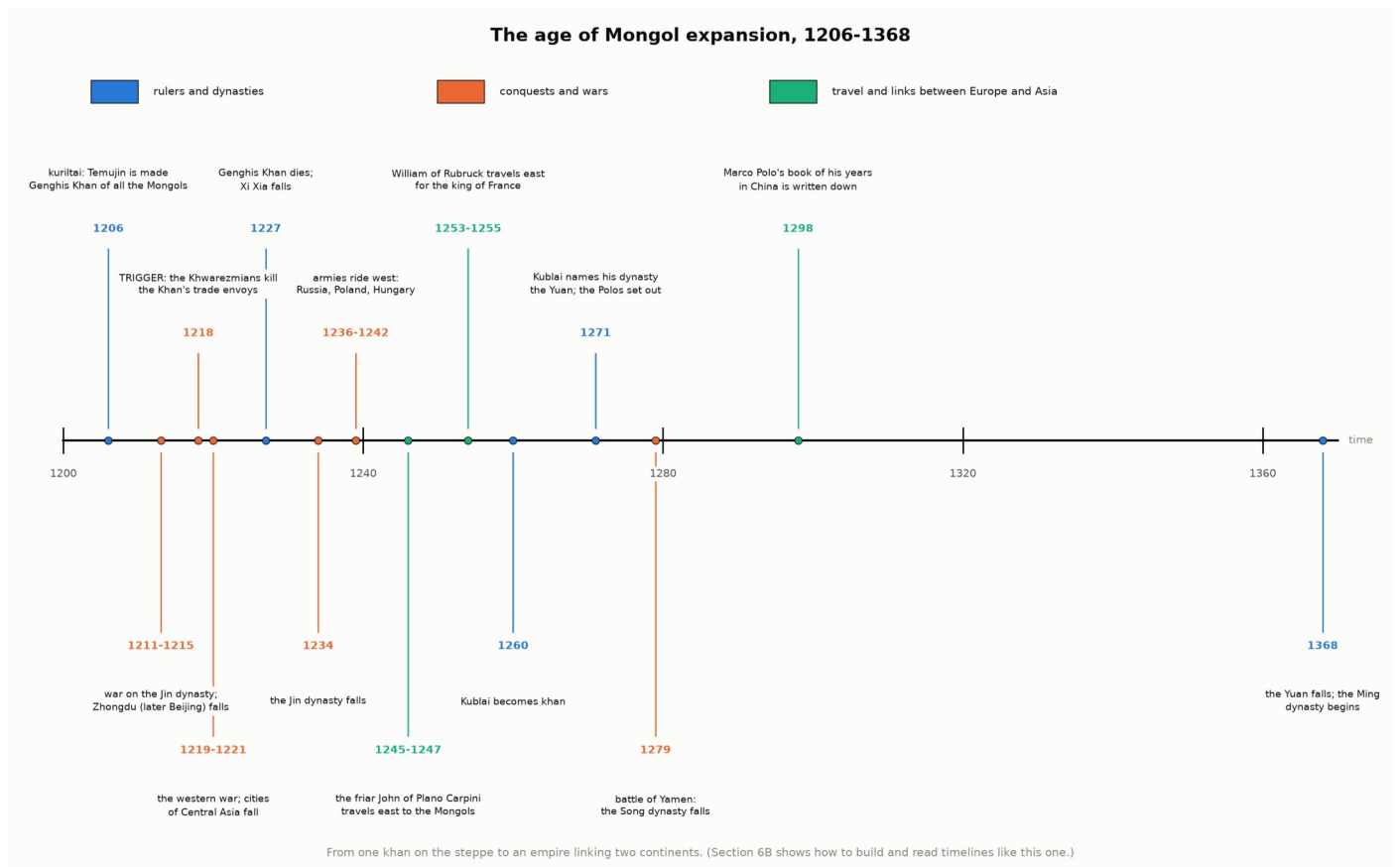
- **steppe** — the great belt of grassland across the middle of Asia, too dry for most farming, home to herding peoples.
- **nomadic** — moving from place to place with herds of horses, sheep and goats, rather than settling in one place to farm.
- **khan** — a steppe title for a ruler or chief.
- **kuriltai** — the great meeting of steppe chiefs that chose or confirmed a khan.
- **dynasty** — a line of rulers from the same family.
- **empire** — one power ruling many peoples and lands, usually won by force. *Empire* is a contested word: what one society calls “bringing order”, the conquered may call rule by force. In this section we use it to mean the khans' rule over many lands.
- **decimal organisation** — arranging the army in units of ten, a hundred, a thousand and ten thousand.
- **codified laws** — laws set down in writing as one body of rules, rather than only spoken and remembered.
- **yam** — the relay-post system that carried orders, news and visitors across the empire with fresh horses.
- **paiza** — a tablet of authority the khan gave to envoys, officials and trusted merchants; the passport of the Mongol world.
- **turning point** — a moment after which things are clearly different from before.

Teaching sequence

Part 1 — One event: the steppe turns outward (1206–1279) VC2HH8K25 .E11

Around 1200, the steppe was home to **nomadic** tribes who herded horses, sheep and goats and traded with the settled lands around them: China's **dynasties** to the south and east, and the rich trading cities of Central Asia to the west. Tribes raided and traded in turns, and chiefs kept their followers by rewarding them with loot, gifts and trade goods.

Into this world came **Temujin** (born c. 1162). By **1206** he had beaten or bound every rival, and a **kuriltai** — the great meeting of the steppe tribes — made him **Genghis Khan**, one ruler over all the Mongols. The steppe had never been one power before. In **1218** the **Khwarezmian Empire**, which ruled Central Asia, killed a caravan of the khan's trade envoys at the frontier town of **Otrar**, and then killed his ambassador too. Genghis Khan answered with a full invasion (1219–1221). The steppe was turning outward, and it kept turning for sixty years. Figure 1 shows the shape of the whole event before we try to explain it.



Timeline from 1200 to 1368 with three colour-coded lines: rulers and dynasties (the kuriltai of 1206, Genghis Khan's death in 1227, Kublai khan in 1260, the Yuan named in 1271, the Yuan falls and the Ming begins in 1368), conquests and wars (the 1218 trigger at Otrar, the Jin war 1211-1215, the western war 1219-1221, Jin falls 1234, the ride west 1236-1242, Yamen 1279), and travel (Carpini 1245-1247, Rubruck 1253-1255, Polo's book written down 1298)

Figure 1. The age of Mongol expansion in fourteen events (Section 6B shows how to build and read timelines like this one).

Two things to notice in Figure 1. First, conquest came in waves: each win brought new soldiers and new borders, and each new border touched new neighbours. Second, the travel line runs inside the conquest's shadow — the roads between Europe and Asia only opened *because* one power now ruled them end to end. That is the connection .E11 asks us to explain.

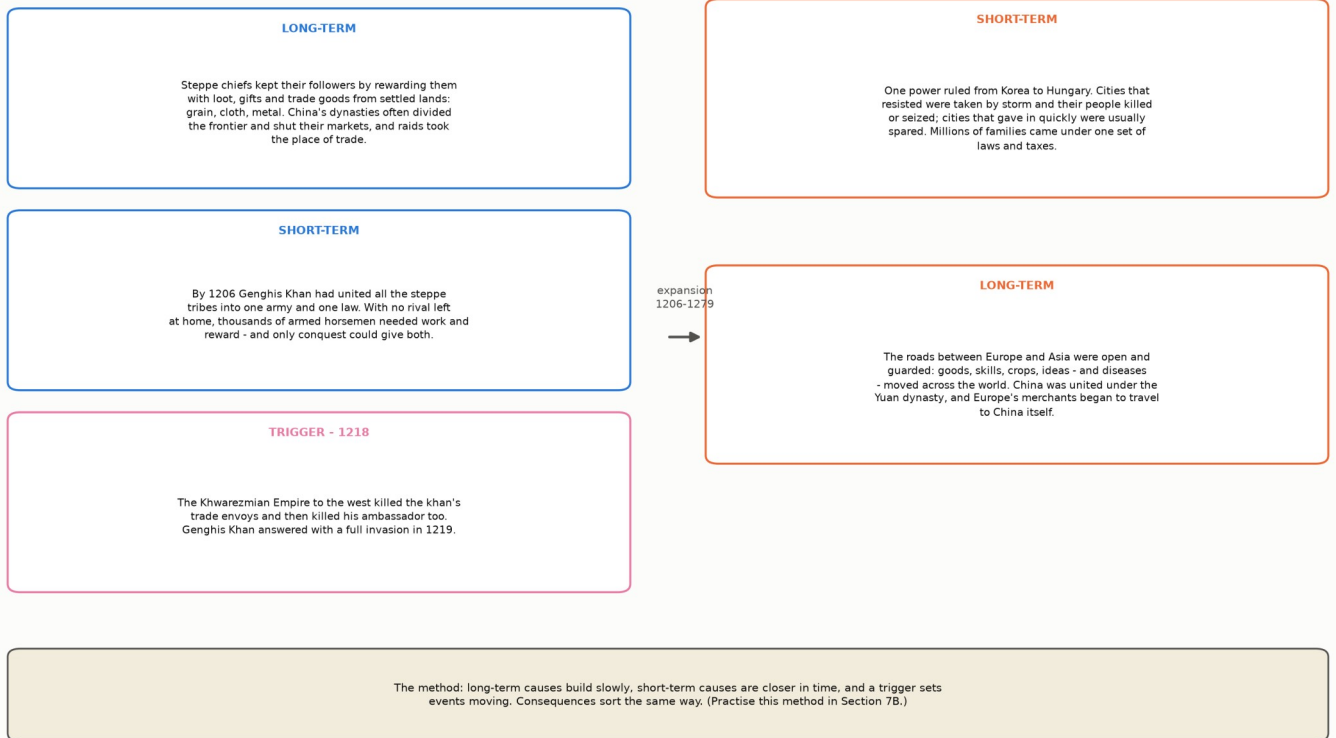
Part 2 — Sorting the causes and consequences VC2HH8K25 .E13

Historians sort causes into **long-term causes** (deep, slow-building reasons), **short-term causes**, and a **trigger** (the spark that sets events off). They sort consequences the same way: short-term results and long-term results. Figure 2 models this for the Mongol expansion (the method is practised in Section 7B).

Sorting the causes and consequences of Mongol expansion

CAUSES - why did it happen?

CONSEQUENCES - what did it lead to?



One event, sorted into layers. Consequences fed back too: each new land brought new wealth, new borders and new reasons to march again.

Cause and consequence model of the Mongol expansion: long-term cause (steppe chiefs kept followers with loot, gifts and trade goods; China's dynasties divided and shut their markets), short-term cause (by 1206 all the steppe tribes were united under one army and one law), trigger 1218 (the Khwarezmians killed the khan's trade envoys and his ambassador), short-term consequence (one power ruled from Korea to Hungary), long-term consequence (the roads between Europe and Asia opened and were guarded)

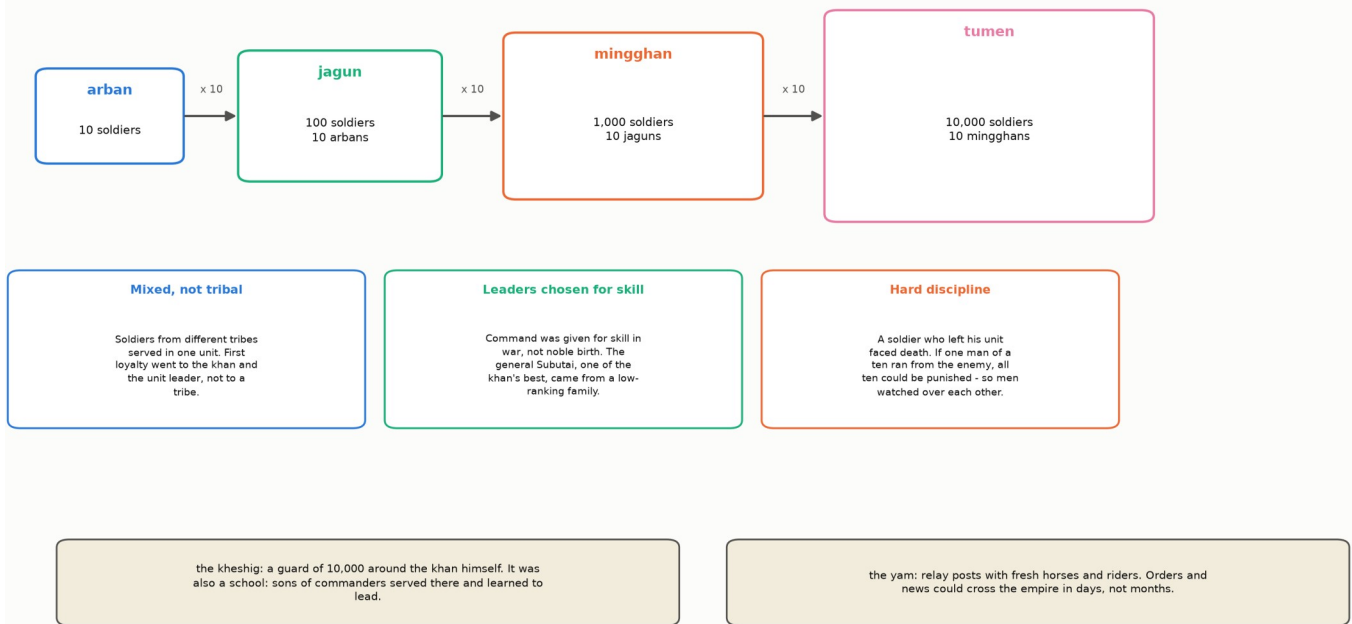
Figure 2. One event, sorted into causes and consequences.

The pattern in Figure 2 is a key idea for this section: **consequences feed back into causes**. Each new land brought new wealth, new borders and new reasons to march again — conquest fed more conquest, until one power ruled from Korea to Hungary.

Part 3 — Ruling an empire: the decimal army and the khan's policies VC2HH8K25 . E12

With so much war ahead of him, Genghis Khan rebuilt his army by tens. Every soldier belonged to a fixed unit — an **arban** of ten, a **jagun** of a hundred, a **mingghan** of a thousand, a **tumen** of ten thousand — and the units cut across the old tribes, so that first loyalty went to the khan (Figure 3).

An army rebuilt by tens: the decimal organisation (from 1206)



Every man belonged to a fixed unit of ten, a hundred, a thousand or ten thousand. It turned a band of tribes into one standing army.

Diagram of the decimal army: arban 10 soldiers, jagun 100, mingghan 1,000, tumen 10,000, each ten times the last, with notes that units mixed tribes, that leaders were chosen for skill (the general Subutai came from a low-ranking family), and that discipline was hard; plus the khashig guard of 10,000 and the yam relay posts

Figure 3. An army rebuilt by tens: it turned a band of tribes into one standing army.

An army that big needed rules, and an empire needed more. Figure 4 sets out the four policies named in .E12 — and, like historians, it names who wrote each one down.

Ruling the empire: four policies, and who recorded them

policy	what the rule said	who wrote it down
Laws set down in writing	The khan's commands (the yasa) were written down and kept. Rules included: no stealing of animals, no seizing of people between tribes, and no betraying a guest or an envoy.	Juvayni, c. 1260; Rashid al-Din, c. 1307
Animals protected in the breeding season	No killing of animals during the breeding season. Herds and wild game were given time to grow back - a rule that also kept hunting food for later.	Juvayni, c. 1260; Rashid al-Din, c. 1307
Room for all faiths	Religious leaders of every faith - Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Daoist - were freed from taxes and forced work, and each faith was asked to pray for the khan.	decrees reported by visitors (e.g. Carpini, 1247) and in temple records
Trade expanded and guarded	Merchants were protected on the roads. Trade partnerships (ortoq) were backed with the khan's own silver, and a paiza tablet gave carriers food, horses and guards.	Marco Polo, c. 1298; Juvayni, c. 1260

A caution from historians: every account we have was written years after Genghis Khan died in 1227. They disagree about how much was written down in his own lifetime and how much was added by later rulers who put his name on new rules.

The four policies named in elaboration VC2HH8K25.E12: laws set down in writing, animals protected in the breeding season, room for all faiths, and trade expanded and guarded.

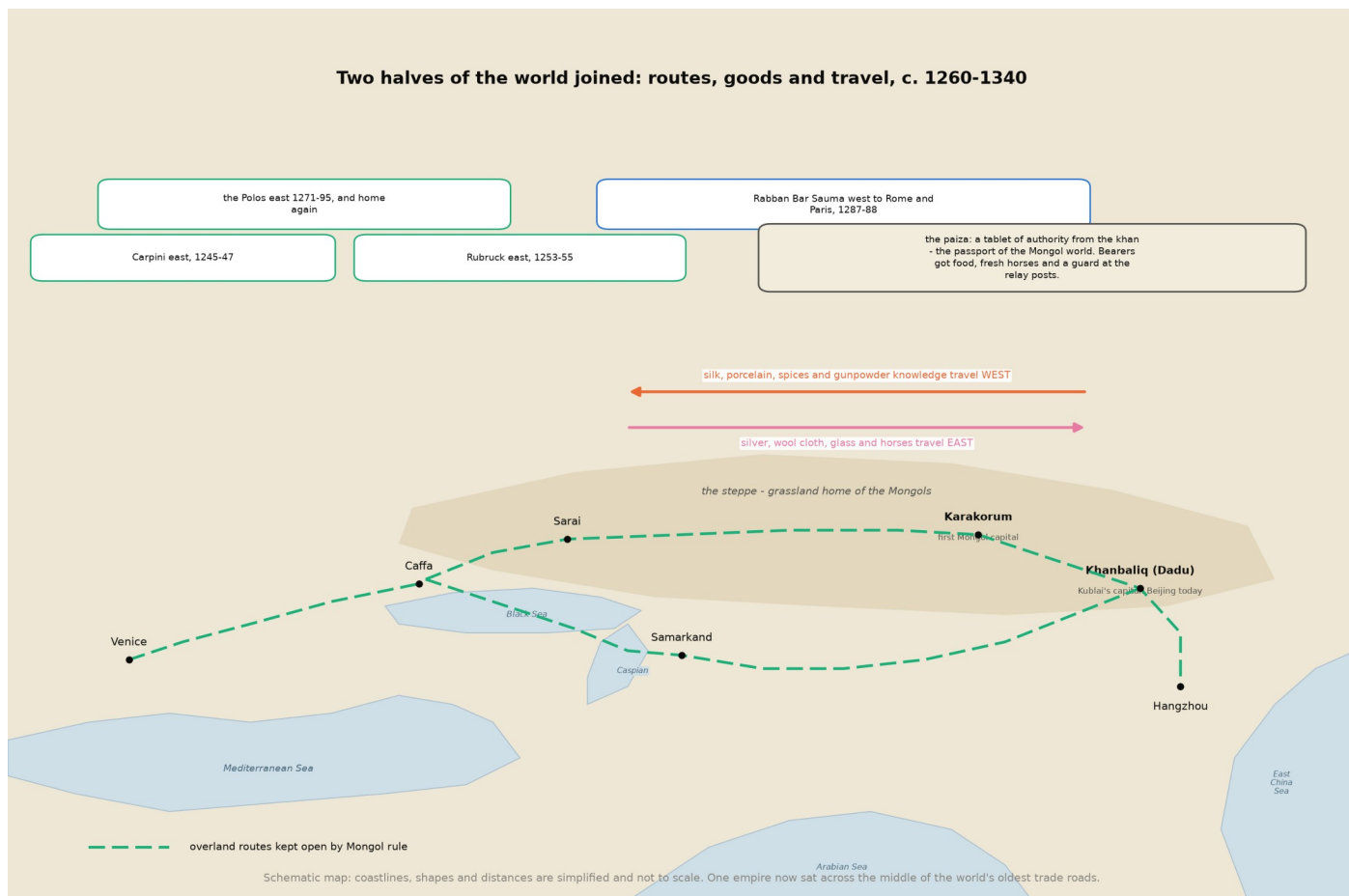
Table of four policies — laws set down in writing (the yasa), animals protected in the breeding season, room for all faiths, trade expanded and guarded — each with what the rule said and which later writers recorded it (Juvayni c. 1260, Rashid al-Din c. 1307, Carpini 1247, temple records, Marco Polo c. 1298), plus a caution that every account was written years after 1227

Figure 4. The four policies of elaboration E12, with their witnesses.

The caution box in Figure 4 matters. Our accounts of the **codified laws** (the **yasa**) were written years after Genghis Khan died in 1227, and they disagree. Whether he set down one written code is still argued: the rules may have grown as later khans added to them and kept his name on them. We can say the rules were real in their effects; we should be careful about the tidy story of a single law book.

Part 4 — Two halves of the world joined: trade, travel, paper money VC2HH8K25.E11

The biggest consequence of the expansion was a road: for the first time, one power ruled the overland routes between Europe and China, and guarded them (Figure 5).

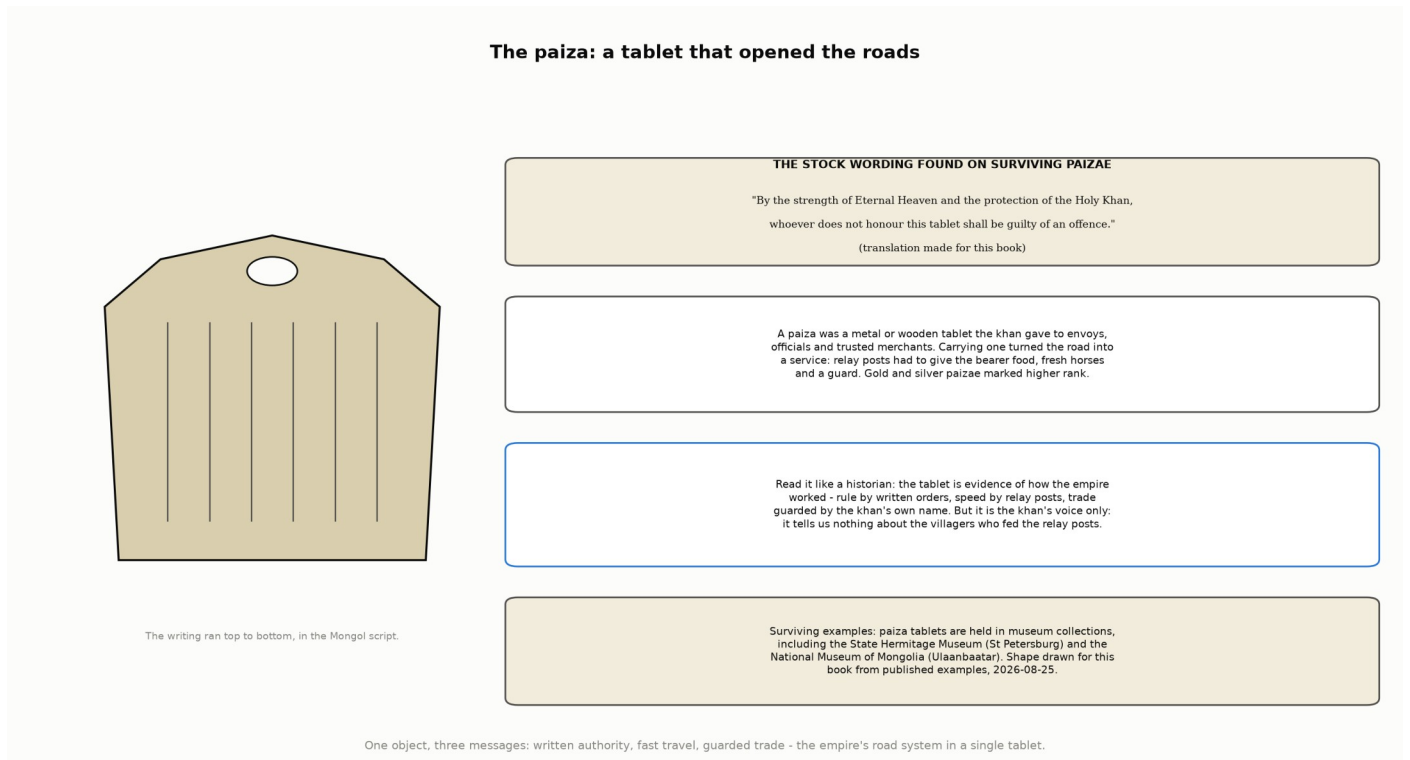


Schematic map of the Mongol-era routes joining Europe and Asia c. 1260-1340: Venice, Caffa, Sarai, Samarkand, Karakorum, Khanbaliq and Hangzhou joined by dashed overland routes; silk, porcelain, spices and gunpowder knowledge travelling west; silver, wool cloth, glass and horses travelling east; travel chips for the Polos (1271-95), Rabban Bar Sauma (west to Rome and Paris, 1287-88), Carpini (1245-47) and Rubruck (1253-55); and a note on the paiza as the passport of the Mongol world

Figure 5. One empire sat across the middle of the world's oldest trade roads. Schematic — not to scale.

Goods moved both ways along Figure 5: silk, porcelain, spices and knowledge of gunpowder west; silver, wool cloth, glass and horses east. People moved with them. The pope sent **John of Plano Carpini** east (1245–1247); the king of France sent **William of Rubruck** (1253–1255); the Venetian **Polos** went east and came back (1271–1295); and **Rabban Bar Sauma**, born near Khanbaliq, travelled the other way, reaching Rome and Paris in 1287–1288. A merchant's handbook written c. 1340 by **Pegolotti** of Florence says the route to China was safe by day and by night. Sickness travelled the same roads: the Black Death of the 1340s rode these routes into the ports of the Mediterranean (Section 4A).

Travel that long needed papers. Figure 6 shows the **paiza**, the tablet that turned the road into a service.



Drawing of a lobed paiza tablet with its stock inscription translated — “By the strength of Eternal Heaven and the protection of the Holy Khan, whoever does not honour this tablet shall be guilty of an offence” — beside panels on what a paiza was, how to read it like a historian, and where surviving examples are held (State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg; National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar)

Figure 6. The paiza: the empire’s road system in a single tablet.

Primary source close study. Of all the things a European merchant saw in Yuan China, nothing amazed Marco Polo more than paper money (Figure 7).

A primary source: Marco Polo meets paper money, c. 1275

MARCO POLO, THE TRAVELS, BOOK II

How the Great Kaan makes the bark of trees pass for money

He takes the bark of the mulberry tree ... and from it he makes sheets like paper, but black. When they are ready they are cut into pieces of different sizes, and stamped with the seal of the chief officer of the khan.

(a)

All these pieces of paper are issued with as much solemnity and authority as if they were pure gold or silver. And no one dares to refuse them on pain of death. And everybody takes them gladly, for wheresoever a person may go throughout the Great Kaan's dominions he shall find these pieces of paper current.

(b)

And with this paper, as I have told you, all the business of the country is done. So you may see that the Great Kaan may truly be said to have the secret of making money.

(c)

Shortened and translated for this book from the account Polo dictated in 1298.

READ IT LIKE A HISTORIAN

Who speaks? A Venetian merchant who served the khan for about 17 years - writing years later, from memory, in a Genoese prison.

Why? To tell merchants and courts what the east was like - and to amaze them.

What checks it? Banknotes of the Yuan dynasty still survive in museums. Paper money was real.

What surprises Polo is the idea, not the object: in Europe money was gold and silver you could weigh, and only the person who owned the metal trusted it. In Yuan China money was paper, trusted because the state behind it was strong. For Polo that looked like magic - 'the secret of making money'.

Why it matters here: this source is evidence for VC2HH8K25.E11 - the Mongols' paper money and coinage as part of the new links between Europe and Asia. Readers who carried the habit of weighing coins had to learn to trust a seal.

Paper money was already old news in China - but no one in Europe had seen it. Polo's wonder is itself evidence of how far apart the two worlds still were.

Primary source panel with three shortened extracts from Marco Polo's Travels, Book II — the mulberry bark made into black paper stamped with the khan's seal; the paper issued as if it were pure gold or silver, refused on pain of death; "the secret of making money" — beside a read-it-like-a-historian sidebar: who speaks (a Venetian merchant, writing from memory in a Genoese prison), why (to tell and amaze), and what checks it (Yuan banknotes still survive in museums)

Figure 7. Marco Polo meets paper money, c. 1275.

Read Figure 7 like a historian (Sections 6C–6D): ask *who* speaks, *why*, and *what checks it*. Polo was a Venetian merchant who served the khan for about 17 years, and his book was written down in 1298, from memory, in a Genoese prison — so we check him. The check works: Yuan banknotes still survive in museums. What surprises Polo is the idea, not the object. In Europe, money was metal you could weigh; in Yuan China, money was paper, trusted because the state behind it was strong. His wonder is itself evidence (Section 6E) of how far apart the two worlds had been — and of the new link .E11 names: the rising flow of European merchants to China.

Part 5 — Consequences for China: before, during, after VC2HH8K25.E13

.E13 asks for consequences on life in China across the Mongol conquest — *before it, during it and after it*. Figure 8 lays the three times side by side.

China across the Mongol conquest: before, during, after

BEFORE - about 1200	DURING - the wars of conquest	AFTER - under the Yuan, 1271-1368
China divided into three states: Xi Xia in the north-west, the Jin dynasty in the north, the Song dynasty in the south. Tens of millions of people; some of the biggest cities on Earth. Rice farms, silk, porcelain, printing, paper money and gunpowder weapons - far ahead of most of the world at the time. Scholars won government posts by written exams. The south grew rich on sea trade.	Long wars: Xi Xia fell in 1227, the Jin in 1234; the Song held out until 1279 (Xiangyang fell in 1273; the last fight at Yamen, 1279). Cities that resisted were taken by storm; many people were killed, seized or driven from their homes. How many died is still argued - Section 5E tests the big claims. Skilled workers - builders, cloth-makers, weapon-makers - were sent far across the empire to serve the khans. But surrender could save a city: towns that gave in quickly were usually spared.	One government for all of China: the Yuan dynasty, with its capital at Khanbaliq (Beijing today). The exams were stopped for decades; Mongols and their allies held the top posts, with Chinese staff below them. Farming, silk and porcelain carried on; the Grand Canal was extended to feed the new capital; paper money ruled trade. Chinese skills stayed in demand: engineers, doctors and astronomers worked for the khans - and Chinese ideas moved west.
1368: after drought, hunger and rebel armies, the Mongols were driven back to the steppe. Zhu Yuanzhang, a rebel leader, founded the Ming dynasty. The Ming kept some Yuan habits - provinces, roads and sea trade - but brought the exams back.		

Conquest changed who ruled China - but fields, workshops and skills mostly carried on. That mix of change and continuity is what this section is about.

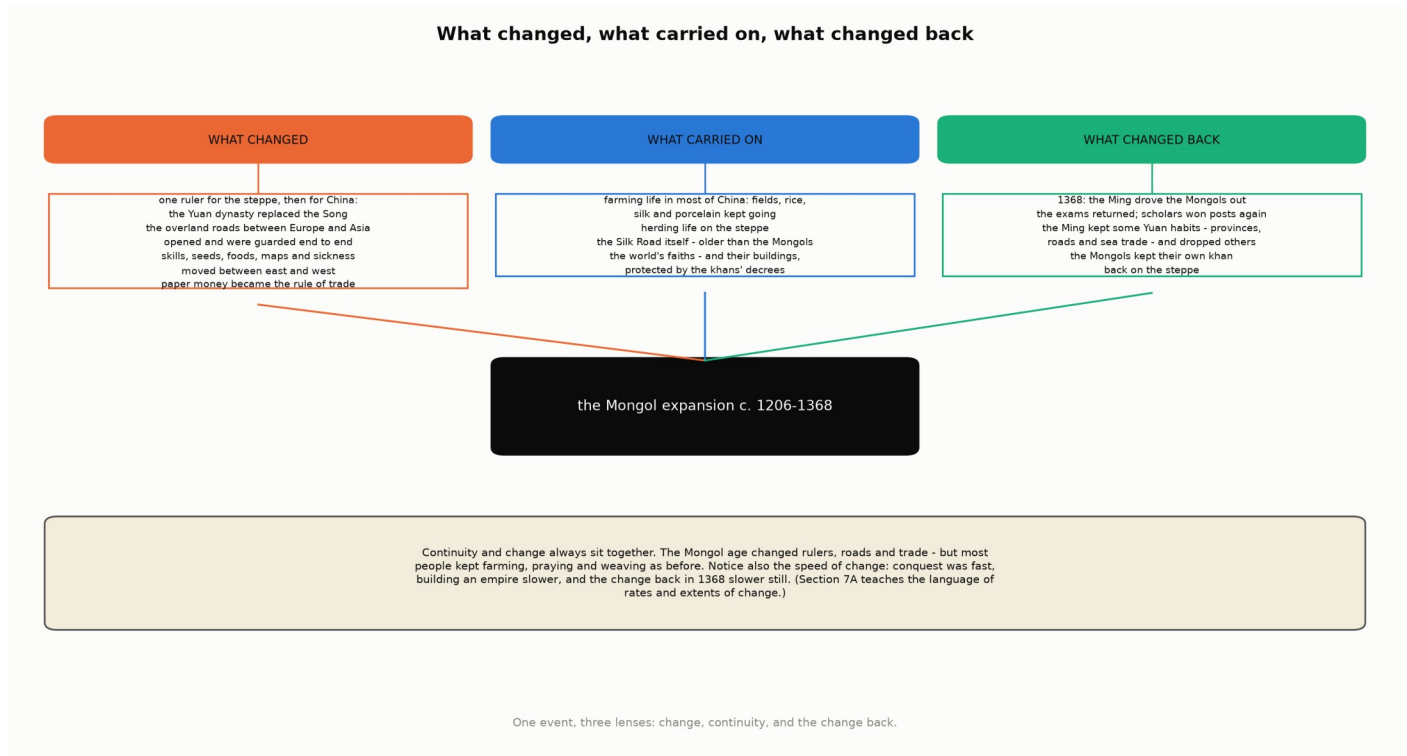
Three-column table: China before (about 1200) divided into Xi Xia, Jin and Song, tens of millions of people, rice farms, silk, porcelain, printing, paper money and gunpowder, scholars winning posts by exams; during the wars (cities that resisted taken by storm, people killed or driven out, skilled workers sent across the empire, surrender sparing a city); after under the Yuan 1271-1368 (one government at Khanbaliq, exams stopped for decades, the Grand Canal extended, paper money ruling trade, Chinese skills in demand); with a closing band on 1368, the Ming driving the Mongols out and bringing the exams back

Figure 8. Conquest changed who ruled China — but fields, workshops and skills mostly carried on.

Before the conquest, China was divided, rich and far ahead in skills: rice farms, silk, **porcelain**, printing, paper money and gunpowder. During the wars, cities that resisted were taken by storm and many people were killed, seized or driven from their homes; towns that gave in quickly were usually spared. How many died is still argued — the big claims are tested in Section 5E. Skilled workers — builders, cloth-makers, weapon-makers — were sent far across the empire, which is one way skills moved west. After the conquest, one Yuan government ruled all of China from **Khanbaliq** (Beijing today); the exams were stopped for decades; the Grand Canal was extended to feed the new capital; and paper money ruled trade. In **1368**, after drought, hunger and rebel armies, the **Ming** dynasty drove the Mongols out — and kept some Yuan habits (provinces, roads and sea trade) while bringing the exams back. That mix of change, continuity and change-back is the pattern of this whole section.

Part 6 — Change, continuity and two readings of the Mongol age

Figure 9 pulls the section together: one event, three lenses.



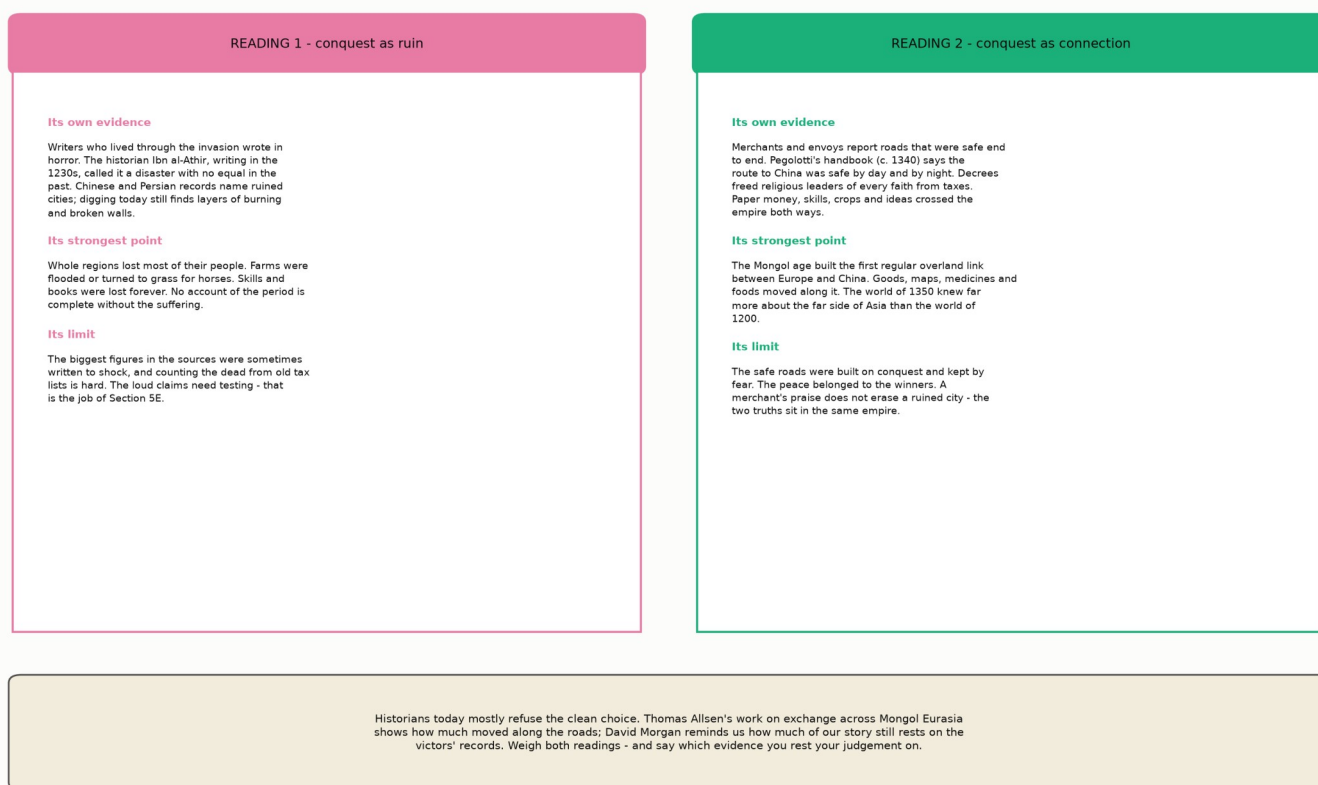
Continuity and change web around “the Mongol expansion c. 1206-1368”: what changed (one ruler, the Yuan replacing the Song, guarded overland roads, skills, seeds, foods, maps and sickness moving east and west, paper money the rule of trade), what carried on (farming life in most of China, herding life on the steppe, the Silk Road itself, the world’s faiths protected by the khans’ decrees), and what changed back (1368 the Ming drove the Mongols out, the exams returned, the Ming kept some Yuan habits and dropped others)

Figure 9. One event, three lenses: change, continuity, and the change back.

Notice also the *speed* of change in Figure 9: conquest was fast (1206–1279), building an empire slower, and the change back in 1368 slower still. Rates and extents of change are Section 7A’s language; here we only need the pattern — continuity and change always sit together.

Interpretations. Was the Mongol age ruin or connection? Figure 10 sets two readings side by side, each at its strongest (weighing them is practised in Section 6F).

Same conquest, two readings - each at its strongest



Two readings, two bodies of evidence, one question: how much weight does each deserve? Argue each side at its strongest before you judge.

Two-panel figure comparing two readings of the Mongol conquest: Reading 1, conquest as ruin (Ibn al-Athir in the 1230s calling it a disaster with no equal; ruined cities and burn layers in the digging; whole regions losing most of their people), and Reading 2, conquest as connection (Pegolotti c. 1340 calling the route safe by day and night; the first regular overland link between Europe and China; goods, maps, medicines and foods moving both ways), each with its own evidence, its strongest point and its limit, plus a judgement band naming Thomas Allsen and David Morgan

Figure 10. Same conquest, two readings — argue each at its strongest before you judge.

In 1986, **David Morgan**'s *The Mongols* set the cautious reading that still rules the field: the empire was a steppe power living on the wealth of the settled lands, and much of our story rests on records kept by its victors, and by the conquered clerks who served them. In 2004, **Jack Weatherford**'s *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* argued the bold opposite: that the Mongols opened free trade between Europe and Asia, spread crops, skills and ideas, and planted habits of religious freedom — in short, that they helped make the modern world. Many specialists answered that Weatherford's boldest claims lean on sources written long after the events, and give too little weight to the suffering in Reading 1. Argue each side at its strongest before you judge. Morgan is right that almost every account we have was written by someone the conquest touched, and must be weighed, not swallowed (Section 6D). Weatherford is right that the roads were real, that goods and skills moved both ways, and that the world of 1350 knew far more about Asia than the world of 1200. **Thomas Allsen**'s studies of exchange across Mongol Eurasia sit between the two: the connections were real and large — and they rode on conquest.

That blend is your model for VC2HH8K25.E13: consequences come in kinds — ruin and connection at once — with continuity running underneath both, and a change-back waiting in 1368.

Worked example (scaffolded)

Question: Use Figure 8 to write one well-structured paragraph: "Explain how the Mongol conquest changed life in China, and how it did not."

Step 1 — Sort. Pick two changes and two continuities from Figure 8 (for example: the Yuan replaced three states; the exams were stopped — but farming, silk and porcelain carried on).

Step 2 — Connect. Join them with continuity-and-change language: *was replaced by, carried on, returned, in the long term.*

Step 3 — Date and place. Add at least two dates (1279, 1368) and name the capital (Khanbaliq).

Model opening (you finish it): “Before the conquest, China was divided between three states, so when the Song fell at Yamen in 1279, ...”

Practice questions — scaffolded

1. (6B) Use Figure 1. Put these in order, from the first to the last: (a) the Yuan dynasty is named; (b) the kuriltai makes Temujin Genghis Khan; (c) the battle of Yamen ends the Song; (d) the Khwarezmians kill the khan’s trade envoys; (e) Carpini travels east.
2. (7B) Use Figure 2. Label each item as *long-term cause, short-term cause, trigger* or *consequence*: (a) steppe chiefs kept their followers with loot, gifts and trade goods; (b) the Khwarezmians kill the trade envoys in 1218; (c) one power rules from Korea to Hungary; (d) by 1206 all the steppe tribes are united under one army and one law.
3. (6C) Use Figure 4. (a) Name the two writers who recorded the breeding-season rule, with their dates. (b) Why does the figure caution us about these accounts?
4. (6C) Use Figure 7. (a) Who speaks, and where was he when his book was written down? (b) What objects, still surviving in museums, check his account?
5. (6D) Use Figure 6. A paiza is a primary source. (a) Give two things it tells us about how the empire worked. (b) What can it *not* tell us?
6. (6E) Use Figure 10. Match each voice to a reading: “a disaster with no equal in the past” / “the route to China was safe by day and by night”.

Practice questions — unscaffolded

7. (E12) Explain, in your own words (4–5 sentences), Genghis Khan’s decimal organisation and two of his policies for ruling the empire.
8. (7B, E13) Write one paragraph (6–8 sentences) explaining causes and consequences of the Mongol expansion. Use at least two causes (one long-term, one trigger), two consequences, and two connectives.
9. (E11, 6C) “The Mongol age joined two halves of the world.” Use Figures 5 and 7 to support this claim with three points of evidence.
10. (6F, E13) “The Mongol conquest was ruin, not connection.” Use Figure 10 and Part 6 to argue both sides, then give your own judgement.

Answers (scaffolded)

1. b (1206), d (1218), e (1245–1247), a (1271), c (1279).
2.
 - (a) long-term cause; (b) trigger; (c) consequence (short-term); (d) short-term cause.
3.
 - (a) Juvayni (c. 1260) and Rashid al-Din (c. 1307). (b) They wrote years after Genghis Khan died in 1227, and they disagree about how much was written down in his own lifetime and how much was added by later rulers under his name.
4.
 - (a) Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant who served the khan for about 17 years; the book was written down in 1298, from memory, in a Genoese prison. (b) Yuan dynasty banknotes — paper money that still survives in museum collections.
5.
 - (a) Any two: rule by written orders; relay posts owed the bearer food, fresh horses and a guard; trade was guarded in the khan's own name; higher rank carried gold and silver paizae. (b) It is the khan's voice only — it tells us nothing about the villagers who fed and staffed the relay posts.
6. “A disaster with no equal in the past” → Reading 1 (Ibn al-Athir, 1230s). “The route to China was safe by day and by night” → Reading 2 (Pegolotti's handbook, c. 1340).

Fully-worked solutions (unscaffolded)

7. The decimal organisation arranged every soldier in a fixed unit of ten (arban), a hundred (jagun), a thousand (mingghan) or ten thousand (tumen), with units mixed across tribes so that loyalty ran to the khan, not to a tribe. Command went to skill, not birth, and discipline was hard, so the army fought as one. As for governing, Genghis Khan had his commands written down (the yasa), and banned the killing of animals during the breeding season so that herds and hunting food would grow back. He also freed religious leaders of every faith from taxes, and guarded trade with protected roads and paiza tablets. Together, the army by tens and the written rules turned a conquest into an empire.

8. The long-term cause of the Mongol expansion was the steppe itself: chiefs kept their followers by rewarding them with loot, gifts and trade goods from the settled lands, and when China's dynasties shut their markets, raids took the place of trade. The short-term cause was that by 1206 Temujin had united all the steppe tribes into one army and one law, so thousands of armed horsemen needed work and reward. The trigger came in 1218, when the Khwarezmians killed the khan's trade envoys and his ambassador; as a result, Genghis Khan invaded in 1219. In the short term, one power came to rule from Korea to Hungary, and cities that resisted were taken by storm. In the long term, the roads between Europe and Asia opened and were guarded, so goods, skills, crops, ideas — and diseases — moved across the world. Consequences fed back into causes: each new land brought new wealth and new reasons to march again.

9. First, Figure 5 shows one power ruling and guarding the overland routes end to end, so that — in Pegolotti's handbook of c. 1340 — the road to China was safe by day and by night; trade on that scale needed the guarded roads that conquest built. Second, Figure 5 shows goods and people moving both ways: silk, porcelain, spices and gunpowder knowledge west, silver, wool cloth, glass and horses east, with the Polos going east and Rabban Bar Sauma going west. Third, Figure 7 shows the link working at the level of money itself: Yuan paper money, stamped with the khan's seal, ruled trade, and Polo's amazement is evidence of a European merchant face to face with a China he found hard to believe. So the Mongol age did not just touch two halves of the world; it joined them with roads, papers and money.

10. One side says the conquest was ruin: Ibn al-Athir, writing in the 1230s, called it a disaster with no equal in the past; Chinese and Persian records name ruined cities; digging still finds burn layers and broken walls; whole regions lost most of their people, and farms were flooded or turned to grass for horses. The other side says the conquest was connection: Pegolotti reports the route to China safe by day and by night; the Mongol age built the first regular overland link between Europe and China; paper money, skills, crops and ideas crossed the empire both ways, and the world of 1350 knew far more about Asia than the world of 1200. My judgement: the two readings are both true, because consequences come in kinds. The safe roads were built on conquest and kept by fear, and a merchant's praise does not erase a ruined city. The Mongol conquest was a turning point precisely because it was ruin and connection at once — with ordinary farming and faith carrying on underneath both.

Source notes (retrieved 2026-08-25)

Primary sources

- *The Secret History of the Mongols*, c. 1240 — the first Mongol account, compiled after Genghis Khan's death; survives in later copies.
- Paiza tablets — surviving examples in museum collections, including the State Hermitage Museum (St Petersburg) and the National Museum of Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar); shape drawn for this book from published examples.
- Yuan dynasty banknotes — surviving examples in museum collections.
- Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Book II — dictated 1298 to Rustichello of Pisa in a Genoese prison; excerpted and translated for this book.
- Decrees freeing religious leaders of every faith from taxes — reported by visitors (e.g. Carpini, 1247) and in temple records.

Medieval writers (translations made for this book)

- Ibn al-Athir, chronicle, 1230s (Mosul).
- Juvayni, *History of the World-Conqueror*, c. 1260.
- Rashid al-Din, *Compendium of Chronicles*, c. 1307.
- John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, 1247.
- William of Rubruck, *Itinerary*, 1255.
- Pegolotti, merchant's handbook (*Pratica della mercatura*), c. 1340.
- *Yuan shi* (official history of the Yuan dynasty), compiled 1370.

Secondary sources

- David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 1986.
- Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, 2004 — the bold reading; its boldest claims are contested by many Mongol specialists.
- Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 2001.

Rulers and ruled: perspectives on power and authority

In this section we follow one case study — Mongol rule over China under **Kublai Khan** — to look at both sides of the same throne. On one side sits the ruler: Kublai, Great Khan of the Mongols and, from 1271, emperor of China's **Yuan dynasty**. On the other side live his subjects: Mongol nobles, Chinese farmers, craft workers, merchants and scholars, each seeing the same rule from a different place. We ask how Kublai kept **power** — being able to get his way — and how he tried to win **authority** — being accepted as the right person to rule. Then we follow the roads his empire kept open, which tied Europe and Asia together so closely that a Venetian merchant, **Marco Polo**, could travel to China, serve the khan, and come home with a book the world is still arguing about.

Curriculum focus — VC2HH8K26 Students learn about: what rulers and ruled each experienced and saw, and how power and authority interacted

This section delivers the Mongol elaborations (the chapter plan makes Mongol expansion the end-to-end case study; the other societies' elaborations, .E01–.E04 on the Polynesian expansion, Japan under the shoguns and the Angkor/Khmer Empire, stay as comparison points):

- VC2HH8K26.E05 — Kublai Khan's Yuan reign: government and Chinese culture
- VC2HH8K26.E06 — Mongol links between Europe and Asia (Silk Road, Marco Polo)

Skills joined here: chronology and timelines (Section 6B), source features and content (Section 6C), value and verification of evidence (Section 6D), perspectives from sources (Section 6E), interpretations and debates (Section 6F).

Key terms

- **power** — the Victorian Curriculum uses *power* and *authority* but does not define them. Both are contested terms: different writers use them in different ways. In this section we follow the sense given by Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (1919): *power* means being able to get your way even when others resist you. Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with this one.
- **authority** — in Weber's sense, *authority* means the chance that an order is obeyed because people accept it as right. Power can force obedience; authority earns it.
- **empire** — one power ruling many peoples and lands, usually won by force. As in Section 3E, *empire* is contested: what rulers call order, the conquered often call force.
- **khan** — a Mongol ruler. The **Great Khan** ruled over the whole Mongol empire.
- **dynasty** — a line of rulers from one family, and the period when they rule. The **Yuan dynasty** is the dynasty Kublai Khan founded in 1271: Mongol rule over China until 1368.
- **Semu** — the Yuan-era term for people from Central and West Asia, meaning “people of various sorts”.
- **yam** — the Mongol relay-post system: a chain of stations with fresh horses, where the khan's riders changed mounts.
- **paiza** — a tablet carried by the khan's messengers and envoys (official senders) as a mark of authority, ordering stations to help them.
- **Silk Road** — the web of trade routes joining China to the Mediterranean. The name was given in 1877 by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen; the people who travelled those roads did not use it.
- **Pax Mongolica** — “the Mongol peace”: a term later historians coined, on the model of the Pax Romana (Section 3E), for the time when one rule made the roads from China to Europe safer for trade and travel.

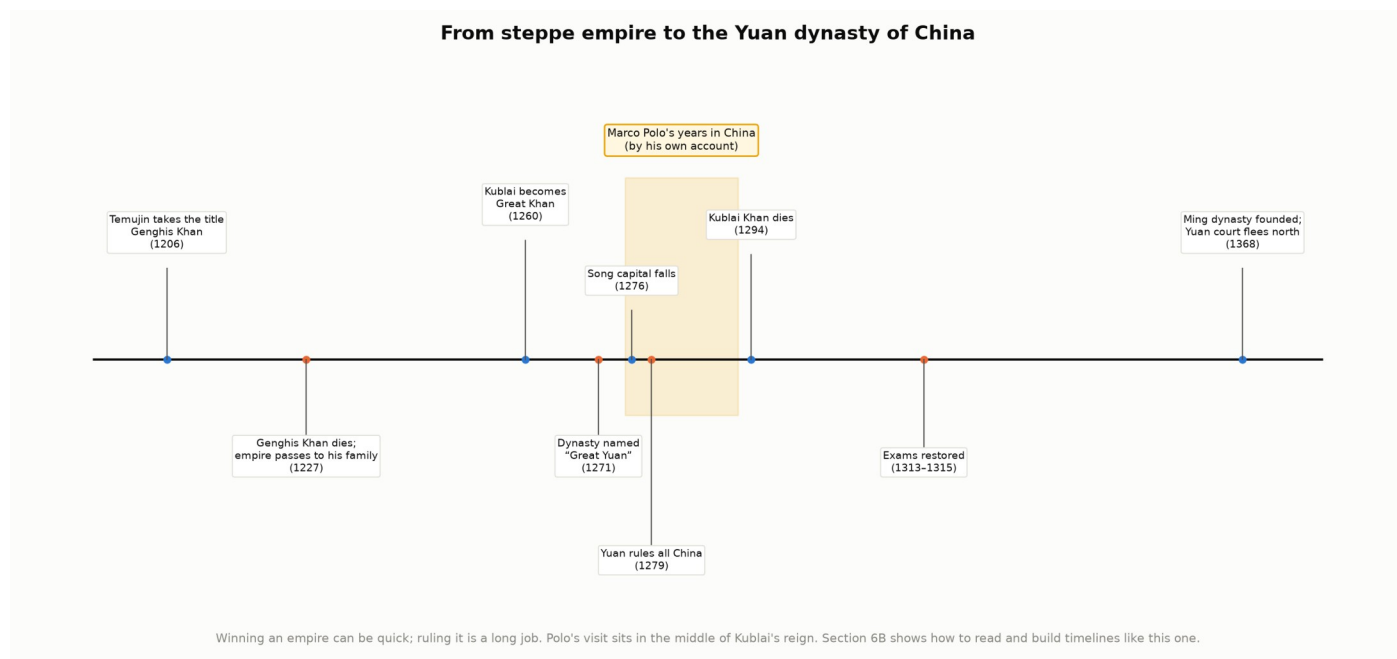
Teaching sequence

Part 1 — From steppe empire to Chinese dynasty VC2HH8K26.E05

In 1206, a Mongol leader named **Temujin** united the warring tribes of the steppe — the great grasslands of Mongolia — at a grand assembly, and took the title **Genghis Khan**, “universal ruler”. By his death in 1227, his riders ruled lands stretching from northern China to Persia. The empire then passed inside his family. In 1260 his grandson **Kublai Khan** became **Great Khan**, after a war with his brother over who should rule.

Kublai faced a new problem. Mongol riders were superb at winning land, but a few thousand riders could not farm, tax or judge millions of Chinese subjects from the saddle. Kublai had to learn to govern. In **1271** he gave his rule a

Chinese name — **Great Yuan**, taken from an ancient Chinese classic — and began to rule as an emperor in the Chinese style as well as a Mongol khan. In **1276** his armies took the capital of the Song dynasty, China's last native royal line; by **1279** the last Song forces were beaten at a sea battle, and all China stood under Mongol rule. Figure 1 sets out the key dates.



Timeline from 1206 to 1368 showing Temujin becoming Genghis Khan, Genghis Khan's death, Kublai Khan becoming Great Khan, the naming of the Great Yuan dynasty, the fall of the Song capital, full Mongol rule over China, Kublai Khan's death, the return of the exams and the founding of the Ming dynasty, with a band marking the years Marco Polo said he spent in China

Figure 1. From steppe empire to the Yuan dynasty of China (Section 6B shows how to read and build timelines like this one).

Two things to notice in Figure 1. First, the conquest of China took nearly twenty years after Kublai became Great Khan: winning an empire can be quick, but ruling it is a long job. Second, Marco Polo's years in China — by his own account — sit right in the middle of Kublai's reign. The Polo story you meet in Part 8 happened at the height of Yuan power.

Part 2 — One ruler, two crowns: power and authority VC2HH8K26.E05

Kublai had **power**: at his back was the strongest army in the world, and his word carried the threat of death. But power alone is costly — you cannot stand a soldier behind every farmer. Cheaper, and stronger, is **authority**: the ruled accepting that you have the *right* to rule them. This is the interaction this section keeps returning to: power forces, authority persuades, and lasting rule needs both.

For Kublai this was not simple, because he wore two crowns, and each crown had its own audience (Figure 2).

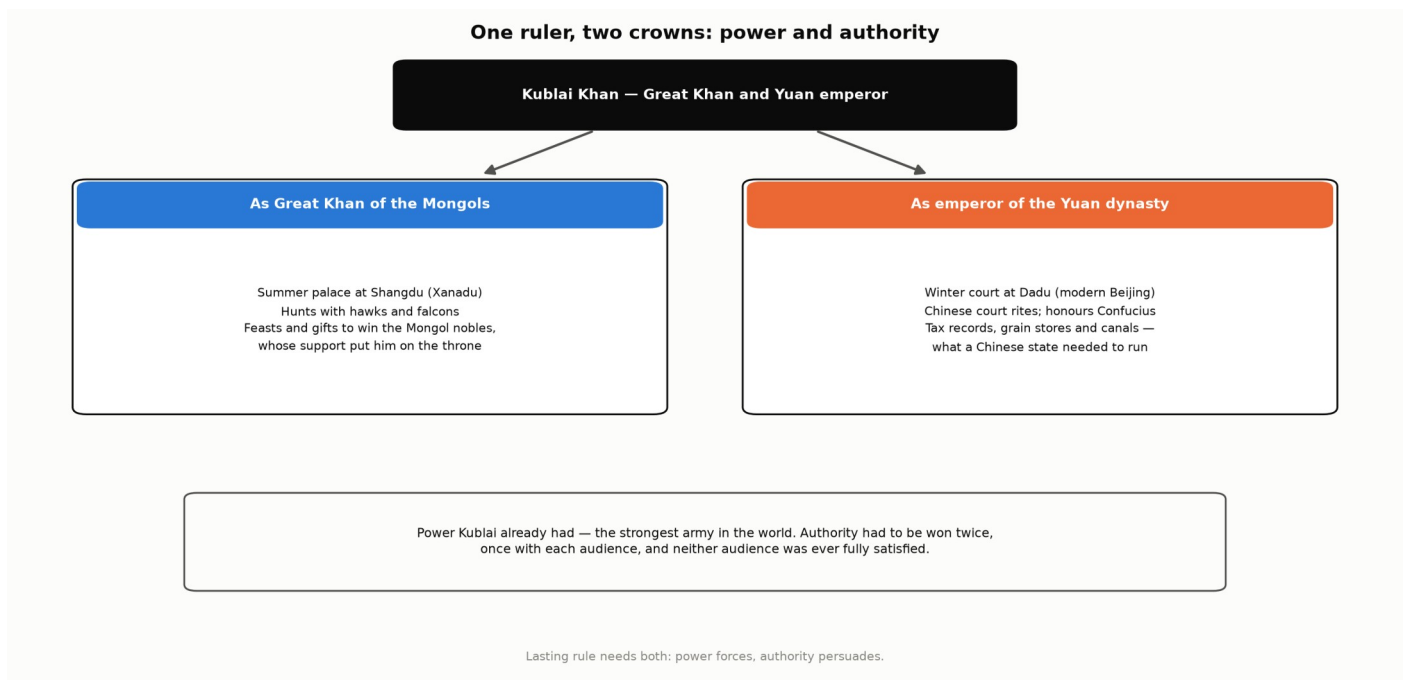


Diagram of Kublai Khan at the centre with two crowns: as Great Khan of the Mongols keeping the summer palace at Shangdu, hunting with hawks and winning the support of Mongol nobles with feasts and gifts, and as Yuan emperor holding court at Dadu, performing Chinese rites and keeping taxes, records and granaries

Figure 2. One ruler, two crowns: Kublai had to look right to two very different audiences.

As **Great Khan of the Mongols**, Kublai had to look like a steppe ruler. He kept the summer palace at **Shangdu** (which Europeans later called Xanadu), hunted with hawks and falcons, and won the support of the Mongol nobles with feasts and gifts. Those nobles had put him on the throne — and they could unmake a khan who forgot he was one of them.

As **emperor of the Yuan dynasty**, he had to look like a Chinese emperor. He moved his main court to **Dadu** (“city of the khan”), the new capital he built where Beijing stands today. There he performed the old court rites, honoured the teaching of Confucius, and kept the tax records and grain stores a Chinese state needed. He even ordered that farmland should not be turned into grazing ground for Mongol herds — a ruler choosing his Chinese farmers’ needs over his own people’s customs.

Some Mongol nobles felt he had gone too far into Chinese ways; some Chinese scholars could not accept a foreign ruler on a Chinese throne at all. Neither audience was fully satisfied — which is exactly why both crowns mattered. Whether Kublai “really was” a Chinese emperor is a *frame* question: the answer depends on who is judging. We weigh that in Part 7.

Part 3 — Who did the ruling? Administrators of many backgrounds VC2HH8K26.E05

One khan cannot tax millions alone. The Yuan state drew its officials from many peoples, and mixed them on purpose, so that no single group could grow strong enough to challenge the throne (Figure 3).

Who ruled the Yuan empire? Administrators of many origins

Group	Part in government
Mongol nobles	The top army and government posts stayed with Mongol families.
Semu — people of Central and West Asia	Taxes, trade and money: Ahmad Fanakati ran the treasury until his death in 1282.
Han — people of northern China	Army officers and local officials.
Southerners — the last conquered	The largest group in the empire; mostly shut out of the top posts.
Around the throne: Liu Bingzhong — Chinese planner who laid out Dadu · Chabi — chief wife and closest adviser · Phagpa — Tibetan Buddhist leader on religion · Marco Polo — claimed 17 years of service (if we believe him)	
The old road to office — hard written exams in Confucius' teaching — was paused, and only restored in 1313–1315. Historians' label "four-class order" sums these tiers up, but no Yuan law code listing the classes has been found.	

Every official owed his place to the khan, not to his own people — that was the point of mixing them.

Table of the Yuan government showing administrators of many origins: Mongol nobles at the top posts, Semu officials from Central and West Asia handling taxes, trade and money including Ahmad Fanakati, Han people of northern China as army officers and local officials, and southern Chinese mostly shut out of top posts, with Kublai Khan's inner circle named and a note that the exams were paused until 1313 to 1315

Figure 3. The Yuan government drew its administrators from many backgrounds.

Notice who sits near the throne in Figure 3: a Chinese planner (Liu Bingzhong, who helped lay out Dadu), a queen (Chabi, Kublai's chief wife and closest adviser, who supported Buddhism), a Tibetan Buddhist leader (Phagpa, who advised on religion) — and, if we believe his own book, a Venetian. This mixing was power at work: every official owed his place to the khan, not to his own people.

One change closed the old road to office. For centuries, Chinese scholars had entered government through the **exams** — hard written tests in the Confucian classics. The Mongol rulers paused the exams, and they were only restored in 1313–1315, after Kublai's death. For many educated Chinese men, the road to power shut — and that changed what they did with their lives (Part 4).

A note on how we know this shape of Yuan rule. Historians often sum it up as a "four-class order": Mongols on top, then Semu, then the people of northern China, and last the southern Chinese, the last to be conquered. But handle the label with care: **no Yuan law code that lists these four classes has been found**. The order is a summary of what historians see across many appointments and decrees — a reading of the evidence, not a list the Yuan government wrote down. That difference matters (Section 6D): a pattern historians infer is not the same thing as a rule an empire declared.

Part 4 — The ruled: four lives under one throne VC2HH8K26.E05

Power looks different from below. Figure 4 sets the experience of the ruler's side against four common lives among the ruled — farmer, craft worker, merchant and scholar.

Rulers and ruled: the same empire, five different lives



Where you stood decided what you saw: perspective starts from standing (Section 6E).

Two-column comparison of life under Yuan rule: the ruler and court at Dadu and Shangdu with palaces, feasts, guards and servants, against the ruled — farmers paying grain tax and giving labour but served by state granaries, craft workers in state workshops making blue-and-white porcelain at Jingdezhen, merchants gaining higher standing and using paper money, and scholars turning from the paused exams to drama, painting and teaching

Figure 4. Rulers and ruled: the same empire, five different lives.

Under Kublai, Chinese culture did not stop — in some arts it grew. The section's elaboration (. E05) names this growth of Chinese culture, and three examples stand out:

- **Drama.** With the exams paused, some of China's best writers turned to the stage. The playwright **Guan Hanqing** wrote *The Injustice to Dou E*, the story of a poor young woman wronged by officials, and the Yuan era is still counted as a golden age of Chinese drama.
- **Porcelain.** At the kiln town of **Jingdezhen**, potters made the first great **blue-and-white porcelain** — fine white pots painted in cobalt blue. Much of the blue mineral, cobalt, came all the way from Persia. Yuan blue-and-white bowls now sit in museums from Beijing to Istanbul: trade made visible.
- **Painting.** **Zhao Mengfu** (1254–1322) came from the old Song royal family. In 1286 a Yuan official came south looking for able men, and Zhao went north to serve Kublai's court. He became one of China's most admired painters and masters of calligraphy (the art of beautiful handwriting).

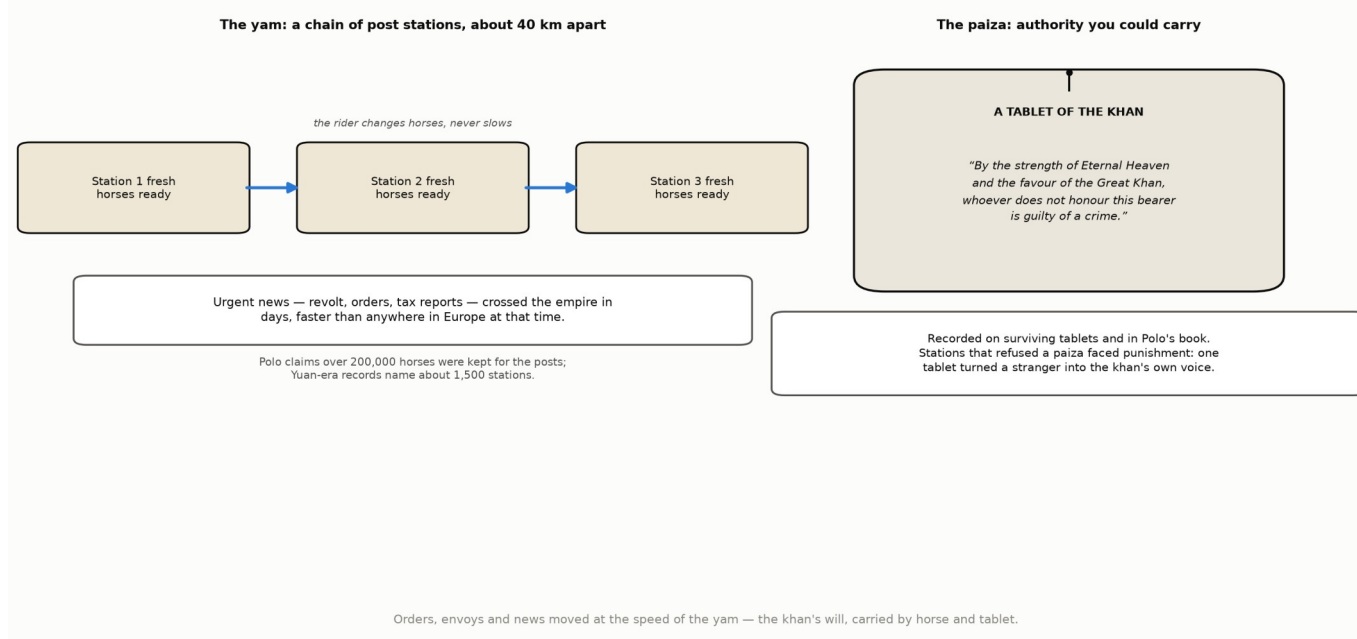
Zhao Mengfu shows the knot of loyalty the ruled often faced. Later Chinese writers argued about him: some called him a turncoat for serving the men who conquered his family's dynasty; others said that by serving he kept Chinese learning alive at the heart of the conquering court. One life, two readings — exactly the kind of perspective work practised in Section 6E.

Part 5 — The tools of rule: roads, tablets and paper money

How did one court in Dadu hold an empire so wide? Three tools of power tied ruler to ruled.

The yam — the relay-post system. Across the empire ran chains of post stations, each about 40 km apart, with fresh horses ready. The khan's riders changed mounts at every station, so urgent news — revolt, orders, tax reports — travelled faster than anything in Europe at that time. Polo claims over 200,000 horses were kept for the posts; Yuan-era records name about 1,500 stations. The horse count is probably too big, but the system was real. Figure 5 shows how it worked, and the tablet that made it obeyed.

The yam and the paiza: power travelling at the gallop



Labelled diagram of the yam relay-post system: a rider with a paiza tablet changes horses at stations about 40 km apart, with the tablet's recorded words calling on the strength of Eternal Heaven and the favour of the Great Khan, and a note that the khan's orders could cross the empire in days

Figure 5. The yam and the paiza: power travelling at the gallop.

The paiza — authority you could carry. The khan's messengers and envoys carried tablets of wood or metal. Surviving tablets, and Polo's book, record words like these on them: "By the strength of Eternal Heaven and the favour of the Great Khan, whoever does not honour this bearer is guilty of a crime." One tablet turned a stranger into the khan's own voice — and stations that refused it faced punishment. That is authority made into an object.

Paper money — power printed. The Yuan state printed notes from the bark of the mulberry tree, stamped them with the khan's seal, and ordered that they be accepted across all his lands. Paper money let the state pay soldiers and buy grain without moving wagons of silver and silk. It was also a claim of authority: a scrap of bark is worth a bowl of rice only because the ruler behind it says so — and can make the saying stick. In Part 6 you will see that Polo found this the most wonderful thing in China. The source panel below is this section's primary-source close study.

Primary-source close study — Marco Polo on paper money

From The Travels of Marco Polo, book 2

"I shall tell you a great marvel. The Great Khan knows the secret of making money. He takes bark from the mulberry tree — the same tree whose leaves feed silkworms — and makes thin sheets of it. These sheets are cut into pieces, small and large, and stamped with the Great Khan's seal. They are paid to everyone in all his lands, and no one dares refuse them on pain of death. With these pieces of paper you can buy anything anywhere: silk, gold, pearls and everything else."

Shortened from Marco Polo, The Travels (dictated 1298–1299).
Translation made for this book.

Read it like a historian (Sections 6C–6D)

Who speaks?

A Venetian merchant who said he served Kublai Khan — one foreign pair of eyes.

To whom?

Readers back in Europe — and wonder sells books.

Why?

To show the wealth and strangeness of the Khan's rule.

What is left out?

Chinese voices: forgers, notes losing their value, the poor who suffered when they did.

One system, different eyes: Polo the merchant marvels; Chinese writers of the time worried about forgers and falling value.

Primary source panel with a shortened excerpt in which Marco Polo describes how the Great Khan makes money from mulberry bark, stamps it with his seal, and orders it to be accepted on pain of death, beside historian's questions about who speaks, to whom, why, and what the source leaves out

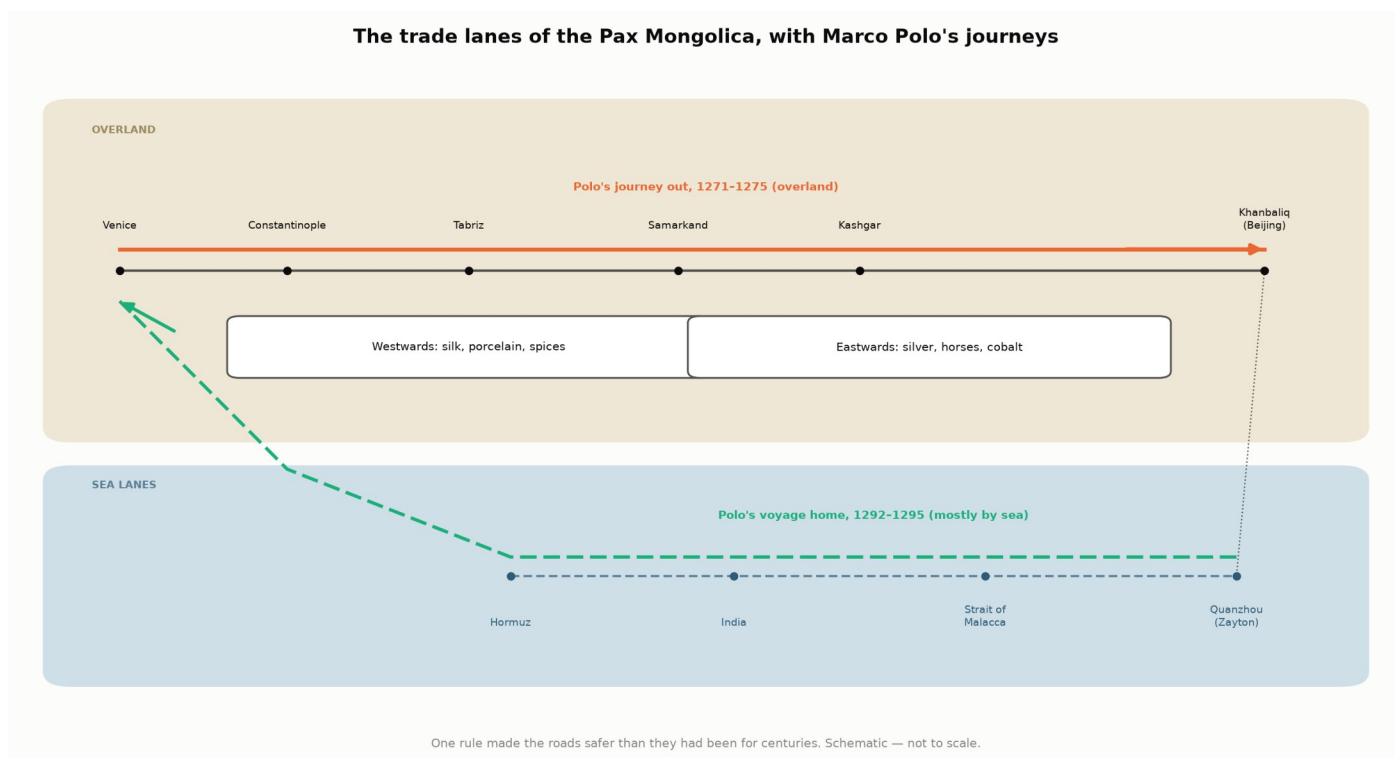
Figure 6. Marco Polo on paper money — the primary-source close study (read it the way Sections 6C–6D teach).

Read Figure 6 like a historian: ask *who* speaks, *to whom*, *why*, and *what is left out*. Polo was a merchant, writing home to other merchants and curious readers — wonder sells books. Chinese writers of the time also described paper money, and they worried about forgers, about notes losing value, and about the poor who suffered when they did. Same system, different eyes.

Part 6 — Joining Europe and Asia: the Silk Road VC2HH8K26.E06

One rule across so much of Asia made the old trade roads safer than they had been for centuries. Merchants could ride from China to the edges of the Mediterranean under the peace of a single empire. Later historians call this time the **Pax Mongolica** — the Mongol peace — a name built on the model of the Pax Romana you met in Section 3E, and like that older peace, it was kept by conquest.

Figure 7 shows the two great lanes of trade, and Polo's own journeys along them.



Schematic map of the trade lanes of the Pax Mongolica, with the overland Silk Road from Khanbaliq to Kashgar, Samarkand, Tabriz and on to Constantinople and Venice, and the sea lane from Quanzhou through the Strait of Malacca, India and Hormuz, with goods moving in both directions and Marco Polo's outward journey of 1271 to 1275 and sea voyage home of 1292 to 1295 marked

Figure 7. The trade lanes of the Pax Mongolica, with Marco Polo's journeys. Schematic — not to scale.

Along these lanes moved goods, people, skills and ideas — and disease. Figure 8 sorts what moved, with named examples for each kind.

Connection works both ways: what moved along the Mongol roads and sea lanes

What moved	Named examples
Goods	Silk, porcelain and spices went west; silver, horses and Persian cobalt came east — Yuan blue-and-white bowls now sit in museums from Beijing to Istanbul.
People	Friars and envoys rode east: John of Plano Carpini (1240s), William of Rubruck (1250s), the Polos. A monk rode west: Rabban Bar Sauma, born near Khanbaliq, met the Pope and the kings of France and England in 1287–1288.
Skills and Ideas	Knowledge of gunpowder reached Europe within a century of Mongol conquest; Muslim doctors and astronomers worked at Kublai's court.
Disease	The plague that reached Europe as the Black Death in the 1340s moved along these same roads and ships (Section 4A).

Connection carries everything people carry — nothing that travelled stayed one-way, and nothing stayed harmless.

Table of what moved along the Mongol roads and sea lanes: goods such as silk, porcelain and cobalt; people including friars, envoys, merchants and the monk Rabban Bar Sauma who travelled west from Khanbaliq to meet the Pope; skills and ideas including gunpowder knowledge; and disease, the plague that reached Europe as the Black Death in the 1340s

Figure 8. Connection works both ways: what moved along the Mongol roads and sea lanes.

Notice the direction of travel in Figure 8. Most European retellings centre the friars and merchants who rode east — John of Plano Carpini in the 1240s, William of Rubruck in the 1250s, then the Polos. But people rode west too: **Rabban Bar Sauma**, a Christian monk born near Khanbaliq, travelled west in 1287–1288 and met the Pope and the kings of France and England. Connection was a two-way road. And nothing that travelled stayed harmless: the plague that reached Europe as the Black Death in the 1340s came from Asia along these same roads and ships (you met it in Section 4A). Trade roads carry everything their people carry.

Part 7 — Weighing it up: was Mongol rule good for China?

Here the two sides of the throne meet one question. Historians have answered it both ways — and the two answers use the *same* Yuan-era facts, weighted in different ways. Figure 9 sets each side out in its strongest form. Steelman both before you judge; Section 6F practises the method.

Was Mongol rule good for China? — the two weighings

The case FOR	The case AGAINST
• One rule made the roads safe end to end • Cities and trade grew; merchants thrived • All faiths were left free to worship • The Grand Canal was extended to feed the capital • State granaries fed people in hungry years • Drama, porcelain and painting flowered	• Conquest cost uncounted lives — the counting is argued in Section 5E • The ranked order kept most Chinese at the bottom, shut from top posts • Exams paused; scholars lost the road to office • Taxes and forced labour fell on farmers • Rebellions grew: in 1368 the Ming drove the Yuan court north

Both sides stand on Yuan-era evidence; the difference is the weighting — and whose eyes you ask. “Good for whom?” is the frame question. Steelman both before you judge (Section 6F).

Steelman panels weighing Mongol rule over China: the case for, with safe roads, growing cities and trade, religious freedom, the Grand Canal extended to feed the capital, state granaries for hungry years, and the growth of drama and porcelain; against the case against, with conquest deaths counted in Section 5E, the ranked order keeping most Chinese at the bottom, exams paused, taxes and labour on farmers, and the rebellions that drove the Yuan court out in 1368

Figure 9. Same facts, two weighings: the case for and against Mongol rule over China.

Notice the shape of the argument. It is not fact against fiction; both sides stand on Yuan-era evidence and disagree about the weighting. And the answer shifts with the asking: a Mongol noble at a feast in Dadu, a Semu tax official, a farmer digging the new canal and a scholar shut out of office all lived in the same empire — they did not live the same empire. “Good for *whom?*” is the frame question, and your judgement must say whose eyes you are weighing. The mark goes to the reasoning, not the conclusion reached.

Part 8 — Whose story? Did Marco Polo really go?

The most famous voice on Kublai’s China is not Chinese or Mongol at all. **Marco Polo** was a Venetian merchant who said he reached China with his father and uncle around 1275, served Kublai for seventeen years, and sailed home in 1295. Then Venice and Genoa went to war; Polo was captured, and in 1298–1299 he dictated his book — *The Travels of Marco Polo* — to a writer of romances named **Rustichello da Pisa**. The oldest surviving copy is an Old French manuscript now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. The book is the richest foreign portrait of Yuan China — and the most argued-about. Figure 10 sets a modern debate side by side: this section’s secondary-source interpretation.

Did Marco Polo really reach China? A modern debate about a medieval source

Frances Wood, 1995 — he may not have gone

- The book leaves out what any visitor noticed: the Great Wall, tea, foot binding, Chinese writing
- His claim that his family brought the machines that took Xiangyang is contradicted: the city fell first, and other records name two Muslim engineers from West Asia
- Perhaps a handbook built from Persian and Chinese sources, without the journey

Stephen Haw, 2006, and others — he did go

- The Wall tourists see today was built by the Ming, long after Polo — he could not have seen it
- A Venetian merchant had little reason to write about tea, foot binding or writing
- His pages on paper money, salt, rivers and cities check out against Chinese records
- Igor de Rachewiltz and David Morgan argued the same side

The debate turns on what a source leaves out. Absence of evidence is not proof of absence — but a long run of surprising absences is worth a question. What further evidence would settle it — and does any survive? (Section 6D)

Read both columns at their strongest before you judge (Section 6F).

Debate panel setting two readings of Marco Polo's Travels side by side: Frances Wood's 1995 case that Polo may not have reached China, pointing to the missing Great Wall, tea, foot binding and Chinese writing and the contradicted story of Xiangyang, against the answer of Stephen Haw and other scholars that the Wall Polo could have seen did not yet exist, that a merchant would skip court customs, and that Polo's pages on paper money, salt and geography check out against Chinese records

Figure 10. Did Marco Polo really reach China? A modern debate about a medieval source.

Read Figure 10 the way Section 6D teaches. The debate turns on what a source *leaves out*. Wood treats Polo's silences as evidence of absence; Haw treats them as the normal gaps of a merchant's notebook. Absence of evidence is not proof of absence — but a long run of surprising absences is worth a question. When you judge, say what further evidence would settle it: a second witness? a record of Polo's post in Chinese sources? The honest answer is that, on what survives, historians can still disagree — and that disagreement is itself part of how history works.

Worked example (scaffolded)

Question: Using Part 2 and Figure 2, write one well-built paragraph: "Explain how Kublai Khan kept power and authority over China."

Step 1 — Define. Open by saying what *power* and *authority* mean in this section (in Weber's sense).

Step 2 — One of each. Give at least one example of Kublai's power (the army, the yam, paper money) and at least one example of his bid for authority (the Chinese dynasty name, Dadu, the court rites, officials of many backgrounds).

Step 3 — Perspective. End with one sentence showing that not everyone accepted his authority.

Model opening (you finish it): "Power means being able to get your way even when others resist, and Kublai Khan held it in full: ..."

Practice questions — scaffolded

- (6B) Use Figure 1. Put these in order, from first to last: (a) Kublai names his dynasty Great Yuan; (b) Temujin takes the title Genghis Khan; (c) the last Song forces are beaten; (d) Kublai becomes Great Khan; (e) the Ming dynasty drives the Yuan court north.
- (6C) Use Figure 3. (a) Name two groups the Yuan drew its administrators from, and one job each group did. (b) Who ran taxes and money under Kublai until his death in 1282?
- (6E) Use Figure 4. Give one fact of daily life for each group: a farmer, a craft worker, a merchant, a scholar.

4. (6C) Use Figure 5. (a) What was a paiza? (b) Copy out the words the tablet carried. (c) Why did a tablet work better than a letter?
5. (6D) Use Figure 6. (a) Who speaks in the extract, and in what situation was his book made? (b) Give one reason Polo might stretch the truth about paper money.
6. (6E) Match each sentence to a perspective — Kublai Khan, a Chinese farmer, a Semu official, a Chinese scholar: (a) “My word rides from Dadu to the edge of the empire in days”; (b) “I pay tax in grain and give days of work on the canals”; (c) “My tablet opens every station from here to Persia”; (d) “Office once came by exam; now it comes by birth”.

Practice questions — unscaffolded

7. (E05) Explain how the Yuan government used administrators from different backgrounds (5–6 sentences). Name at least three groups and one job each group did, and say why the khan mixed them.
8. (E06, 6C) “The Mongols joined Europe and Asia into one trading world.” Use Figures 7 and 8 to support this claim with three pieces of evidence. Then add one limit of the claim (hint: who gained, and who paid?).
9. (6F) “Marco Polo’s book cannot be trusted.” Use Figure 10 and Part 8 to argue both sides at their strongest, then give your own judgement with reasons.
10. (E05, E06, 6E) Extended response: “Under Mongol rule, rulers and ruled saw the same empire in different ways.” Write two paragraphs — one from the point of view of someone near the throne, one from the point of view of someone ruled. Use at least three details from this section in each paragraph.

Answers (scaffolded)

1. b (1206), d (1260), a (1271), c (1279), e (1368).
2.
 - (a) Any two, e.g. Mongol nobles — the top army and government posts; Semu officials — taxes, trade and money; Han people of northern China — army officers and local officials. (b) Ahmad Fanakati.
3. Farmer: paid grain tax and gave days of labour on canals and roads, but the state kept granaries for hungry years. Craft worker: could be counted and kept in state workshops; at Jingdezhen, potters made blue-and-white porcelain with Persian cobalt. Merchant: gained higher standing than under earlier Chinese dynasties, and was paid in paper money. Scholar: with the exams paused, turned to drama, painting and teaching.
4.
 - (a) A tablet of wood or metal carried by the khan's messengers and envoys as a mark of authority. (b) "By the strength of Eternal Heaven and the favour of the Great Khan, whoever does not honour this bearer is guilty of a crime." (c) A letter could be doubted or forged; the tablet was the khan's standing order, and stations that refused it faced punishment.
5.
 - (a) Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant; the book was dictated to the writer Rustichello da Pisa in 1298–1299 while Polo was held prisoner in Genoa. (b) Any one: wonder sells books; Polo wanted readers back home to believe China was worth trading with; he had no reason to know how Chinese people felt about the notes.
6.
 - (a) Kublai Khan (the ruler); (b) a Chinese farmer; (c) a Semu official; (d) a Chinese scholar.

Fully-worked solutions (unscaffolded)

7. The Yuan government ruled China by drawing its administrators from many backgrounds and mixing them on purpose. Mongol nobles kept the top army and government posts. Semu officials from Central and West Asia ran taxes, trade and money — Ahmad Fanakati ran the treasury until his death in 1282. Han people of northern China served as army officers and local officials, while the southern Chinese, the last to be conquered and the largest group in the empire, were mostly shut out of the top posts. Kublai also kept able men of any origin near him, such as the Chinese planner Liu Bingzhong. Mixing mattered because every official owed his place to the khan rather than to his own people, so no single group could grow strong enough to challenge the throne.

8. First, Figure 7 shows one rule joining two whole trading lanes — the overland Silk Road from Khanbaliq to the Mediterranean and the sea lane from Quanzhou to Hormuz — so a merchant could cross most of the route under one empire's peace. Second, Figure 8 shows goods moving both ways: silk, porcelain and spices west; silver, horses and Persian cobalt east, which is why Yuan blue-and-white bowls turn up from Beijing to Istanbul. Third, Figure 8 shows people moving both ways too — friars and merchants east, and the monk Rabban Bar Sauma west to meet the Pope. But the claim has a limit: the peace was kept by conquest. Safe roads served the ruler as much as the merchant, taxes and forced labour fell on Chinese farmers, and the same roads also carried the plague west. "One trading world" was real for those who traded — it cost others.

9. Wood's case, at its strongest: Polo's book leaves out what any visitor would have noticed — the Great Wall, tea, foot binding, Chinese writing — and his claim that his family brought the machines that took the city of Xiangyang is contradicted by other records, which say the city fell before the Polos arrived and name the engineers as two Muslim specialists from West Asia. Perhaps Polo built his book from Persian and Chinese material without going east. The answer, at its strongest: the Wall tourists see today was built by the Ming, long after Polo, so he could not have seen it; a Venetian merchant had little reason to write about tea, foot binding or writing; and Polo's pages on paper money, salt and China's rivers and cities check out against Chinese records. My judgement: on balance Polo probably reached China, because so many of his details fit Chinese sources; but the honest position is that historians can still disagree on what survives, and the book must be checked line by line, not swallowed whole.

10. Paragraph 1 — near the throne: From Dadu, the empire looked like order. Kublai Khan ruled as both Great Khan of the Mongols and Yuan emperor, so his court mixed Mongol feasts at Shangdu with Chinese rites in the new capital. His word rode the yam relay posts, carried by riders whose paiza tablets opened every station from China to Persia, and his paper money — stamped bark, in Polo's wondering eyes — paid soldiers and bought grain without moving a single wagon of silver. Officials of every background, Mongol, Semu, Han and even foreigners, owed their places to

him, and the safe roads brought silk, cobalt and tribute to a court that saw itself as the hinge of the world. Paragraph 2 — among the ruled: From a farm in the south, the same empire looked like tax and labour. Farmers paid grain and gave days of work digging the canal extensions that fed the new capital, and they stood last in the ranked order that put Mongols and Semu above them. Their scholar neighbours found the road to office shut, because the exams were paused; some, like Zhao Mengfu, chose to serve the conquerors and were called turncoats for it, while others turned to painting, teaching and the new drama. And when the same safe roads carried the plague as well as silk, the ruled learned what the rulers of Dadu never had to: connection has a price, and the price travels in both directions.

Source notes (retrieved 2026-08-25)

Primary sources

- Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo (Il Milione)*, dictated to Rustichello da Pisa, 1298–1299; oldest surviving copy the Old French manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (MS Français 2810); excerpts shortened and translated for this book.
- *Yuanshi* (History of the Yuan), compiled 1370 under the Ming court — the standard history of the Yuan dynasty.
- Surviving paiza tablets — e.g. examples in the National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar; the tablet formula also recorded in Polo's book and the *Yuanshi*.
- Yuan-era blue-and-white porcelain from the Jingdezhen kilns — surviving examples in the Palace Museum, Beijing, and the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul.
- Zhao Mengfu, paintings and calligraphy, e.g. *Autumn Colours on the Que and Hua Mountains* (c. 1295–1296), Palace Museum, Beijing.

Medieval travel accounts (translations made for this book)

- John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, from his embassy of 1245–1247.
- William of Rubruck, account of his journey to the Mongols, c. 1255.
- The life of Rabban Bar Sauma, monk of Khanbaliq, who travelled west in 1287–1288.

Secondary sources

- Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, 1919 — the definitions of power and authority used in this section.
- Ferdinand von Richthofen, 1877 — the naming of the “Silk Road”.
- Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?*, 1995.
- Stephen G. Haw, *Marco Polo in China: Problems with Internal Evidence*, 2006; other specialists, including Igor de Rachewiltz and David Morgan, have also argued against Wood's case.

A significant person or group: what they did and achieved

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8K27 (Historical Knowledge and Understanding, Asia and the Pacific, c. 600–1750 CE).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export, final ids over substantive elaborations):

- **Mongol expansion (default path, D9):** .E04 (comparing the two khans' leadership styles and achievements). This section is authored end-to-end on that comparison: Genghis Khan as the founder-leader, Kublai Khan as the builder-leader, with their changes to Mongol-ruled society studied as the evidence base. The chapter note for Chapter 5 names this exact pairing for 5D.
- **Alternative paths (join key, remain available to a teacher or a D9 sign-off swap):** .E01 (one Polynesian people's achievements — Māori, Rapa Nui, others); .E02 (Tokugawa Ieyasu's legacy as the shogunate's founder); .E03 (Jayavarman VII's rule — empire, the Chams, Angkor's building program). Each alternative reuses this section's structure: historical context → the individual's/group's rise and role → their changes sorted by area of society → comparison or legacy judgement → evaluation with questions and criteria → primary-source close study → secondary-source interpretation → biography/comparison task.

Achievement standard coverage: this section serves the standard's aims of identifying and explaining the significant events, people, ideas and developments behind continuity and change, and of building and testing judgements of historical significance against criteria — recognising the part played by individuals, events, places, developments and legacies. Criteria work is owned by 7C (VC2HH8S09) and is applied here, not re-taught; source features and value are owned by 6C/6D (VC2HH8S03/VC2HH8S04) and applied here in the Secret History close study and the Rashid al-Din interpretation.

First Nations disposition (§2A): none — the CD and all four of its elaborations carry no First Nations content. Nothing in this section is excluded. (The “Indigenous peoples of the Americas” note in D3 concerns Chapter 4 elaborations, not this one.)

Cross-references: 5A (nomadic life in Mongolia and Temujin's rise to 1206 — re-established briefly here in Part 1 as context, then cross-referenced), 5B (the decimal army organisation, codified laws, trade expansion and consequences of Mongol expansion are explained there — named here as Genghis Khan's achievements and cross-referenced, not re-explained), 5C (Kublai Khan's Yuan-dynasty government, administrators from different backgrounds, the Silk Road and Marco Polo are studied there — used here as achievement evidence and cross-referenced), 5E (interpretations of the Mongols and the contested death-toll claims — the cost of conquest raised in Part 2 is verified there, not here), 6C/6D (source features, strengths and limitations), 7C (significance criteria), 7D (constructing evidenced interpretations). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): role, contribution, achievement, significant individual, group, leadership style, khan, Great Khan, empire, steppe, nomadic, kurultai, dynasty, successor, yam, paper money (glossed in context), legacy, primary source, secondary source (the last two re-established in one sentence, owned by 6C). Contested-term handling per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md`: “achievement” and “great”/“greater” are defined as contested at first use (whose standard? from whose point of view?) with the operational frame stated; the two opposed cases — Genghis Khan as the greater force for change, Kublai Khan as the greater force for change — are steelmanned (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4), and marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (Rule 5, stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. Frame the CD: what “role”, “contribution” and “achievement” mean, and why “achievement” is a contested word (What you will learn). 2. Historical context first: the Mongol steppe before 1206 and the rise of Temujin, briefly re-established, with the deep study left to 5A (Key ideas Part 1; Figure 5d_timeline.png). 3. Genghis Khan — the founder: his rise, and his changes to how Mongols fought, were governed, traded and remembered (Part 2; Figure 5d_genghis_achievements.png). Conquest and its human cost are named honestly and without detail; the death-toll verification task belongs to 5E. 4. Kublai Khan — the builder: civil war to the throne, the Yuan dynasty, government with administrators of many backgrounds, and the growth of culture and trade (Part 3; Figure 5d_kublai_achievements.png). 5. The comparison — similarities

and differences in leadership styles and achievements, the exact task of E04 (Part 4; Figures 5d_comparison.png, 5d_two_cases.png) — steelman both cases; mark reasoning, not conclusion. 6. Primary-source close study: The Secret History of the Mongols, the inside account (Figures 5d_secret_history_card.png, 5d_secret_history_extract.png) — features, content, context, and the fact that it goes silent before Kublai Khan's time. 7. Secondary-source interpretation: Rashid al-Din's Compendium of Chronicles, written in Iran about a century after Genghis Khan (Figure 5d_rashid_card.png) — strengths, limitations, and why he matters for comparing both khans; the source table (5d_sources_table.png) sorts the evidence. 8. Evaluation with questions and criteria (Part 5; Figure 5d_criteria.png), then scaffolded practice Q1–Q6, unscaffolded Q7–Q10. The chapter's evidence-based extended response lives in the Skills chapters, not here (per-section volume, §3).

Common misconceptions to address: that Genghis Khan was only a destroyer (he also made laws, organised the army and the state, backed writing and trade — but the destruction his armies caused was real, large, and must not be glossed over); that Kublai Khan simply “inherited” an empire (he won a civil war for the throne and built a new capital, a new dynasty and a new way of ruling); that the Mongol empire stayed one united state under Kublai Khan (its western parts increasingly went their own way); that The Secret History of the Mongols covers both khans (it goes silent before Kublai Khan's rise — every source has limits); that “great” settles the argument (it reports a judgement and must be earned with defined criteria and evidence).

What you will learn in this section

Eight hundred years ago, a boy grew up on the cold grasslands of Mongolia, abandoned and poor after his father was killed. That boy, **Temujin**, grew up to unite the warring tribes of the grasslands and build the largest land empire the world had yet seen. His grandson, **Kublai**, was born a prince of that empire — and he changed it again, turning its richest part, China, into a new dynasty he ruled from a city he built himself.

Two men, one family, two very different kinds of leadership. In this section you will study the **role**, the **contribution** and the **achievements** of both — and you will judge, with evidence, whose leadership changed more, and for whom.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **role** — the part a person or group plays in events.
- **contribution** — what a person or group gives or adds to a society.
- **achievement** — something a person or group succeeds in doing. **Note:** this is a contested word. What counts as an achievement, and whether it was a good one, depends on who is judging and what standard they use. An empire's achievement can be a conquered people's disaster. In this section, an achievement is treated as *a change a person or group brought about that we can check in the sources* — and every judgement about whether it was “great” must be argued with evidence, not assumed.
- **significant individual** — a person whose actions made a large, lasting difference to a society. **Group** — a set of people whose combined actions did the same. The curriculum allows either; this section's default studies two individuals in depth. Task Q10 shows how the same questions can be asked of a group.
- **leadership style** — this section uses the term to mean *how a leader gains power, keeps it, and uses it*: who they listen to, who they reward, how they make and enforce decisions.
- **khan** — a title for a ruler among the steppe peoples of Central Asia; a **Great Khan** claimed rule over all of them. **Empire** — a large state in which one power rules over many peoples and lands.
- **legacy** — what is left behind by a person or group, and still matters after them.

We will also keep using words you have met in other sections: **source**, **evidence**, **primary source** (made at the time, by someone there or close to it), **secondary source** (made later by someone who was not there), **cause**, **consequence**, **continuity**, **change** and **significance**.

Key ideas

Part 1: The world before them — the Mongol steppe

To understand the two khans, you first need their world. Mongolia is a land of wide grasslands, called the **steppe**, ringed by mountains and desert. Winters are cruel; food is never certain. Its people were **nomadic** — they moved with

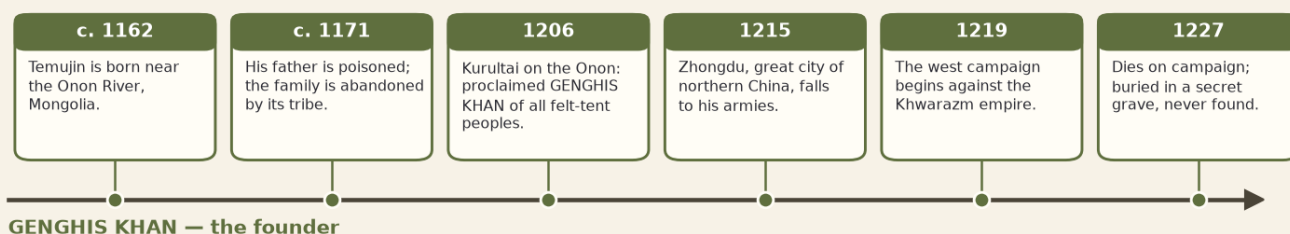
their herds of horses, sheep, goats, camels and cattle rather than farming one fixed spot, and they lived in round felt tents. Skilled riding and archery were skills for life, and for war. Section 5A studies this way of life in full; here you need its main fact.

Around the year 1200, the steppe was not one people but many competing tribes, raiding each other for animals, people and revenge. Into that world, about 1162, Temujin was born. When he was about nine, his father — a minor chief — was poisoned by enemies, and his own tribe abandoned the family on the open plain. Temujin grew up poor, hunted, and at one point held captive by a rival tribe. He survived through force of will, sharp alliances and a gift for binding men to him. Section 5A follows that rise step by step; the end point is what matters here. In **1206**, at a great assembly of the tribes by the Onon River — an assembly called a **kurultai** — Temujin was proclaimed ruler of “all the people living in felt tents”, and given a new name with a new meaning: **Genghis Khan**, often understood as “universal ruler”.

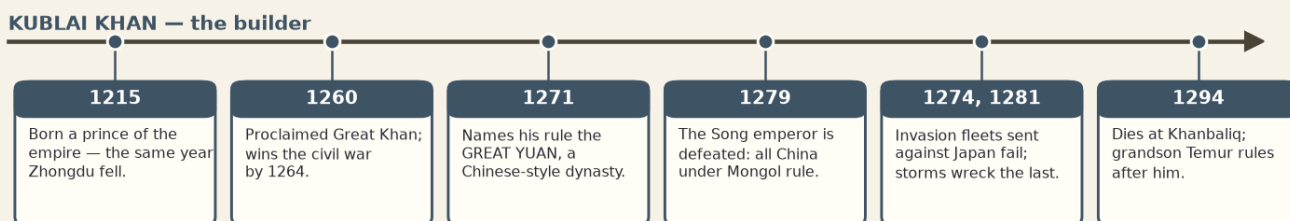
That moment is the starting line for this section. Everything Genghis Khan did after 1206, and everything his grandson Kublai did two generations later, is measured from it.

Two khans, one century: the lives of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan

Dates are true; spacing is evened for readability.



Between them, Genghis Khan's sons and grandsons rule on — Ogedei in 1229, Mongke in 1251 — and the empire keeps growing.



The grandfather made the empire; the grandson changed what it ruled. Every marker is a cause or a consequence.

Timeline of the Mongol world from about 1150 to 1300, with two lifelines: Genghis Khan from his birth about 1162, to his proclamation in 1206, to his death in 1227; and Kublai Khan from his birth in 1215, to becoming Great Khan in 1260, naming the Yuan dynasty in 1271, to his death in 1294

Part 2: Genghis Khan — the founder's leadership

Genghis Khan ruled for twenty-one years after 1206, and in that time he changed almost everything about how his people fought, were governed, and lived. His changes are the evidence for his leadership style: a man who broke old tribal habits on purpose and built new systems in their place.

War and the army. Before Genghis Khan, men fought for their own tribe and their own chief. He re-organised the whole army — and society — into units of ten, a hundred, a thousand and ten thousand, mixing different tribes together on purpose so that loyalty ran to him, not to old chiefs. Promotion went to ability and loyalty, not to noble birth. He added a personal guard of ten thousand men, which doubled as a training school for his commanders. Section 5B explains this decimal organisation and the reasons behind it in full; here it stands as evidence of a leader who organised as carefully as he fought. With that army he conquered northern China, taking the great walled city of

Zhongdu (near modern Beijing) in 1215, and in 1219 led his forces west into Central Asia against the Khwarazmian Empire, whose rich cities fell one by one.

The honest record must include the cost. Cities that resisted were destroyed; great numbers of people were killed or driven from their homes, and whole regions were emptied. How many died is still argued by historians, and section 5E is where you will test those claims against the sources. For this section the key point is a rule of judgement: the size of a change does not tell you whether it was good.

Law. Genghis Khan had rules of law set down and kept — decrees covering crime, theft, the treatment of people travelling and of ambassadors, and even the killing of animals during the breeding season, to protect the herds the whole way of life rested on. A conquered people who gave up without a fight could expect their lives and their laws respected; those who resisted could expect none. The law was also a tool of loyalty: it rewarded service and punished betrayal above nearly all else.

Writing, records and religion. After defeating a rival tribe in 1204, Genghis Khan took its scribes and had the Mongol language written down for the first time, using a script adapted from the Uyghur people. Scribes kept records and wrote his decrees. He also set a rule that was rare for its age: religions were to be tolerated. Buddhist monks, Muslim holy men and Christian priests were freed from taxes and service, and Genghis Khan met religious leaders of several faiths himself, including a famous Daoist monk he summoned from China.

Trade and communication. He protected merchants and their caravans, seeing trade as a source of wealth and information, and set up a relay system of riders and fresh horses — the **yam** — so messages and goods could cross enormous distances fast. Under his rule and his sons' the routes later known as the Silk Road grew busier than they had been for centuries.

The sum of it: by his death in August 1227, on campaign in north-west China, Genghis Khan had turned scattered, warring herders into a single conquering state with shared laws, writing, guards and roads. He was buried in a secret grave, and to this day no one knows where. Before he died he had named his son **Ögedei** as his successor — the person to rule after him — and the kurultai confirmed it in 1229. Choosing his own successor was one more sign of his style: he tried to make even his death follow his rules.

What Genghis Khan changed: the founder's achievements

Area of change	What he did	How we know it
War and the army	One army out of many tribes: units of 10, 100, 1,000 and 10,000 mixed on purpose so loyalty ran to him; promotion by ability, not birth; a guard of 10,000 that trained his commanders.	Northern China conquered; the great city of Zhongdu taken in 1215; the Khwarazm empire in the west beaten from 1219.
Law	Rules set down and kept: theft, how travelling people and ambassadors were treated, and the killing of animals during the breeding season, to protect the herds.	Scribes recorded the rules; conquered peoples who gave up kept their lives and their laws.
Writing and religion	The Mongol language written down for the first time, using a script taken from the Uyghur people; religions tolerated.	Scribes kept after 1204; monks, Muslim holy men and priests freed from taxes and service.
Trade and communication	Merchants and caravans protected; the yam relay of riders and fresh horses set up to carry messages and goods fast.	Routes later called the Silk Road grew busier than they had been for centuries.
The state itself	Many warring tribes made one people under one khan; the successor — the next ruler — chosen by the khan himself.	Kurultai of 1206; Ogedei named successor and confirmed in 1229; the empire kept growing.

Evidence from Part 2 — each row is a change that can be checked in the sources.
His leadership style in one line: break the old tribal ways on purpose; build new systems in their place.

Table of Genghis Khan's main achievements sorted into five areas of change: war and the army, law, writing and religion, trade and communication, and the state itself, each with the evidence that shows it

Part 3: Kublai Khan — the builder's leadership

Genghis Khan's grandson **Kublai** was born on 23 September 1215 — the very year his grandfather took Zhongdu. He grew up inside the empire, the son of Genghis Khan's youngest son Tolui and of **Sorghaghtani**, a famously sharp princess who raised four sons who all became rulers. Where Genghis Khan's school was hardship on the steppe, Kublai's was the court of a world empire — and it showed in the leader he became.

In 1251 Kublai's older brother **Möngke** became Great Khan and put Kublai in charge of Mongol lands in China. When Möngke died on campaign in 1259, two brothers claimed the throne. Kublai held his own kurultai in 1260 and was proclaimed Great Khan; his younger brother Ariq Böke did the same in Mongolia. A civil war followed, and Kublai won it in 1264. His leadership was tested before it truly began — and it had won.

A new way of ruling China. Kublai Khan understood that China — the richest, most populous part of his empire — could not be ruled from horseback. From the 1260s he built a new capital, **Khanbaliq** ("the Khan's city", near modern Beijing), and kept a summer palace at **Shangdu**, later famous in the West as Xanadu. In **1271** he gave his rule a Chinese-style name, the **Great Yuan** — a **dynasty**, meaning a line of rulers passing power within one family — and in **1279** his armies defeated the last of China's Song emperors. For the first time, all of China was ruled by a non-Chinese dynasty. Kublai Khan adopted the forms of a Chinese emperor: a grand court, set taxes, granaries for famine, and temple rites — while keeping Mongols right at the top of power.

Government by many hands. His government used administrators from many different backgrounds: Mongols, Chinese officials, Muslims from Central Asia and Persia, and even Europeans — the Venetian merchant **Marco Polo** claimed Kublai Khan employed him for seventeen years. Section 5C studies this mixed government, the Silk Road it served, and Polo's account in depth; here they stand as evidence of a leader who chose talent wherever he found it, much as his grandfather had.

Building, money and knowledge. Kublai Khan rebuilt China's great canal so grain could sail from the south to his new capital, repaired and extended roads and the yam relay, and made paper money — notes whose value came from the state's word, not from metal — the standard currency of his lands. He backed temples of many faiths, favoured

Buddhism, and paid scholars to fix the calendar: in 1281 his astronomers produced one of the most accurate calendars the world had yet seen. In his capital, drama, painting and printing flourished.

Limits and costs. His record has dark and failed pages too. Twice he sent invasion fleets against Japan, in 1274 and 1281, and both were destroyed — the second by great storms. Campaigns into what is now Vietnam and Java failed to hold. Wars drained the treasury, and his later years saw rebellions and money troubles. And the empire Genghis Khan had made one was no longer one: by Kublai Khan's death on 18 February 1294, its western parts — the Golden Horde, the Chagatai lands and Persia — increasingly went their own way, honouring the Great Khan more in name than in obedience. He was succeeded by his grandson Temür.

What Kublai Khan changed: the builder's achievements		
Area of change	What he did	How we know it
Winning and keeping power	Proclaimed Great Khan at his own kurultai in 1260; beat his brother Ariq Boke in civil war by 1264.	He ruled for over thirty years, to 1294 — power won, and held.
Ruling China	Ruled as a Chinese-style emperor: a grand court, set taxes, granaries for famine; named his dynasty the GREAT YUAN in 1271; all China under Mongol rule from 1279.	New capital Khanbaliq (near modern Beijing); summer palace at Shangdu; the Song dynasty ended.
Government by many hands	Chose talent wherever it was found: administrators came from Mongol, Chinese, Central Asian and Persian backgrounds — and even a European, the Venetian merchant Marco Polo.	Polo claimed seventeen years in Kublai Khan's service; studied in depth in section 5C.
Building and money	Rebuilt the great canal so grain could sail to his capital; repaired roads and the yam relay; made paper notes — money whose value came from the state's word — the standard.	Surviving canal routes and paper notes; visitors' accounts describe both.
Knowledge and culture	Backed scholars: a new, highly accurate calendar fixed in 1281; drama, painting and printing flourished in his capital; temples of many faiths built.	The 1281 calendar; surviving plays, paintings and printed works of the Yuan era.
The empire abroad	Trade and embassies linked Europe and Asia (the age of Marco Polo); tried to extend rule by sea — against Japan in 1274 and 1281, and against Java.	Trade goods and the reports of visitors; the Japan fleets were wrecked and Java was not held.

His leadership style in one line: China could not be ruled from horseback — so he ruled it from a city.

Table of Kublai Khan's main achievements sorted into six areas of change: winning and keeping power, ruling China, government by many hands, building and money, knowledge and culture, and the empire abroad, each with the evidence that shows it

Part 4: Side by side — two leadership styles, one empire

The curriculum's task for this section is to identify the **similarities and differences** between the leadership styles and achievements of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. Here is the shape of a good comparison.

What they shared:

- Both held the title of Great Khan and each led the Mongol empire at its widest moments.
- Both won and kept power with the army, and both rewarded ability and loyalty over noble birth.
- Both used the kurultai assembly to give their rule public, shared approval.
- Both protected trade and the yam relay, and both tolerated religions. Each saw exchange — of goods, people and ideas — as strength.
- Both left legacies that lasted long past their deaths: Genghis Khan's law and army organisation, Kublai Khan's capital and the dynasty that ruled China for nearly a century.

Where they differed:

- **Starting point.** Genghis Khan rose from an abandoned child on a divided steppe to founder of an empire — a self-made ruler. Kublai Khan was born a prince of that empire and worked to keep and grow what he inherited.
- **Style of rule.** Genghis Khan ruled from horseback: his court was his camp, his decrees were his law, his people were moved into new units by command. Kublai Khan ruled from a city: a fixed capital, a court with set forms, taxes, granaries and scholars. One led by founding systems; the other by running them.
- **Theirs to change.** Genghis Khan changed the Mongols themselves — one people out of many tribes, with shared law, writing and service. Kublai Khan changed the empire's richest prize, China — joining Mongol power to Chinese ways of government.
- **Successes and failures.** Genghis Khan never lost his empire, and died on campaign with his succession arranged. Kublai Khan doubled the empire's reach in China and made it wealthier, but his invasions of Japan failed, and the unity of the empire slipped from his hands.
- **How they are remembered.** Genghis Khan is remembered as founder and lawgiver — and, because of the destruction his armies caused, as one of history's most feared conquerors. Kublai Khan is remembered as the emperor who ruled China in the age of Marco Polo.

A comparison like this is the heart of the section: not a list, but a weighing.

Two leadership styles, one empire: a comparison frame		
Copy this frame for Q6 — three similarities and three differences, each with a date or fact.		
	GENGHIS KHAN (the founder)	KUBLAI KHAN (the builder)
Starting point	Abandoned boy on a divided steppe; nothing was given to him.	Born a prince of a world empire in 1215; everything was already built.
Road to power	Alliances and battles; the kurultai of 1206 proclaimed him Genghis Khan.	His kurultai in 1260; civil war against his brother, won by 1264.
Style of rule	From horseback: his camp was his court, his orders were the law.	From a city: court, taxes, granaries, scholars and set forms.
Main changes	One Mongol people; decimal army; law; writing; the yam relay.	The Yuan dynasty (1271); capital Khanbaliq; paper money; the canal.
Successes	The largest land empire the world had yet seen; his successor arranged.	All China under one rule (1279); trade and learning flourished.
Failures	Conquest brought vast destruction — the cost is tested in section 5E.	Japan invasions failed (1274, 1281); the western parts drifted away.
Remembered as	Founder and law-giver — and one of history's most feared conquerors.	The emperor who ruled China in the age of Marco Polo.
What BOTH shared Both were Great Khans. Both rewarded ability and loyalty over noble birth. Both used the kurultai to give their rule shared approval. Both protected trade and the yam relay, and tolerated religions. Both left legacies that lasted long after their deaths.		

A good comparison weighs, it does not just list — every point needs a date or a fact.

Comparison table of the leadership of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan across seven rows: starting point, road to power, style of rule, main changes, successes, failures, and how each is remembered, with a shared column listing what both had in common

Two cases, each in its strongest form. Which khan was the greater force for change? Before judging, historians steelman each side — put each case as strongly as its own supporters would.

Case for Genghis Khan. Without him there is no Mongol empire at all: no unified people, no army, no law, no roads, no China under Mongol rule. Every change Kublai Khan made stood on what his grandfather built. Measured by size of change from where he started — from outcast to founder of the largest land empire the world had yet seen — no ruler in this section's period comes close.

Case for Kublai Khan. Founding is one kind of change; making things work is another. Kublai Khan ruled the biggest and richest part of the empire, governed it for over thirty years, built its capital, its money system and its canal, and presided over a flowering of culture and trade that linked Europe and Asia. Genghis Khan made the empire possible; Kublai Khan made it last, at least in its richest half.

Each case is honest, and each can be answered: the founder's case must face the destruction his conquests caused, which no success erases; the builder's case must face the failed invasions and the fracturing of the empire's unity. Your judgement must weigh the evidence on both sides. Different students, reasoning well, may reach different conclusions — that is expected, and it is the reasoning that is marked.

Which khan was the greater force for change?

Each case in its strongest form — as its own supporters would put it. Judge the evidence, not the slogan.

CASE A — the founder changed more

Without Genghis Khan there is no Mongol empire at all.

- 1206: one people made out of warring tribes — no founder, nothing after.
- His systems outlived him: the decimal army, the law, writing, the yam relay.
- From an abandoned outcast to founder of the largest land empire the world had yet seen.
- Every change Kublai Khan made stood on what his grandfather built.

What this case must face

Conquest destroyed cities and emptied regions. Size of change is not proof of good — section 5E tests the toll against the sources.

CASE B — the builder changed more

Founding is one kind of change; making things work is another.

- Ruled the empire's biggest, richest part for more than thirty years.
- Built Khanbaliq, the Yuan dynasty (1271), paper money and the rebuilt canal.
- 1279: all China under one rule — trade and learning flourished as never before.
- Genghis Khan made the empire possible; Kublai Khan made it work.

What this case must face

The Japan invasions failed (1274, 1281), and the empire's western parts drifted apart while he ruled.

Both cases are honest, and each can be answered. Your judgement must weigh the evidence on both sides — the reasoning is what is marked.

Diagram presenting the two strongest cases side by side: the case that Genghis Khan was the greater force for change, and the case that Kublai Khan was, each with its evidence and the objection each case must face

Part 5: Evaluating leadership with questions and criteria

To judge the two khans' achievements, historians use questions and **criteria** — agreed tests for judging importance. You met significance criteria in section 7C; here are the five we use in this section:

1. **How big was the change?** A new coin, or a new way of ruling half the world?
2. **How many people felt it?** One tribe, or most of Asia?
3. **How long did it last?** A reign, or centuries after his death?
4. **What do the sources show?** Laws, records, buildings, money and books can all be checked. Whose voices do they carry — and whose are missing (the conquered peoples, ordinary herders, the people the yam rode past)?
5. **Good for whom?** An achievement for the empire may be a disaster for those it conquered. A full evaluation names who gained and who lost.

Judging achievements: five questions, one worked example

Use **The five questions**. The worked example applies a **Worked Example: Genghis Khan's laws**.

1. How big was the change?

A whole new way of settling disputes across a new state — not just one tribe's customs.

2. How many people felt it?

Every Mongol subject, and every conquered people that gave up and came under Mongol rule.

3. How long did it last?

These rules stayed in force long after Genghis Khan died in 1227.

4. What do the sources show?

Scribes wrote the rules down; later writers such as Rashid al-Din describe them — so the claim can be checked.

5. Good for whom?

Good for traders and subjects who gained order and safety; harsh for enemies who resisted. A full judgement names both.

An achievement is a change you can check in the sources. Whether it was 'great' is a judgement you must earn with these questions.

Table of the five evaluation questions and criteria used in this section to judge the achievements of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan, with a worked example applied to Genghis Khan's law-making

Primary source close study: The Secret History of the Mongols

The most important inside account of Genghis Khan is a book called **The Secret History of the Mongols** — the oldest surviving work written in the Mongol language. It was composed around 1240, within living memory of the events, by an unnamed writer of the Mongol court. It tells the story of Temujin's hard childhood, his rise, the kurultai of 1206, Genghis Khan's conquests and sayings, and the start of his son Ögedei's rule.

No copy in the original Mongol writing survives. The text reached us through a Chinese version, in which Mongol words were written out using Chinese characters and translated — first used as a language textbook and preserved in editions from 1386. Modern scholars, above all Francis Woodman Cleaves in his 1982 translation, have worked back from that text to the Mongol original.

Source card — The Secret History of the Mongols (primary source)

The inside account: the oldest surviving work written in the Mongol language.

What it is	A court history telling Temujin's hard childhood, his rise, the kurultai of 1206, and Genghis Khan's conquests and sayings, ending in the first years of his son Ogedei's rule.
Who wrote it	An unnamed writer of the Mongol court — someone inside the world the book describes.
When	Around 1240 CE — within living memory of Genghis Khan, who died in 1227.
How it survives	No original Mongol copy survives. The text came down through a Chinese version, in which Mongol words were written out with Chinese characters and translated, preserved in a language-textbook edition of 1386.
Standard translation	Francis Woodman Cleaves, <i>The Secret History of the Mongols</i> (1982), worked back from the Chinese text to the Mongol original.
Why it matters	No outside writer saw the Mongol rise from inside. It keeps words, motives and family stories no other source holds.
Its limits	It goes silent before Kublai Khan's time. It was written for the family it praises, and it survives only through another language's writing.

Primary = made at the time, by someone there or close to it.

Source card for The Secret History of the Mongols: what it is, who wrote it, when, how it survives, and where the standard translation comes from

Here is the moment this section turns on — the 1206 kurultai. The wording below is a fresh rendering made for this section from the standard Mongol text; it is not a copy of any published translation.

“When all the peoples who lived in felt tents had been brought under his rule, and the Mongols camped at the source of the Onon River in the Year of the Tiger [1206], they set up the white banner with nine tails, and Temujin was enthroned. Then the holy man Kokochu spoke the message he said came from Eternal Blue Heaven: ‘It is decreed that you shall rule the empire ... From this day you shall be called Genghis Khan.’”

— The Secret History of the Mongols, passage on the 1206 kurultai, rendered from the Mongol text by the author for this section

Run your source questions over it:

- **Features and context:** a court history in the Mongol language, written for the ruling family about 1240, within living memory of the man it describes. It is a **primary source**: made by someone inside the world it describes, close to the time.
- **What it shows:** how the Mongols themselves told the rise of Genghis Khan — his poverty, his escapes, his friendships and betrayals, and the message from “Eternal Blue Heaven” that his rule was chosen. No outside writer saw any of this from inside.
- **What it does not show:** the views of the peoples his armies conquered, who appear mostly as enemies or subjects. And it goes silent before Kublai Khan’s time — for the grandson, you need other sources. A source being precious does not make it complete.
- **A note on praise:** it was written for the family whose story it tells. That does not make it false — it is full of unflattering detail — but a historian reads its loudest claims with care.

Reading the inside account: the kurultai of 1206

Fresh rendering made for this section from the standard Mongol text — not a copy of any published translation.

“When all the peoples who lived in felt tents had been brought under his rule, and the Mongols camped at the source of the Onon River in the Year of the Tiger [1206], they set up the white banner with nine tails, and Temujin was enthroned. Then the holy man Kokochu spoke the message he said came from Eternal Blue Heaven: ‘It is decreed that you shall rule the empire ... From this day you shall be called Genghis Khan.’”

— The Secret History of the Mongols, passage on the 1206 kurultai, rendered from the Mongol text by the author for this section

What it shows

How the Mongols themselves told the rise of Genghis Khan — his rule, the assembly, and the belief that Eternal Blue Heaven chose him.

What it cannot show

The views of the peoples his armies conquered. And it goes silent before Kublai Khan — for the grandson, you need other sources.

Read with trust and care

Written for the family whose story it tells. That does not make it false — but read its loudest claims against outside evidence.

A source being precious does not make it complete — and being inside does not make it neutral.

The Secret History of the Mongols passage on the 1206 kurultai in English rendering, with notes on what the passage shows, what it cannot show, and why an inside source is read with both trust and care

Secondary source interpretation: Rashid al-Din’s Compendium of Chronicles

The Secret History stops short of Kublai Khan, so the comparison needs a source that covers both khans. The most detailed one is the **Compendium of Chronicles** (*Jami’ al-tawarikh*) written in Persia (modern Iran) by **Rashid al-Din**, a physician who rose to be the most senior minister of the Mongol-ruled Ilkhanate. He compiled it about 1300–1310, drawing on something precious: the **Altan Debter**, a now-lost register kept at the Mongol court, and the memory of Mongol officials at his court. His history runs from Genghis Khan’s ancestors through the reigns of his sons and grandsons — including Kublai Khan.

Source card — Rashid al-Din, Compendium of Chronicles (secondary source)

The outside-but-informed account that covers BOTH khans — the comparison needs it.

Who he was

Rashid al-Din: a doctor who rose to be the most senior minister of the Mongol-ruled Ilkhanate in Persia (modern Iran).

What he wrote

Jami' al-tawarikh — the Compendium of Chronicles — a world history whose Mongol part runs from Genghis Khan's ancestors through his sons and grandsons, including Kublai Khan.

When and where

Tabriz, in the Ilkhanate, about 1300–1310 CE — roughly eighty years after Genghis Khan's death.

Sources he used

The Altan Debter — the Mongol court's own register, now lost — and the memory of Mongol officials serving at his court.

Strengths

The most detailed early history covering both khans in one connected story, built on court records that no other source keeps.

Limits

He was not there: he wrote in Iran, after both khans had died, and he served the family he describes. His main court source is lost, so parts of his story can no longer be checked against the original.

Secondary = made later, by someone who was not there — here, by a careful collector who kept what no primary source holds.

Source card for Rashid al-Din and his Compendium of Chronicles: who he was, when and where he wrote, what sources he could reach, and the strengths and limitations of reading him today

On Genghis Khan's last arrangements, Rashid al-Din records that the dying khan gathered his sons, made them swear to stand together, and named Ögedei to rule after him — the orderly succession described in Part 2. On Kublai Khan he writes as a subject of the Mongol rulers: a careful administrator who finished the conquest of China, rewarded service, and governed with settled laws. Passages above are rendered and summarised in the author's own words from the Persian.

His value is plain: he gives us both khans in one connected story, built on court records. His limits are just as plain. He wrote in Iran, about eighty years after Genghis Khan's death and after Kublai Khan's too; he was not there, he served the family he describes, and his court source, the Altan Debter, is lost, so parts of his story can no longer be checked against the original. He is exactly what secondary sources are for — keeping detail and voices that no primary source holds — and exactly what they are not: a view from the room where it happened.

The figure below sorts the main sources for the two khans — primary and secondary — and what each one can show us.

The evidence for two khans: sources sorted by kind				
Source	Who made it	When made	Kind	What it can show
The Secret History of the Mongols	Unnamed writer of the Mongol court	c. 1240 CE	PRIMARY	The rise of Temujin and the rule of Genghis Khan, told from inside.
Compendium of Chronicles (Rashid al-Din)	Persian minister at the Mongol court in Tabriz	c. 1300–1310 CE	SECONDARY	Both khans in one connected story, from court records.
History of the World Conqueror (Juvayni)	Persian official who visited Karakorum	c. 1260 CE	SECONDARY	Genghis Khan and his first successors, from an official who saw the capital.
Yuan shi (History of the Yuan)	Officials of the next (Ming) dynasty, using Yuan court records	1370 CE	SECONDARY	The official story of Kublai Khan's dynasty in China.
Portrait of Kublai Khan	An artist of the Yuan court	Yuan era	PRIMARY	What the ruler looked like — a picture, not words.
Description of the World (Marco Polo)	A Venetian merchant at Kublai Khan's court	c. 1299 CE	PRIMARY	Daily life at the court — studied in depth in section 5C.

No single source covers both khans fully — that is why historians compare sources, not just read one.

Table sorting the main sources for Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan into primary and secondary, with who made each source, when it was made, and what each source can show

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Using Figure 5d_timeline.png, put these six events in order from first to last, and give the date of each: (a) Kublai Khan names his dynasty the Great Yuan; (b) Genghis Khan is proclaimed at the kurultai on the Onon River; (c) the last Song emperor is defeated and all China comes under Mongol rule; (d) Genghis Khan dies on campaign in north-west China; (e) Kublai Khan is born; (f) Kublai Khan holds his own kurultai and is proclaimed Great Khan.

Q2. Figure 5d_genghis_achievements.png sorts Genghis Khan's changes into areas. Sort these five actions into the correct area, with one line of evidence from Part 2 for each: (a) mixing tribes into units of ten, hundred, thousand and ten thousand; (b) having the Mongol language written down using a script adapted from the Uyghur people; (c) freeing monks, Muslim holy men and priests from taxes and service; (d) setting up the yam relay of riders and fresh horses; (e) ordering rules of law set down, covering theft, people travelling and the breeding season.

Q3. Figure 5d_kublai_achievements.png sorts Kublai Khan's changes into areas. Sort these five actions into the correct area, with one line of evidence from Part 3 for each: (a) building the capital Khanbaliq and giving his rule the name Great Yuan in 1271; (b) making paper notes the standard money of his lands; (c) employing administrators from Mongol, Chinese, Central Asian and European backgrounds; (d) backing scholars who produced a new, highly accurate calendar in 1281; (e) rebuilding the great canal so grain could sail to his capital.

Q4. Read the Secret History passage in Figure 5d_secret_history_extract.png. (a) Name two details in it that could be checked against other evidence. (b) Name one part that is a claim about Heaven's choice, which no other source could prove or disprove. (c) In one sentence, explain why an inside source like this is both more valuable and more in need of careful reading than an outside one.

Q5. Give one strength and one limitation of each source studied in this section: (a) The Secret History of the Mongols; (b) Rashid al-Din's Compendium of Chronicles. Use the two source cards (Figures 5d_secret_history_card.png and 5d_rashid_card.png) to help you.

Q6. Comparison frame. Copy the frame in Figure 5d_comparison.png and fill in THREE similarities and THREE differences in the leadership styles of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. Every point must carry a date or a fact from Parts 2–4.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Choose ONE achievement of either khan from the achievement tables (Figures 5d_genghis_achievements.png or 5d_kublai_achievements.png). Evaluate it using all five criteria in Figure 5d_criteria.png. Finish with a clear judgement of your own: how important was this change, and for whom? Give evidence for every point.

Q8. “Without Genghis Khan there would have been no Mongol empire.” “Kublai Khan made the empire work and made it last.” For each claim, give the strongest evidence a supporter would use. Then write your own reasoned judgement — two or three sentences — saying which claim you find better supported by the evidence, or why neither claim tells the whole story. You are marked on the reasoning, not on which side you land on.

Q9. Write one paragraph of 5–7 sentences comparing the leadership styles of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan: how each gained power, how each ruled, and what each changed. End with one sentence of your own evaluation — whose style was more effective, and why. Use at least three dated facts from this section.

Q10. The curriculum allows a group as well as an individual. Choose ONE group that helped change the Mongol world — for example, Genghis Khan's guard of ten thousand, the Uyghur scribes who gave the Mongols writing, the mixed administrators who ran Kublai Khan's government, or the merchants who worked the Silk Road routes. List their role, their contribution and one achievement, and name one source you would use to study them (a record, a building, an object, an account).

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (b) 1206 → (e) 1215 → (d) 1227 → (f) 1260 → (a) 1271 → (c) 1279. Accept dates within a year where sources vary (e.g. Genghis Khan's birth about 1162 does not appear in the six; the kurultai is 1206).

Q2. (a) war and the army; (b) writing and religion; (c) writing and religion (the tolerance rule); (d) trade and communication; (e) law. Evidence lines: decimal units mixing tribes, loyalty to the khan (Part 2, “War and the army”); scribes taken after 1204 and the Mongol language first written down (Part 2, “Writing, records and religion”); monks, Muslim holy men and priests freed from taxes and service (same paragraph); the yam relay of riders and fresh horses (Part 2, “Trade and communication”); decrees covering crime, people travelling and the breeding season (Part 2, “Law”). Note: two actions map to one area and “The state itself” takes none — the sort is by area, not one-to-one.

Q3. (a) ruling China — new capital Khanbaliq and the Great Yuan name in 1271 (Part 3, “A new way of ruling China”); (b) building and money — paper notes as standard currency (Part 3, “Building, money and knowledge”); (c) government by many hands — administrators of Mongol, Chinese, Central Asian and European backgrounds including Marco Polo (Part 3, “Government by many hands”); (d) knowledge and culture — the 1281 calendar, one of the most accurate yet seen (Part 3, “Building, money and knowledge”); (e) building and money — the rebuilt canal carrying grain to the capital (same paragraph).

Q4. (a) Accept any two checkable claims, e.g. that the peoples of the felt tents were brought under one rule; the camp at the Onon River; the 1206 date (Year of the Tiger); the nine-tailed white banner; the new title Genghis Khan. (b) The message that Eternal Blue Heaven decreed his rule — a belief claim no record can test. (c) Accept reasoned variants; look for the double point: an inside source gives access no outsider had (words, motives, the family's own telling) AND is written by people with reason to flatter the family it serves, so its loudest claims need checking against outside evidence.

Q5. (a) *Secret History*: strength — primary, inside the Mongol court, within living memory, full of detail no outside writer had; limitation — goes silent before Kublai Khan’s rise, written for the ruling family, survives only through a later Chinese transcription. (b) Rashid al-Din: strength — covers both khans in one story, built on the lost court register (Altan Debter) and Mongol informants; limitation — wrote in Iran about 80 years after Genghis Khan’s death, served the Mongol rulers he describes, and his main source is lost so parts cannot be re-checked. Accept reasoned variants.

Q6. Accept frames that carry, at minimum: similarities — both Great Khans; both rewarded ability and loyalty over birth; both used the kurultai; both protected trade and the yam; both tolerated religions; both left lasting legacies. Differences — outcast founder vs born prince; horseback decrees vs city government with court, taxes and granaries; changed the Mongol people themselves vs changed Mongol-ruled China; never lost his empire, succession arranged vs failed invasions of Japan and the empire’s western parts drifting away; remembered as founder and feared conqueror vs remembered as the emperor of Marco Polo’s China. Every point must carry a date or fact (1206, 1215, 1227, 1260, 1271, 1274, 1281, 1279, 1294...).

Q7. Mark on: criterion-by-criterion application (size, reach, duration, source support, who gained and lost), evidence named for each point, and a judgement tied to the criteria. Any achievement from either table is acceptable; different judgements with sound reasoning meet the standard (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 5). An answer that honestly weighs the destruction of conquest under “good for whom?” is to be rewarded, not penalised.

Q8. Mark on: the strength of each side’s evidence (claim 1: 1206 unification, the army, law, writing and yam all founded by Genghis Khan, without which no later change was possible; claim 2: thirty-plus years of rule, the capital Khanbaliq, the Yuan dynasty to 1368, paper money, the canal, the 1281 calendar, the China-wide Silk Road trade), and the student’s own judgement with reasons. Both claims are partial — claim 1 ignores Kublai Khan’s own building; claim 2 ignores that the empire’s unity weakened on his watch. Do not mark the conclusion itself; two opposed judgements can both be full marks.

Q9. Mark on coverage (how each gained power, how each ruled, what each changed), three dated facts, and a closing evaluation with reasons. Either final judgement is acceptable with sound reasoning (e.g. “Genghis Khan’s style was more effective because founding systems from nothing is a larger change than running them” or “Kublai Khan’s was more effective because government outlasts conquest — his capital and money system ran for decades”).

Q10. Accept any group with a stated role, contribution and achievement, plus one real, named source (e.g. the scribes: the surviving texts in the Uyghur-Mongol script; the administrators: Yuan-era records and Polo’s account studied in 5C; the merchants: goods and records from the Silk Road; the guard: the *Secret History*’s own account of it). The point is transfer: the same framework applies to a group as to an individual.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **The Secret History of the Mongols** — composed in Mongol around 1240 by an unnamed court writer; no original manuscript survives; preserved through a Chinese transcription and translation used as a language textbook and preserved in editions from 1386 (the Yuan dynasty “Secret History” text). Standard English translation: Francis Woodman Cleaves, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Harvard, 1982). The 1206 kurultai passage above is rendered in my own words from the standard Mongol text, not copied from any published translation. Subject of Figures 5d_secret_history_card.png and 5d_secret_history_extract.png.
- **Rashid al-Din Hamadani, *Jami’ al-tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles)** — compiled at Tabriz in the Mongol-ruled Ilkhanate of Persia, about 1300–1310, under the rulers Ghazan and Öljaitü; drew on the lost Mongol court register Altan Debter and on Mongol officials at his court. The succession and Kublai Khan passages above are rendered and summarised in the author’s own words from the Persian. Subject of Figure 5d_rashid_card.png.
- **Ata-Malik Juvayni, *Tarikh-i Jahangushay* (History of the World Conqueror)** — Persian history completed about 1260 by an official in Mongol service who visited the Mongol capital Karakorum; covers Genghis Khan and his immediate successors. Cited in the sources table, Figure 5d_sources_table.png.

- **Yuan shi (History of the Yuan dynasty)** — official Chinese history of Kublai Khan’s dynasty, compiled 1370 under the succeeding Ming dynasty from Yuan court records. Cited in the sources table, Figure 5d_sources_table.png.
- **Portrait of Kublai Khan** — album leaf portrait, Yuan dynasty, artist unknown; National Palace Museum, Taipei (from the Yuan album of imperial portraits). Cited in the sources table, Figure 5d_sources_table.png.
- **Marco Polo (with Rustichello da Pisa), *Description of the World*** — account of Kublai Khan’s court compiled about 1299; described in the author’s own words and cross-referenced to section 5C, where it is studied in depth. Cited in the sources table, Figure 5d_sources_table.png.
- **The yam relay, paper money and the 1281 calendar** — described in Parts 2 and 3 from the standard record of Mongol government; the calendar is the Shoushi calendar produced under the astronomer Guo Shoujing, described in the author’s own words, not quoted.
- All dates follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. No First Nations content appears in this section (none exists in this CD or its elaborations). The human cost of the Mongol conquests is named without detail per the age-appropriateness rule (CONTENT_POLICY.md); the contested death-toll claims themselves are the subject of section 5E’s verification task, not this one.

Contested readings of an event, person or institution and its legacies

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8K28 (Historical Knowledge and Understanding, Asia and the Pacific, c. 600–1750 CE).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export, final ids over substantive elaborations):

- **Mongol expansion (default path, D9):** .E05 (testing the Mongol death-toll claims against sources). This section is authored end-to-end on that debate: the medieval death-toll claims for the conquered cities are put on the table, tested lens by lens against primary sources, and set against modern historians' interpretations; the section then turns to the empire's legacies and tests one legacy story the same way. The Chapter 5 note names this exact task for 5E and pairs it with 6D. The .E05 toll of one million at Nishapur is delivered through Juvaini's specific claim of 1,747,000 — the figure from which the rounded claim descends.
- **Alternative paths (join key, remain available to a teacher or a D9 sign-off swap):** .E01 (Polynesian history when written sources are scarce); .E02 (theories of the Polynesian expansion — accident or design?); .E03 (Japan's closure to foreigners; Perry's 1853 visit); .E04 (theories of the Khmer decline — invasions, environment, waterworks). Each alternative reuses this section's structure: what an interpretation is → the stage set → the claims on the table → each claim tested against sources → two steelmanned readings → legacies and their testing → evaluation with questions and tasks (task Q10 shows the transfer explicitly).

Achievement standard coverage: this section is the book's most direct service to the standard's aim that students recognise how contested the histories of early societies and pre-modern ones are, and use that knowledge to spot and analyse differing historical interpretations and debates; and to its aim of interpreting what historical sources say by checking how accurate and how valuable they are as evidence. It also serves the significance sentence's naming of the legacies left by the societies studied. Verification of claims is owned by 6D (VC2HH8S04) and applied here (the Chapter 5 note pairs 5E with 6D); how and why interpretations differ is owned by 6F (VC2HH8S06) and applied here; significance criteria are owned by 7C (VC2HH8S09) and applied in the legacy judgement; constructing evidenced interpretations is owned by 7D (VC2HH8S10) and prepared by the model tasks. None of those is re-taught here.

First Nations disposition (§2A): none — the CD and all five of its elaborations carry no First Nations content. Nothing in this section is excluded.

Cross-references: 5A (nomadic Mongol life; the khan Mongke's saying about the world's faiths, reported via William of Rubruck, is reused in the legacy web), 5B (the conquests, the yam relay and the decimal army — the events behind this section's claims), 5C (Kublai Khan's Yuan government and the Silk Road — legacy evidence), 5D (the two khans; the human cost of conquest is named there and verified here), 4E (Chapter 4's sibling interpretations section: the Arthur and Pope Joan myths and the historians' Black Death debates — same method, different evidence), 6D (fact vs opinion and source verification — the evidence engine under this section per the Chapter 5 note), 6F (how and why interpretations differ), 7C (significance criteria), 7D (constructing evidenced interpretations). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): interpretation, historical interpretation, legacy/legacies, event, death toll, register, census, exaggeration, steelman (house term), Pax Mongolica, khan/Great Khan, kurultai, steppe, yam, siege, dynasty (the last six re-established from 5A–5D in one line each), primary source, secondary source (re-established in one line each, owned by 6C). Contested-term handling per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md`: the curriculum uses “historical interpretation” and “legacy” but defines neither — the Rule 1 operational-definition template is used at first use for both; “death toll” is taught as a measurable-kind word whose dispute is about measurement (Rule 1b); the two opposed readings of the tolls are steelmanned (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4); marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (Rule 5, stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. Frame the CD: what an interpretation is, what a legacy is, and why the Mongol expansion is the case (What you will learn). 2. Part 1 — how historians build interpretations from traces of the past, and why interpretations differ (Figure 5e_interpretations.png). 3. Part 2 — the stage: the Mongol world 1206–1368 in outline, with the two claims this section puts on trial (Figures 5e_timeline.png,

5e_map.png); deep study of the events stays in 5A–5D. 4. Part 3 — the death-toll claims on the table, side by side, with the Merv disagreement read as evidence (Figure 5e_claims_table.png). 5. Part 4 — test one: the Nishapur claim of 1,747,000, broken down with four lenses (Figure 5e_nishapur_extract.png); this is the 6D verification method applied. 6. Part 5 — test two: the “60 million in China” claim and why registers can fall without bodies (Figure 5e_china_claims.png). 7. Part 6 — two steelmanned readings of the whole question, with the common ground stated (Figure 5e_two_reads.png); mark reasoning, not conclusion. 8. Part 7 — the legacies: connection and destruction travel together, and one legacy story (Caffa, 1346) is itself put on trial (Figures 5e_legacy_web.png, 5e_caffa.png). 9. Primary-source close study: Ata-Malik Juvaini’s History of the World-Conqueror, with the Nishapur passage rendered for this section (Figure 5e_juvaini_card.png). 10. Secondary-source interpretation: the modern historians who test the tallies (Figure 5e_historians.png), with John Masson Smith Jr.’s reading studied as a model. 11. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6, unscaffolded Q7–Q10. The chapter’s evidence-based extended response lives in the Skills chapters, not here (per-section volume, §3).

Common misconceptions to address: that a big number in an old book is a count (it is a claim, and claims are what this section tests); that sources disagreeing means nothing can be known (disagreement between sources is evidence, and it is what starts the testing); that a medieval register worked like a modern census (registers were lists kept for tax and service, and they went missing when government failed); that the debate is “did it happen?” (it is “how big was it, and how do we read the numbers?”); that a legacy must be wholly good or wholly bad (connection and destruction travel together); that testing the claims about the dead is disrespectful (testing is how the dead are taken seriously — a claim we cannot defend honours no one).

What you will learn in this section

In April 1221, a Mongol army took the city of Nishapur, in what is now north-east Iran. A historian writing more than thirty years later said that **1,747,000 people** were killed there — “even the cats and dogs”, he added. If you read about the Mongol conquests today, you will also often see this claim: **60 million people died in China**. Both numbers are famous. Both raise the same hard questions: *who counted? Could the number be true? How can we tell, eight hundred years later?*

This section is about **historical interpretations** — the reasoned answers historians build about the past — and about **legacies** — what the past leaves behind. The case is the **Mongol expansion**, the event you have studied through sections 5A–5D: the largest land empire the world had yet seen, won by conquest, and remembered in very different ways. You will put its most famous claims on trial, test them against the sources, and judge what can and cannot be said.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **interpretation, historical interpretation** — the Victorian Curriculum uses the term *historical interpretation* but does not define it. This section therefore treats it as *a reasoned answer to a question about the past, built from sources and tested against evidence*. An interpretation is not the past itself — the past happened once and cannot be re-watched. It is an argued account of the past, and two historians can study the same sources and give different readings. Other definitions exist; every task here is answerable on this one alone.
- **legacy** (plural **legacies**) — the curriculum uses this word too, without a definition. Here a legacy is *what an event, a person, a group or an institution leaves behind that still matters after it*. A legacy can be good, bad, or both at once; naming one is not the same as praising it.
- **event** — here, the Mongol expansion (1206–1368). The CD also allows an individual, a group or an institution; Part 7 treats the Mongol empire as an institution whose legacies are argued about. Task Q10 shows how the same method transfers.
- **death toll** — the number of people who died in an event. Notice the kind of word this is: the meaning is agreed (a count of the dead), but the *measuring* is where the dispute lives. No one could count the dead of a conquest in the 1200s, and the sources that give numbers disagree. So in this section a death toll is treated as a claim to test, not a fact to repeat.
- **register** — a list kept by a government, usually of people, households or land, so it knows who to tax or call on for service. **Census** — an official count of people. A medieval register was not a census in the modern sense; it counted what the government needed, and it stopped working when the government did.

- **primary source** — made at or near the time, by someone inside the events or close to them (re-established here; owned by 6C). **Secondary source** — made later, by someone who was not there.
- **exaggeration** — saying more than the truth.
- **steelman** — to put a case as strongly and honestly as its own supporters would, before testing it. This is a house rule in this book; you will steelman both sides of the death-toll debate in Part 6.

You will also keep using words from other sections: **source, evidence, cause, consequence, continuity, change, significance, khan** and **Great Khan, kurultai, steppe, yam, siege** and **dynasty**.

Key ideas

Part 1: What is a historical interpretation?

The past is not lying around waiting to be read. It happened once, and it is gone. What survives are **traces**: writings, buildings, coins, bones, lists, laws, stories passed on. Only some traces survive, and every one of them was made by a person with a point of view.

The historian's work is to question those traces. Historians ask a question, check who made each source and when and why, compare sources with each other — looking for agreement, disagreement and silence — and test claims against other evidence: numbers, archaeology, what else is known. Then they build a claim that the evidence can carry, and they say plainly what is still uncertain. That claim is an **interpretation**.

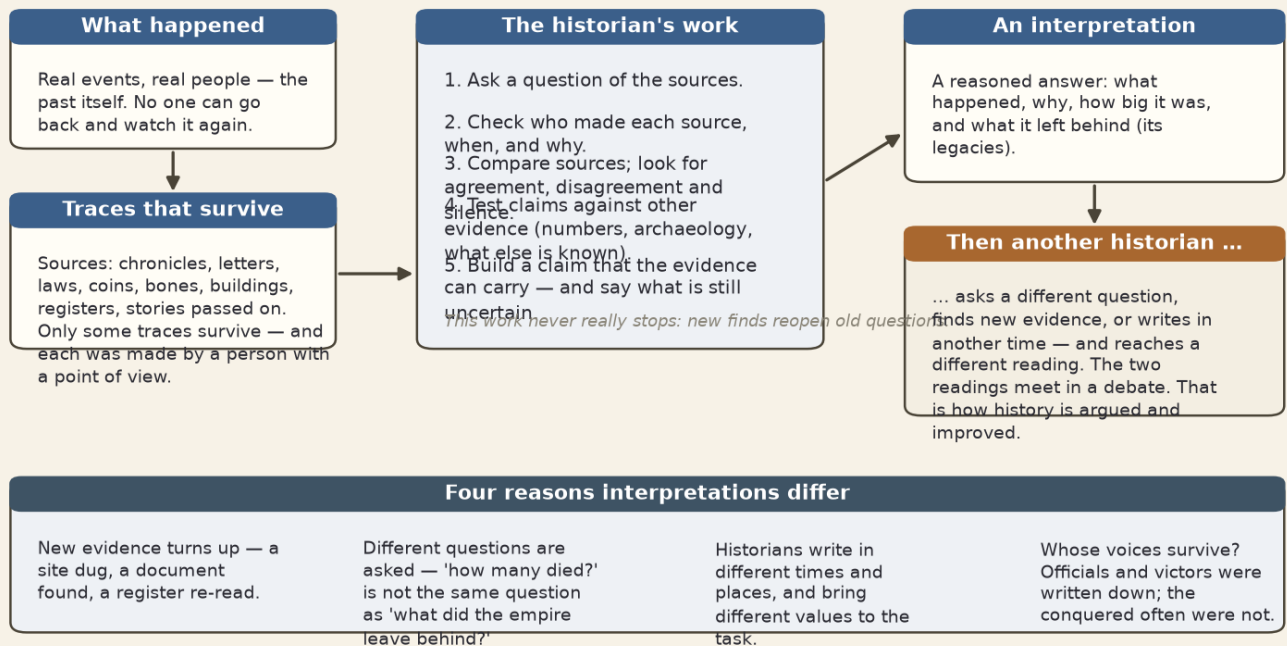
An interpretation is not a guess, and it is not “just an opinion”. It is an argued answer, and it must stand up to testing. But interpretations do change, and they differ — and that is not a failure of history. It is how history works. Four reasons, over and over:

- **New evidence turns up** — a site is dug, a document is found, an old list is re-read.
- **Different questions are asked** — “how many died?” is not the same question as “what did the empire leave behind?”, and each question needs different evidence.
- **Historians write in different times and places**, and bring different values to the task. A writer in the 1250s and a historian in the 1980s do not see the same event the same way.
- **Whose voices survive?** Officials and winners were written down; conquered peoples, ordinary herders and the killed were mostly not. Every reading must ask who is missing.

Section 6F studies how and why interpretations differ in full. Here you will do the thing itself: take a famous set of claims about the Mongol expansion and find out what they can and cannot support.

What is a historical interpretation?

A claim, built from evidence, about what happened, what it meant and what it left behind



Model built for this section from the steps historians use with sources (see section 6D).

Model diagram of how a historical interpretation is built: from what happened, to the traces that survive as sources, through the historian's work of questioning, comparing and testing, to an interpretation — and then a rival interpretation — with four reasons listed for why interpretations differ

Part 2: The stage — the Mongol world, 1206–1368

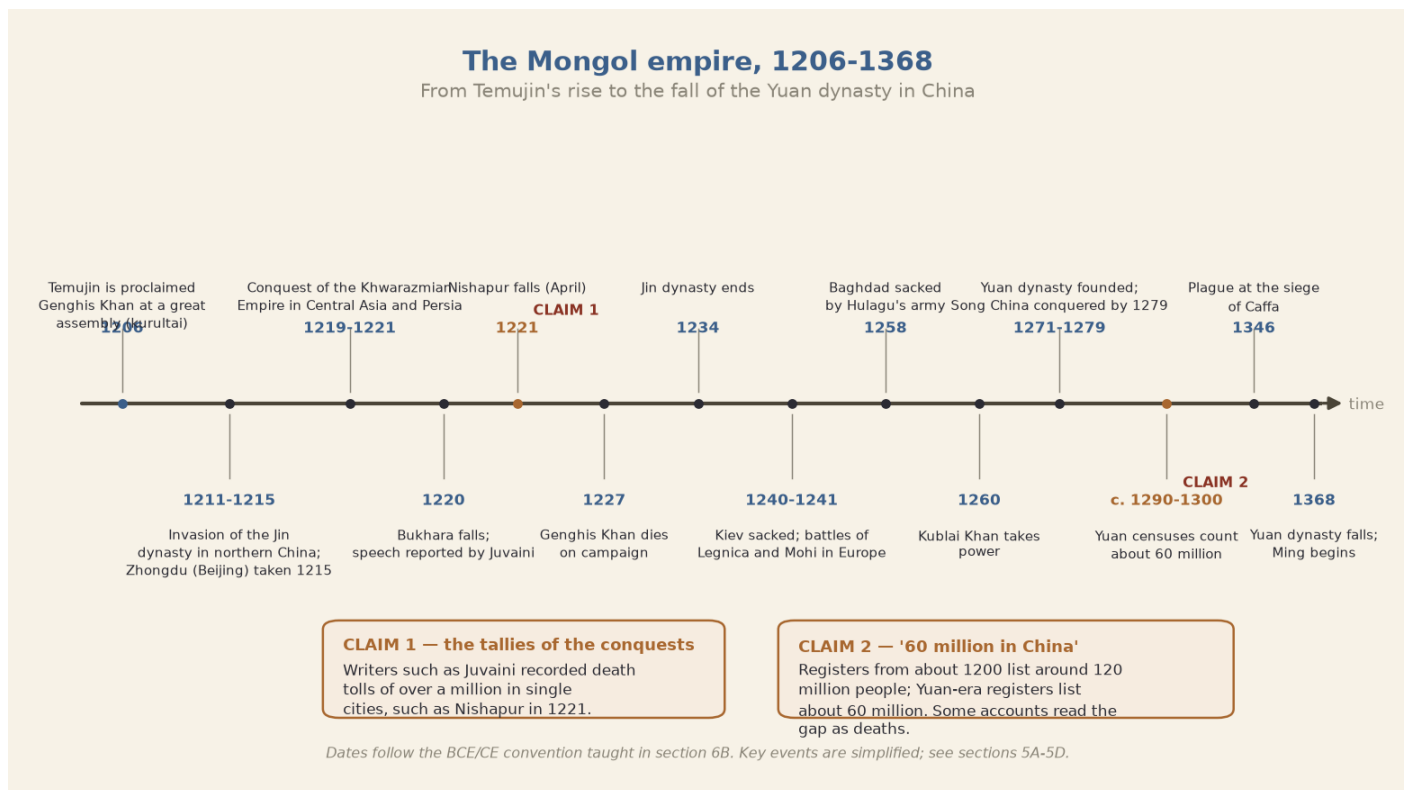
You have met this story in sections 5A–5D; here is the outline this section needs.

In **1206**, at a great assembly — a **kurultai** — by the Onon River, Temujin was proclaimed ruler of the steppe peoples and given the title **Genghis Khan** (5A). With an army organised in units of ten, hundred, thousand and ten thousand (5B), he and his successors won the largest land empire the world had yet seen: the Jin dynasty's lands in northern China (the capital Zhongdu fell in 1215), the Khwarazmian Empire in Central Asia and Persia (1219–1221, with the great cities Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv, Nishapur and Gurganj taken one by one), and the lands of Rus in the west (Kiev was sacked in 1240). Genghis Khan died on campaign in 1227. His sons and grandsons pushed on: a Mongol army sacked Baghdad in 1258, and **Kublai Khan** — studied in 5C and 5D — completed the conquest of China, founding the **Yuan dynasty** in 1271. The dynasty ruled China until 1368, while the empire's western parts went their own way.

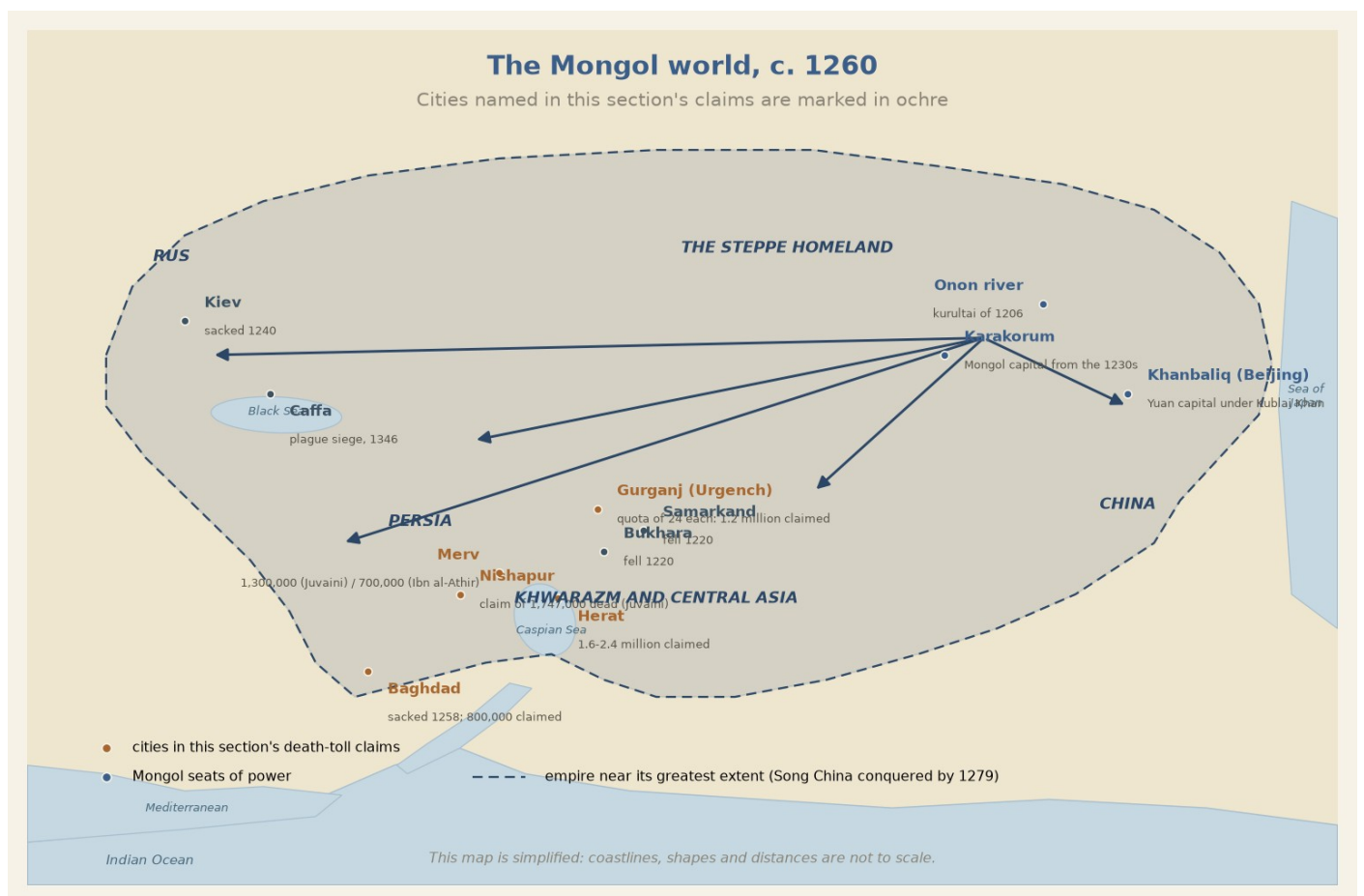
Across that world, two kinds of record survive, and they are the raw material of this section:

- **The writings** — histories written by men who lived under or near the conquest: Ibn al-Athir in Mosul, Juvaini in Mongol service in Persia, Mustawfi later still. They are the source of the death-toll claims.
- **The registers** — the lists governments kept of people and households for tax and service, above all in China, where governments had counted for centuries. They are the source of the “60 million” claim.

Two kinds of record, two famous claims. Both are on trial here.



Timeline of the Mongol empire from 1206 to 1368, from Temujin's proclamation as Genghis Khan through the conquests and the Yuan dynasty to its fall, with the two claims this section tests marked: the conquest tallies such as Nishapur in 1221, and the Yuan-era registers of about 1290-1300



Map of the Mongol world around 1260 showing the empire near its greatest extent, the steppe homeland, and the cities named in this section's claims — Nishapur, Merv, Herat, Gurganj and Baghdad marked as claim cities, and Karakorum and Khanbaliq marked as seats of power

Part 3: The claims on the table

Here are the tolls the medieval writers recorded for cities taken by Mongol armies, side by side. Read across each row: the city and date, the claimed toll, who recorded it, and how the number was said to have been made.

The tallies, side by side

Death tolls recorded by medieval writers for cities taken by Mongol armies

City and date	Claimed toll	Recorded by	How the number was made
Nishapur, April 1221	1,747,000	Juvaini (writing from c. 1252)	The count, he says, included 'even cats and dogs'; the site was sown with barley.
Merv, 1221	1,300,000 - or 700,000	Juvaini, and separately Ibn al-Athir	Juvaini: one clerk counting for 13 days. Ibn al-Athir gives a different total.
Gurganj (Urgench), 1221	1,200,000	Juvaini	50,000 Mongol soldiers, each given 24 people to kill. Modern historians judge the total cannot be true.
Ray (near Tehran), 1220	700,000	Najm al-Din Razi	Toll for the city and its surrounding district.
Baghdad, 1258	800,000	Hamdallah Mustawfi (writing later)	Toll given for the sack of the Abbasid capital.
Herat (later reckoning)	1.6-2.4 million	later medieval tallies	The largest figure in the whole set — for one city.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Two named writers survive for Merv — and they disagree (1,300,000 against 700,000). Disagreement between sources is not a nuisance; it is evidence. It is exactly the kind of disagreement this section asks you to work with.

Figures as given by the named writers; modern historians judge all of them exaggerated.

Table of the medieval death-toll claims for cities taken by Mongol armies: Nishapur 1,747,000 recorded by Juvaini; Merv 1,300,000 or 700,000 recorded by Juvaini and Ibn al-Athir; Gurganj 1,200,000; Ray 700,000; Baghdad 800,000; and Herat 1.6 to 2.4 million, each with how the number was made

Three things to notice before any testing begins.

First, the numbers are huge, and far too exact. 1,747,000 at Nishapur. A clerk counting at Merv for thirteen days. Fifty thousand soldiers at Gurganj, each given a share of twenty-four people to kill, which works out — so the story goes — to 1,200,000. Exact-looking numbers can feel like careful counting. As you will see, they can also be made to look that way.

Second, the writers disagree. For Merv, two named writers survive — Juvaini and Ibn al-Athir — and they give different totals (1,300,000 against 700,000). Disagreement between sources is not a nuisance. It is evidence. It tells you the numbers were not simply copied from one official list, and it is exactly the kind of disagreement this section asks you to work with.

Third, none of these writers was a Mongol enemy-hater writing fiction. Ibn al-Athir wrote in Mosul as the conquests were still happening, and called them the worst disaster he could imagine. Juvaini served the Mongol state and wrote its history. Mustawfi wrote in Persia generations later. Different positions, different distances from the events — and that is precisely why their claims must be compared and tested, not simply repeated.

Part 4: Test one — 1,747,000 at Nishapur

The most famous single claim is Juvaini's: that when Nishapur fell in April 1221, 1,747,000 people were killed. Before anyone says "true" or "false", historians break the claim down. Here are four lenses you can put any claim through — they are the source-checking method of section 6D, applied to this case.

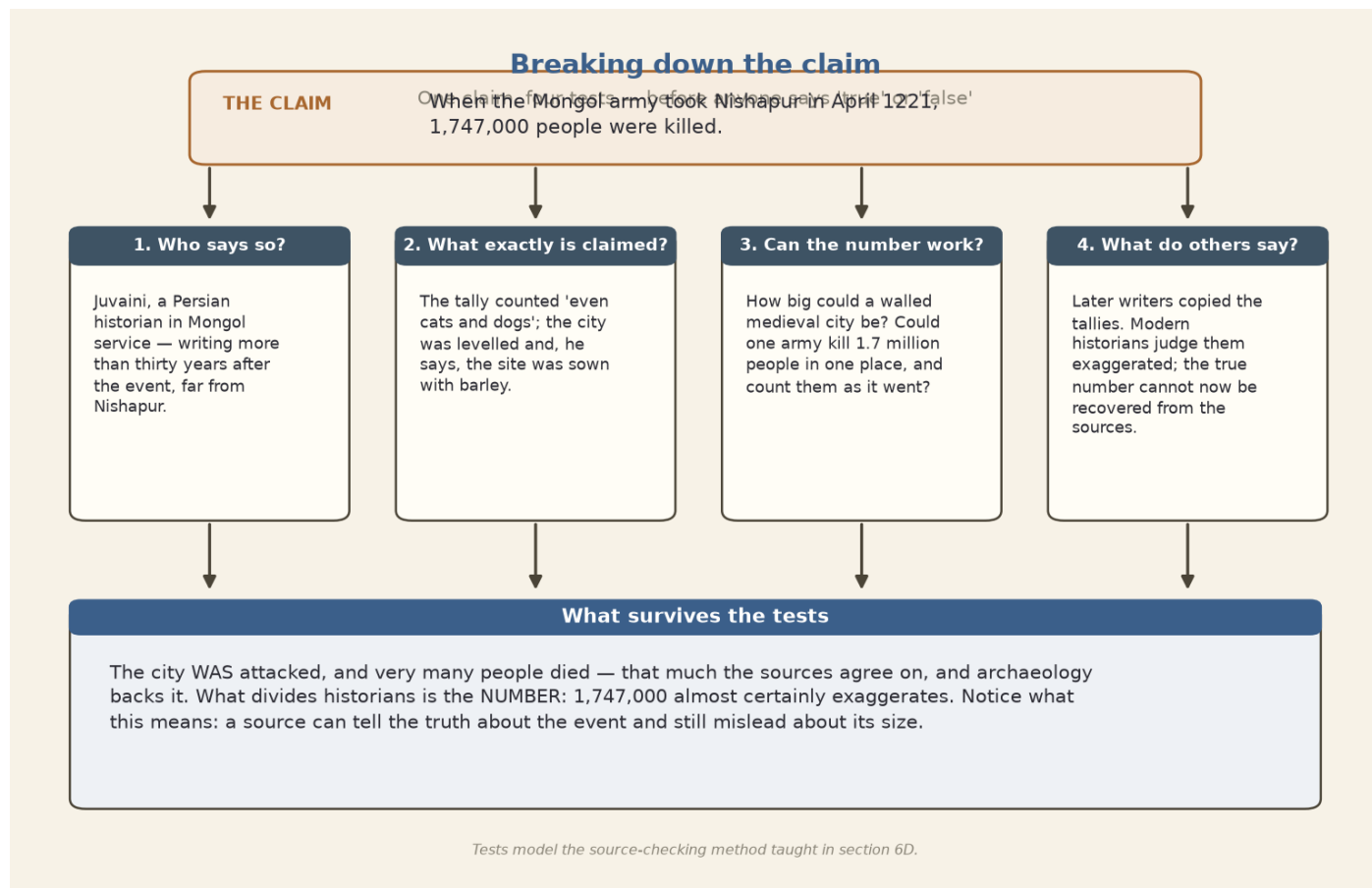


Diagram breaking down the Nishapur claim of 1,747,000 dead through four test lenses — who says so, what exactly is claimed, can the number work, and what do others say — before giving the verdict that the attack and mass death are agreed but the number almost certainly exaggerates

1. Who says so? Juvaini — a Persian historian working inside the Mongol empire, writing more than thirty years after Nishapur fell, far from the city. You will meet him in full in the close study below. For now: he was not there, and his numbers had to come from someone.

2. What exactly is claimed? The tally, he says, included “even the cats and dogs”; the city was levelled and its site ploughed and sown with barley, so nothing of it would remain. Notice that the claim is doing two jobs at once: counting the dead, and painting the total end of a city.

3. Can the number work? This is the cold arithmetic question. How big could a walled medieval city be? Could one army kill, and count as it went, 1.7 million people in one place? Section 5B gives you what you know about the size of Mongol armies; the numbers strain belief, and historians say so.

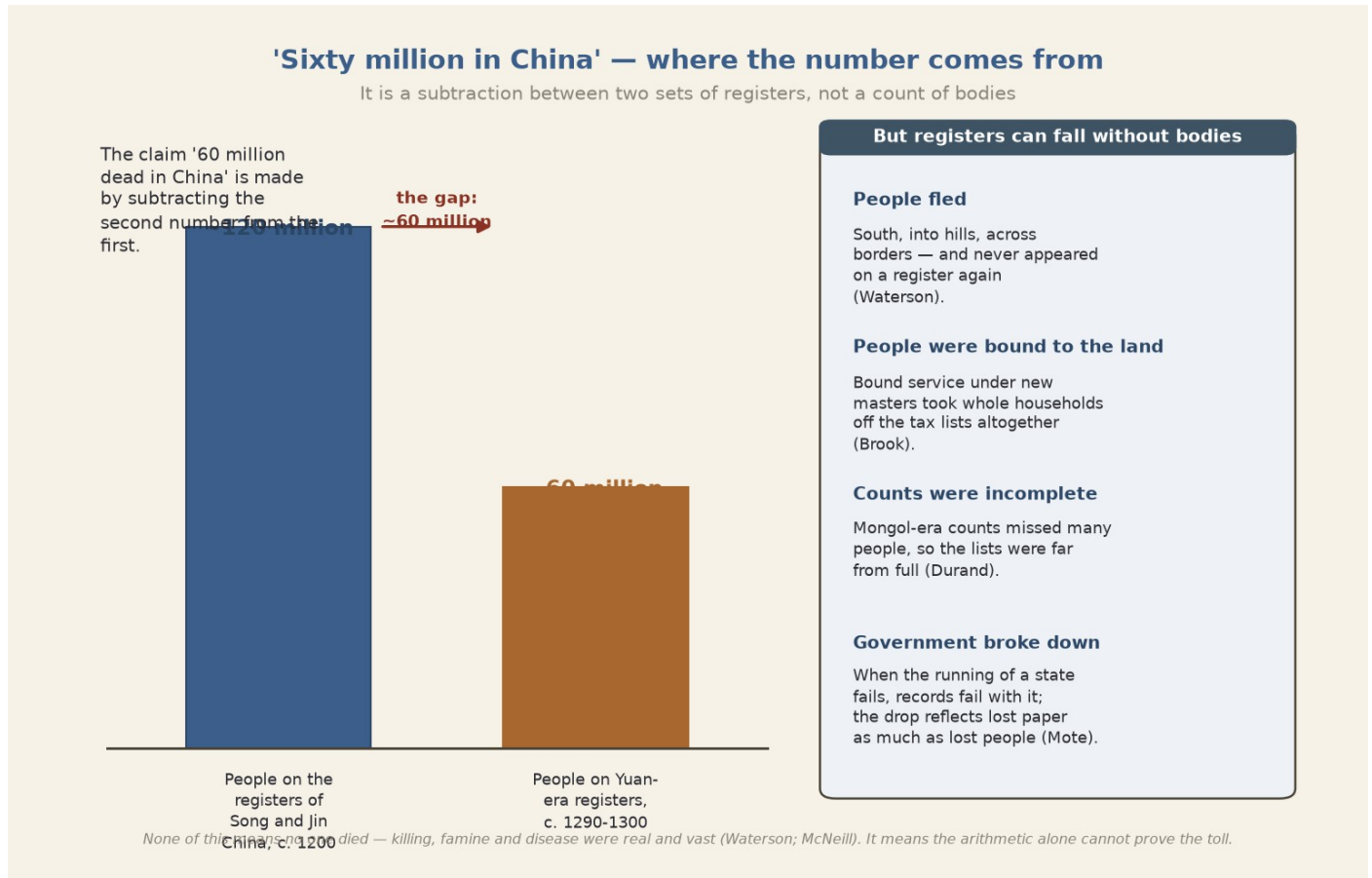
4. What do others say? Later writers copied the tallies, often without asking where they came from. Modern historians judge them exaggerated; the true number cannot now be recovered from the sources.

What survives the tests? **That Nishapur was attacked, taken and wrecked, and that very many people died** — the sources agree on that, and archaeology backs it. What divides historians is the **number**. And notice the lesson, because it matters more than any single toll: *a source can tell the truth about the event and still mislead about its size*. Testing the number is not an insult to the dead. It is how we refuse to let a shaky number stand in for their story.

Part 5: Test two — “sixty million in China”

The second famous claim works in another way. Nobody wrote down “60 million died in China”. The number is built by subtraction:

- The registers of Song and Jin China, around the year 1200 — before the conquest — list about **120 million** people.
- The registers kept under the Mongol **Yuan dynasty**, around 1290–1300, list about **60 million**.
- Some accounts read the gap — about 60 million — as deaths, and that is how “60 million died in China” enters books.



Bar chart showing the claim of sixty million dead in China built by subtracting the Yuan-era registers of about 60 million people from the Song and Jin registers of about 120 million, with four reasons given for why registers can fall without deaths: flight, bondage, incomplete counts, and government breaking down

The subtraction looks like arithmetic — clean, factual, hard to argue with. But registers are not bodies, and registers can fall for reasons that have nothing to do with death:

- **People fled.** South, into the hills, across borders — and never appeared on a register again. The historian James Waterson warns against blaming north China’s fall on killing alone: flight, disease and famine did their work too.
- **People were bound to the land.** Under new masters, whole households were tied to service and left the tax lists altogether (Timothy Brook).
- **Counts were incomplete.** Mongol-era counts missed many people; John D. Durand judged the surviving lists far from full.
- **Government broke down.** When the running of a state fails, records fail with it. Frederick Mote reads the fall in listed people as records breaking down, not as a full count of the dead.

None of this means no one died. Killing happened, and famine and disease followed the wars; the suffering was real and vast, and Waterson, McNeill and others are clear about that. The point is narrower and colder: **the arithmetic alone cannot prove the toll.** The gap between two registers measures everything that took people off the lists — flight, bondage, failed records — and death is only one of those things.

Part 6: Two readings, argued honestly

Put the two tests together and you have a genuine debate among historians. House rule: before judging, **steelman** each side — put each reading as strongly as its own supporters would.

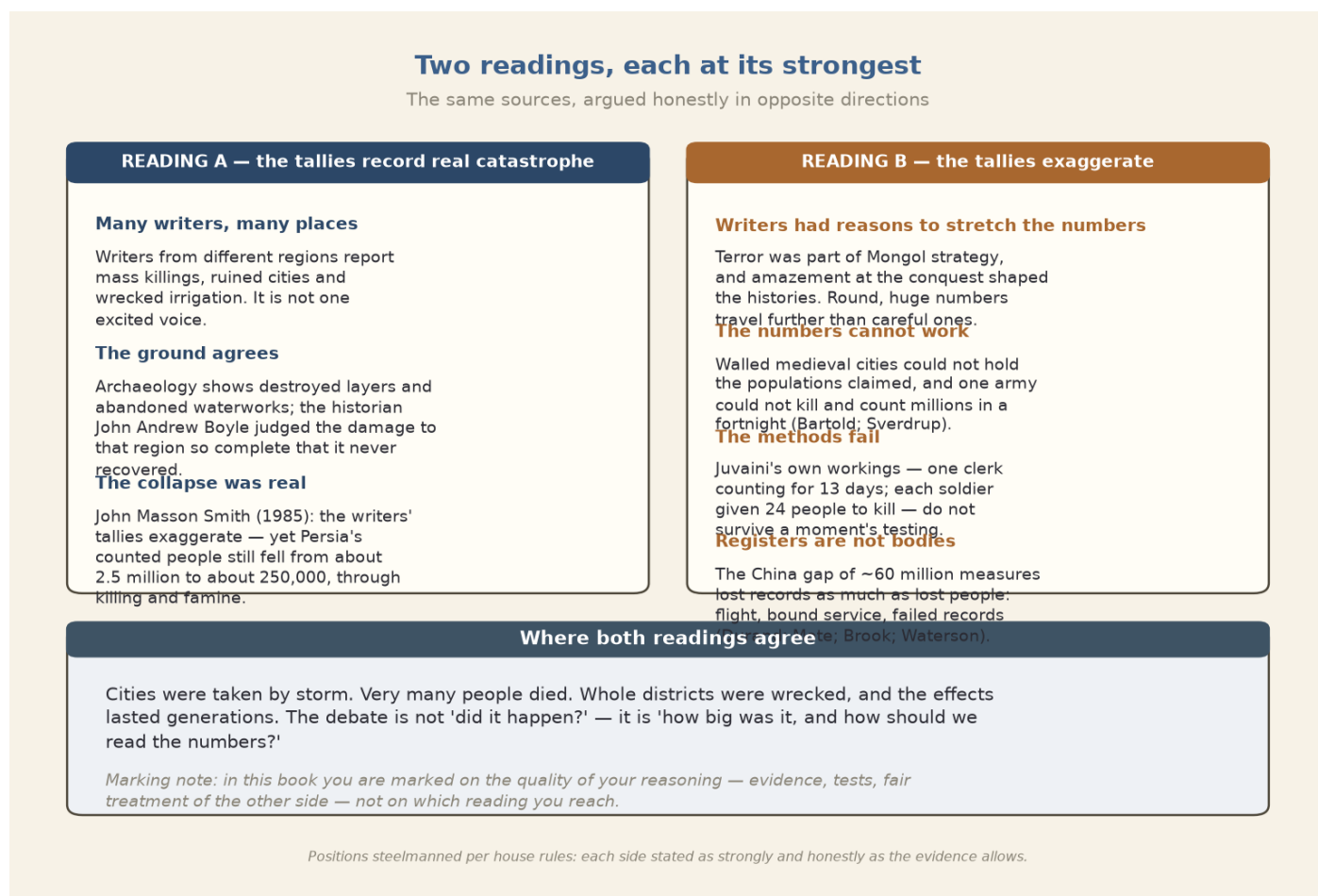


Diagram presenting the two steelmanned readings of the Mongol death tolls side by side — Reading A, that the tallies record real catastrophe, and Reading B, that the tallies exaggerate — each with its strongest evidence, and underneath the common ground both readings share

Reading A — the tallies record real catastrophe. Many writers from different regions report mass killing, ruined cities and wrecked water works; it is not one excited voice. Archaeology agrees: destroyed layers, abandoned water works. The historian John Andrew Boyle judged the damage to that region so complete that it never recovered. And John Masson Smith (1985) showed that even after allowing for exaggerated tallies, Persia's counted people still collapsed — from about 2.5 million to about 250,000 — through killing and famine. On this reading, doubting the exact numbers must not become doubting the disaster.

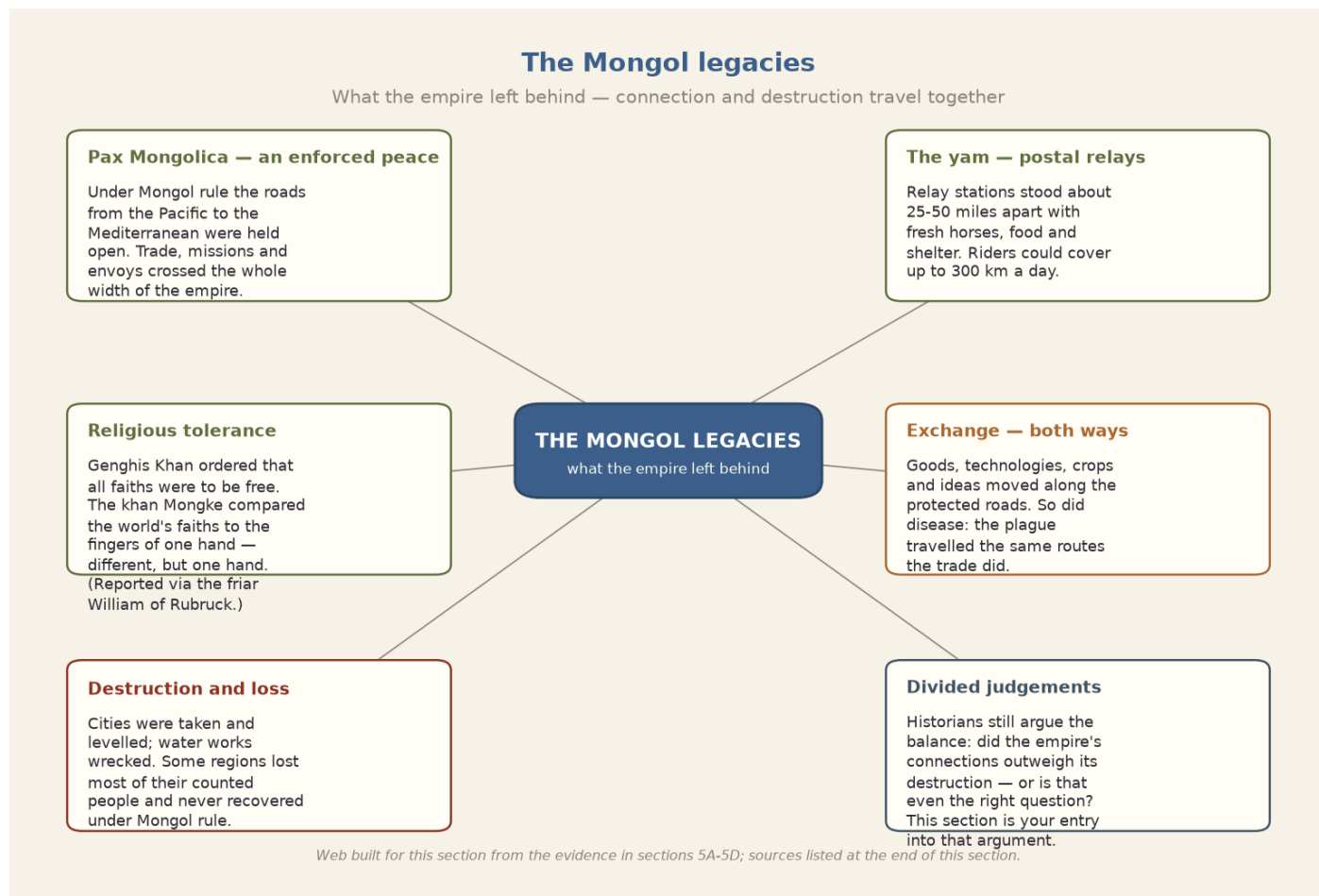
Reading B — the tallies exaggerate. Writers had reasons to stretch the numbers: terror was part of Mongol strategy, and amazement at the conquest shaped the histories; round, huge numbers travel further than careful ones. The numbers often cannot work: walled medieval cities could not hold the populations claimed, and one army could not kill and count millions in a fortnight (Bartold; Sverdrup). Juvaini's own workings — one clerk counting for thirteen days; each soldier given twenty-four to kill — do not survive a moment's testing. And the China gap measures lost records as much as lost people (Durand; Mote; Brook; Waterson). On this reading, repeating the tallies as fact is bad history, whatever the truth.

Where both readings agree is worth more than where they differ: cities were taken by storm; very many people died; whole districts were wrecked, and the effects lasted generations. The debate is not “did it happen?”. It is “how big was it, and how should we read the numbers?”

One rule of this book, stated plainly: **you are marked on the quality of your reasoning — evidence named, tests applied, the other side treated with respect — not on which reading you reach.** Two students, reasoning well from the same sources, may reach different conclusions and both do excellent work.

Part 7: Legacies — connection and destruction travel together

The CD asks about **legacies** as well as interpretations, and the Mongol empire's legacies are as argued-about as its death tolls. A legacy, remember, is what is left behind that still matters — and naming one is not praise. Here is the web.



Web diagram of the Mongol legacies with the Pax Mongolica peace, the yam postal relays, religious tolerance and two-way exchange in one colour, destruction and loss in another, and divided judgements underneath, showing that connection and destruction travel together

- **The Pax Mongolica** — a modern name, modelled on “Pax Romana”, for the period when Mongol rule held the roads open from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. Trade, envoys and people on the move crossed the whole width of the empire; section 5C studied the Silk Road traffic of Kublai Khan’s time, and Marco Polo made one of those journeys.
- **The yam** — the relay of riders and fresh horses you met in 5B, grown into a postal system across the empire: stations about 25–50 miles apart with horses, food and shelter, riders covering up to 300 km a day.
- **Religious tolerance** — Genghis Khan ordered that all faiths were to be free, a rule rare for its age. The friar William of Rubruck, who visited the Mongol court in the 1250s, reported the khan Mongke comparing the world’s faiths to the fingers of one hand: different, but one hand (you met Rubruck in 5A).
- **Exchange — both ways.** Goods, technologies, crops and ideas moved along the protected roads. So did disease: the plague travelled the same routes the trade did. That is the hard edge of connection, and it leads to our last case.
- **Destruction and loss.** Cities were taken and levelled; water works wrecked. Some regions lost most of their counted people and never recovered under Mongol rule. This is a legacy too — the longest kind of shadow.

Historians still divide over the balance: did the empire’s connections outweigh its destruction — or is that even the right question to ask of the dead? Part 6’s rule applies here unchanged: steelman, test, reason, judge. Task Q8 is yours.

A legacy story on trial: Caffa, 1346. One famous story joins the legacy and the interpretation work into a single case. As usually told: in 1346 an army of the Golden Horde — the Mongol state in the west — besieged Caffa, a trading

port on the Black Sea; plague broke out in the besieging camp; the army hurled the bodies of plague victims over the walls with catapults; the city caught the plague; ships fled Caffa carrying it across the Mediterranean — and so the Black Death entered Europe from the Mongol world.

A legacy story on trial: Caffa, 1346

The story of how the plague left the Mongol world — and what survives the tests

THE STORY AS IT IS USUALLY TOLD

- * In 1346 an army of the Golden Horde — the Mongol state in the west — besieged Caffa, a trading port on the Black Sea.
- * Plague broke out inside the besieging camp.
- * The story says the army hurled plague-ridden corpses over the walls with catapults.
- * The city caught the plague. Ships fled Caffa carrying it across the Mediterranean.
- * So the Black Death entered Europe from the Mongol world.

put on
trial

THE TRIAL — TESTING THE STORY

Who told it?

Gabriele de' Mussis, an Italian law-writer — but he was NOT at Caffa. He wrote it up from another place.

Does it fit other evidence?

No other source from the time confirms the corpse story, and the siege itself was lifted in 1347.

What probably happened instead?

Plague travelled as plague always travelled: on ships, with rats and fleas — grain shipments among them — along the trade routes the Mongols had opened.

THE JUDGEMENT

The plague almost certainly did move from the Mongol world toward Europe along Mongol-era trade routes — that legacy is real. But the famous catapult story does not survive its tests. A legacy can be genuine and its best-known story still be wrong.

Siege of Caffa, 1346-1347; account by Gabriele de' Mussis. Story and its testing as described in the text.

Diagram putting the Caffa story of 1346 on trial: the story as it is usually told on the left, the tests against it on the right — who told it, whether other evidence fits, what probably happened instead — and the judgement that the plague did move along Mongol-era routes but the famous catapult story fails its tests

The tests: **Who told it?** Gabriele de' Mussis, an Italian law-writer — but he was not at Caffa; he wrote the story up from another place. **Does it fit other evidence?** No other source from the time confirms the corpse story, and the siege itself was lifted in 1347. **What probably happened instead?** Plague travelled as plague always travelled: on ships, with rats and fleas — grain shipments among them — along the trade routes the Mongols had opened.

The judgement: the plague almost certainly did move from the Mongol world toward Europe along Mongol-era trade routes — **that legacy is real**. But the famous catapult story does not survive its tests. A legacy can be genuine and its best-known story still be wrong. That is the whole section in one case: test the claim, keep what the evidence can carry, and say plainly what it cannot.

Primary source close study: Juvaini's History of the World-Conqueror

Most of this section's tolls come from one man: **Ata-Malik Juvaini** (1226–1283), a Persian official and historian who worked inside the Mongol empire. He served the Mongol prince Hulagu and later governed Baghdad and the lands around it for the Mongols. His history is called the **Tarikh-i Jahangushay** — the *History of the World-Conqueror* — and it is one of the main written records of the Mongol conquests.

PRIMARY SOURCE CARD

Ata-Malik Juvaini

1226 - 5 March 1283

A Persian official and historian who worked inside the Mongol empire. He served the Mongol prince Hulagu, and later governed Baghdad, Lower Mesopotamia and Khuzistan for the Mongols. His history is called the *Tarikh-i Jahangushay* — 'History of the World-Conqueror'. It is one of the main written records of the Mongol conquests.

What he wrote

A history of the Mongol rise and conquests, including the fall of Nishapur in April 1221.

When he wrote

He began writing about 1252-1253, at the Mongol capital Karakorum — more than thirty years after Nishapur fell. The history closes around 1260.

Where his numbers come from

Likely from Mongol officials' own accounts, and from what was said at the Mongol court. He could not have counted the dead himself.

Why it matters

He is the source of the famous claim that 1,747,000 died at Nishapur — that does not make him a liar.

KEEP IN MIND

Juvaini served the rulers he describes. That does not make him a liar — it makes him a source to test, not simply to believe.

Card compiled for this section. English translation of the history: John Andrew Boyle, 1958.

Primary source card for Ata-Malik Juvaini: who he was, when he lived and wrote, where his numbers come from, and why it matters that he served the rulers he describes

Here is his account of Nishapur's fall — the claim this section puts on trial — in a fresh rendering made for this section from his Persian text; it is not a copy of any published translation.

“... and when the city was taken, the order came that none should be spared — not one person, not even the cats and dogs. The number of the dead was counted, and it came to 1,747,000. Then the ground of the city was ploughed up, and barley was sown over it, so that no trace of it should remain.”

— Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangushay*, the fall of Nishapur (April 1221), rendered from the Persian by the author for this section

Run your source questions over it:

- **Features and context:** a court history in Persian, begun about 1252–1253 — more than thirty years after Nishapur fell — by an official of the empire doing the conquering. It is a **primary source** in the sense that matters most: it comes from inside the world it describes, close enough to the events to speak to people who remembered them.
- **What it shows:** how the conquest was recorded by a subject of the empire — the scale of the destruction, the terror it carried, and the habits of counting and record that the Mongol state brought with it. No outside writer gives the conquest's inner record like this.
- **What it does not show:** the voices of the conquered, who appear mostly as numbers or as enemies. And Juvaini could not have counted the dead of Nishapur himself — his figures came from Mongol officials' accounts and court talk. A number in a book is still a claim, and a claim is what you test.
- **A note on position:** Juvaini served the rulers he describes. That does not make him a liar — he records the destruction his masters caused, in numbers that do them no credit. It makes him a source to test, not simply to believe.

Secondary source interpretation: the historians re-read the tallies

Primary sources are not the last word. Modern historians bring new questions to the same material — and new evidence the medieval writers never had: archaeology, population studies, and a hard look at how registers actually

work. The figure below sets out the named voices in this section's debate: the medieval writers first, then the historians who test them.

Who says what — the named voices in this section

Medieval writers first, then the modern historians who test them		
Writer / historian	When	Position in this debate
Ibn al-Athir	writing c. 1231, Mosul	Calls the Mongol conquest the worst catastrophe he could imagine; gives the LOWER Merv toll: 700,000.
Juvaini	writing c. 1252-1260, in Mongolia	Gives the HIGHEST tolls: 1,747,000 at Nishapur, 1,300,000 at Merv.
Hamdallah Mustawfi	writing c. 1330, Persia	Puts the sack of Baghdad (1258) at 800,000 dead.
John Masson Smith Jr.	1985	The writers exaggerated — yet Persia's counted people really did fall from about 2.5 million to about 250,000: mass killing and famine.
McEvedy and Jones	1978	Put the whole conquest toll at about 40 million (China's loss at about 35 million). Later historians judged their method weak in its use of the records.
John D. Durand	1967	Mongol-era counts missed many people, so the drop in listed numbers is likely stated too big.
Frederick Mote	1999	China's fall in listed people shows records breaking down, not a full count of the dead.
Timothy Brook	2010	People bound to the land under new masters left the registers altogether.
James Waterson	2013	Warns against blaming north China's drop on killing alone: flight south, disease and famine did their work too.
William McNeill and David Morgan	1986	Plague moving along the routes the empire opened was one of the main causes of the great fall in people.

Beige rows: medieval writers (primary sources). White rows: modern historians interpreting them. Years mark publication, not the events.

Table of the named voices in this section's debate: the medieval writers Ibn al-Athir, Juvaini and Hamdallah Mustawfi with their tolls, and the modern historians — John Masson Smith Jr., McEvedy and Jones, Durand, Mote, Brook, Waterson, and McNeill and Morgan — with what each argues about the tolls and the registers

Study one reading closely, as a model of a secondary-source interpretation. In 1985, the historian **John Masson Smith Jr.** re-read the record of the conquests in Persia. His claim has two halves, and both matter:

- **The tallies exaggerate.** Smith does not believe 1,747,000 at Nishapur or 1,200,000 at Gurganj any more than Reading B does. The writers stretched their numbers.
- **But the catastrophe was real.** Using the counts that can be checked, he showed that Persia's counted people still fell from about 2.5 million to about 250,000 — through killing, and through the famine that followed the destruction of farms and water works.

Notice the shape of the argument: **a claim, the evidence it stands on, a method for checking, and limits the historian admits.** That is what a secondary interpretation looks like when it is done honestly — and it is what your tasks Q7–Q9 ask you to build.

Notice too that the historians disagree with each other: McEvedy and Jones (1978), mapping population change, put the losses of the conquest very high, while Durand, Mote and Brook read the same Chinese registers as far less reliable. Disagreement between historians is not a bug in history. It is the argument working — the same disagreement-between-sources you met at Merv in Part 3, one level up. Section 6F takes this further.

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Using Figure 5e_timeline.png, put these six events in order from first to last and give the date of each: (a) Genghis Khan dies on campaign; (b) the Yuan dynasty falls; (c) Temujin is proclaimed Genghis Khan at a kurultai; (d) Baghdad is sacked by Hulagu's army; (e) Nishapur falls; (f) Kublai Khan names his dynasty the Great Yuan.

Q2. Using Figure 5e_claims_table.png: (a) Match each city — Nishapur, Merv, Gurganj, Ray, Baghdad — to its claimed toll and its writer. (b) Which city has TWO named writers surviving, and what totals do they give? (c) In one sentence, say why that disagreement is useful to a historian instead of a problem.

Q3. Using Figure 5e_juvaini_card.png: (a) When did Juvaini begin writing his history, and where? (b) Why could he not have counted the dead of Nishapur himself? (c) In one sentence, explain why a source that served the rulers it describes should still be read — but not simply believed.

Q4. The four lenses of Part 4 work on any claim. Take the Gurganj toll of 1,200,000 (from Figure 5e_claims_table.png) and write ONE sentence for each lens: (1) who says so; (2) what exactly is claimed; (3) can the number work — use the arithmetic in the claim itself; (4) what do modern historians say?

Q5. The “60 million in China” claim (Figure 5e_china_claims.png): (a) What two numbers are subtracted, and what do they each come from? (b) Give TWO reasons a register can fall without people dying, naming the historian attached to each reason in the figure. (c) Does any of this mean no one died in China under the conquest? Answer in one sentence from Part 5.

Q6. Steelman frame (Figure 5e_two_reads.png). Copy the frame and fill in: ONE piece of evidence for Reading A, ONE for Reading B, and ONE sentence stating what both readings agree on. Every point must carry a name or a number from this section.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Choose ONE claim from Figure 5e_claims_table.png that we did not test in full in this section (Ray, Baghdad or Herat). Write your own test of it: state the claim; say who recorded it and when; apply the four lenses of Part 4; and end with a judgement of your own — what can be said about this claim, and what cannot. You are marked on the testing, not on the conclusion you reach.

Q8. “The Mongol empire left more connection than destruction.” Steelman BOTH sides of this claim using Figure 5e_legacy_web.png and Parts 5–7 — at least two points each side — then write your own reasoned judgement of two or three sentences. A judgement in either direction, or a judgement that the question itself is wrongly framed, can be full marks if the reasoning is sound.

Q9. Write a museum panel of 5–8 sentences titled “The Mongol death tolls: what we can and cannot say”. Your panel must use at least TWO named medieval writers and at least ONE named modern historian from this section, and it must say plainly what the evidence can carry and what it cannot. Panels are marked on accuracy, fairness to both readings, and clear language.

Q10. The method of this section — claims on the table, lenses applied, readings steelmanned, common ground stated — works on any contested interpretation. Choose ONE other interpretation you have met in this book: the myths tested in section 4E (King Arthur, Pope Joan, the Black Death debates), or one of this CD's alternative paths — theories of the Khmer empire's decline, explanations of Japan's closure under Tokugawa rule, or the theories of Polynesian expansion. Outline your test in four lines: the claim; two sources you would want; one test you would apply; and what you would need before you reached a judgement.

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (c) 1206 → (e) 1221 → (a) 1227 → (d) 1258 → (f) 1271 → (b) 1368.

Q2. (a) Nishapur — 1,747,000 — Juvaini; Merv — 1,300,000 (Juvaini) or 700,000 (Ibn al-Athir); Gurganj — 1,200,000 — Juvaini; Ray — 700,000 — Najm al-Din Razi; Baghdad — 800,000 — Hamdallah Mustawfi. (b) Merv;

1,300,000 against 700,000. (c) Accept reasoned variants; look for: disagreement shows the totals were not copied from one official list, gives historians something to weigh against each other, and is exactly the kind of evidence the section's tests are built for.

Q3. (a) About 1252–1253, at the Mongol capital Karakorum. (b) He wrote more than thirty years after the event and far from Nishapur; his figures came from Mongol officials' accounts and court talk, not from any counting of his own. (c) Accept reasoned variants; look for the double point: he gives an inside record no outside writer has (and records destruction that does his masters no credit), yet his position gives him reasons to shape the story, so his loudest claims need testing against other evidence.

Q4. Model: (1) Juvaini, writing in Mongol service from about 1252. (2) 50,000 soldiers each given 24 people to kill — a tally built from a quota story, not a count of bodies. (3) $50,000 \times 24 = 1,200,000$, but no army of 50,000 could kill and count 1.2 million people in the time of one siege, so the arithmetic itself argues against the number. (4) Modern historians judge the total cannot be true. Accept reasoned variants on every lens.

Q5. (a) About 120 million on the Song and Jin registers of c. 1200, minus about 60 million on the Yuan-era registers of c. 1290–1300. (b) Any two of: people fled (Waterson); people bound to the land left the lists (Brook); counts were incomplete (Durand); government broke down and records failed (Mote). (c) No — killing, famine and disease were real and vast; the point is only that the subtraction alone cannot prove the toll.

Q6. Reading A evidence, any of: many writers from different regions report mass killing and ruin; archaeology shows destroyed layers and abandoned water works; Boyle's judgement that the region never recovered; Smith's checked counts for Persia falling from about 2.5 million to about 250,000. Reading B evidence, any of: writers had reasons to stretch the numbers (terror as strategy; round huge numbers travel); the numbers cannot work for walled medieval cities (Bartold; Sverdrup); Juvaini's own workings fail their tests; the China gap measures lost records as much as lost people (Durand; Mote; Brook; Waterson). Common ground: cities were taken by storm, very many people died, whole districts were wrecked and the effects lasted generations; the debate is about size and how to read the numbers, not about whether it happened.

Q7. Mark on: the claim stated correctly with its writer and date; the four lenses applied with real content (who recorded it and how far from the event; what the claim includes; whether the number can work; what other sources and modern historians say); and a judgement that separates what the evidence can carry (the city was taken, many died) from what it cannot (the exact toll). Any of Ray, Baghdad or Herat is acceptable; different judgements with sound reasoning meet the standard (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 5). For Herat, accept students who notice that no single named writer owns the largest figure of the set — that weakness is itself a finding.

Q8. Mark on: two steelmanned points each side (connection side: Pax Mongolica and the Silk Road traffic studied in 5C; the yam relay; religious tolerance; exchange of goods and ideas. Destruction side: cities levelled and water works wrecked; regions that lost most of their counted people and never recovered; the plague travelling the same routes as trade), and a judgement tied to the evidence. All three positions — connections outweigh, destruction outweighs, or the weighing itself is the wrong question — can be full marks if reasoned (Rule 5; Rule 4 applied symmetrically).

Q9. Mark on: accuracy of the named writers and historians (Juvaini, Ibn al-Athir, Mustawfi at minimum among the medieval; Smith, Durand, Mote, Brook, Waterson, McEvedy and Jones, McNeill among the modern); a panel that states both what can be said (cities were taken, very many died, some regions collapsed) and what cannot (no exact toll can now be recovered; the tallies exaggerate; the registers undercount the living); fairness to both readings; and clear language. Penalise repetition of a toll as fact without its writer.

Q10. Accept any interpretation from the named range with the four lines completed: a claim (e.g. "Arthur was a real king who won a great battle"; "Angkor fell because its water system broke down"); two sources they would want (for Arthur: early poems and later chronicles, as studied in 4E; for Angkor: inscriptions and the site's water features, as named in the E04 path); one test (does the earliest source know the story? can the site show the claimed failure?); and a stated standard of evidence before judging. The point is transfer: the same frame applies to any contested interpretation — of an event, a person, a group or an institution — and to its legacies.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

Primary sources (the medieval writers whose claims are tested):

- **Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Tarikh-i Jahangushay (History of the World-Conqueror)*** — Persian history begun c. 1252–1253 at the Mongol capital Karakorum and left unfinished around 1260, by a Persian official in Mongol service (1226–5 March 1283) who later governed Baghdad, Lower Mesopotamia and Khuzistan for the Mongols. Source of the Nishapur toll of 1,747,000 (counting “even the cats and dogs”, the site ploughed and sown with barley), the Merv toll of 1,300,000, and the Gurganj quota story (50,000 soldiers × 24). Standard English translation: John Andrew Boyle, *The History of the World-Conqueror* (Manchester University Press, 1958). The Nishapur passage above is rendered in the author’s own words from Juvaini’s Persian, not copied from Boyle’s translation. Subject of Figures 5e_juvaini_card.png, 5e_claims_table.png, 5e_nishapur_extract.png.
- **Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-tarikh (The Complete History)*** — universal history in Arabic written at Mosul to c. 1231 (author 1160–1233), while the conquests were still happening; calls the Mongol invasion the worst disaster he could imagine and gives the lower Merv toll of 700,000. Cited in Figures 5e_claims_table.png, 5e_historians.png.
- **Hamdallah Mustawfi, *Tarikh-i Guzida (The Selected History)*** — Persian history completed c. 1330; puts the sack of Baghdad (1258) at 800,000 dead. Cited in Figures 5e_claims_table.png, 5e_historians.png.
- **Najm al-Din Razi (Daya), *Mirsad al-'Ibad*** — Persian work completed c. 1256; gives the Ray toll of 700,000 for the city and its district. Cited in Figure 5e_claims_table.png.
- **Gabriele de' Mussis, account of the siege of Caffa (1346–1347)** — written c. 1348 in Piacenza by a law-writer who was not present at Caffa; the only source for the catapulted-corpses story, which this section tests and finds unsupported. Discussed in Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (1969), and John Norris, “Black Death Transmission from China to Europe”, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 51 (1977). Subject of Figure 5e_caffa.png.
- **William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*** — report of his journey to the Mongol court (1253–1255), written c. 1255; the source for the khan Mongke’s saying comparing the world’s faiths to the fingers of one hand. Studied in 5A; cited in Figure 5e_legacy_web.png.

Secondary sources (the modern historians’ interpretations):

- **John Masson Smith Jr., “The Mongols and the Eastern Mediterranean”,** in Kenneth Setton (ed.), *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 5 (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) — the model secondary interpretation studied in the close reading above: the tallies exaggerate, yet Persia’s counted people still fell from about 2.5 million to about 250,000 through killing and famine.
- **Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History*** (Facts on File, 1978) — population maps showing a very large fall in China’s listed people between 1200 and 1300; later historians judged the method behind the estimates weak against the registers.
- **John D. Durand, “The Population Statistics of China, A.D. 1–1953”,** *Population Studies* 20 (1967) — Mongol-era counts missed many people; the surviving lists are far from full.
- **Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800*** (Harvard University Press, 1999) — the fall in China’s listed people reflects records breaking down, not a full count of the dead.
- **Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*** (Harvard University Press, 2010) — people bound to the land under new masters left the registers altogether.
- **James Waterson, *Defending Heaven: China’s Mongol Frontier*** (Frontline Books, 2013) — warns against blaming north China’s fall on killing alone: flight south, disease and famine did their work too.
- **William H. McNeill, *Plague and Peoples*** (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976) — the plague moved along the routes the Mongol empire opened; disease was one of the conquest’s heaviest costs. Cited alongside David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Blackwell, 1986).
- **Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*** (Pearson Longman, 2005), and **Carl Sverdrup, *The Mongol Conquests*** (Reaktion, 2017) — cited in Reading B for the sceptical case on the tolls and on what the armies’ size allows. **Vasily Bartold (Barthold), *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*** (1928) — the early sceptic on the city tolls. **John Andrew Boyle** — translator of Juvaini (above), cited in Reading A for the judgement that the damaged regions never recovered.

Register figures. “About 120 million” for Song and Jin China c. 1200 and “about 60 million” for the Yuan-era registers c. 1290–1300 are the standard rounded figures of the scholarship just listed (Durand; Mote; Brook); the “60 million died in China” claim that this section tests is the subtraction between them, as named in the CD’s own elaboration.

Conventions. All dates follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. No First Nations content appears in this section (none exists in this CD or its elaborations). The human cost of the Mongol conquests is the subject of study here — that is the CD’s own task — and is handled honestly, without detail of the killing, per CONTENT_POLICY.md: the dead are taken seriously by testing the claims made about them, never by repeating the largest number available.