PERIOD 3: REGIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL INTERACTIONS, 600 – 1450

The Mongols

# Nomadic Empires

1. Introduction
   1. Between 1000 and 1400, nomadic peoples became more prominent than ever before in Eurasian affairs. Turkish peoples migrated to Persia, Anatolia, and India, where they overcame existing authorities and established new states. The Mongols became the most powerful people of central Asia and settled in China, Persia, Russia, and Eastern Europe, building the largest empire that the world had ever seen.
   2. Mongol states collapsed during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while Turkish peoples continued to embark on new campaigns of expansion that eventually brought most of India, central Asia, all of Anatolia, and a good portion of eastern Europe under their domination.
2. Turkish Migrations and Imperial Expansion
   1. Economy and Society of Nomadic Pastoralism
      1. *Nomadic Pastoralists & Animals –* The nomadic peoples of Asia were pushed into pastoralism by their environment, which would not support farming but did provide vegetation for animals to eat. The nomads kept horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and camels, driving them through migratory cycles in different seasons. They lived in

tents called yurts and even developed an alcoholic drink from fermented mare’s milk called kumiss.

* + 1. *Nomadic and Settled Peoples* – Nomads sought to trade with settled peoples for tools and clothes. They participated in long-distance trade networks because of their mobility, and organized caravans across central Asia that linked settled societies from China to the Mediterranean.
    2. *Nomadic Society* – Nobles and commoners existed, whereby the former were charismatic leaders who made up a very fluid class. Leaders passed noble status on to their heirs, but the heirs could lose their status if they did not continue to provide appropriate leadership for their clans and tribes. Nobles could return to the status of commoners within a few generations. Functioning as leaders and diplomats, nobles could negotiate with allies, other clans, and tribes to gain support.
    3. *Gender Relations* – Nomadic women were given more privileges than their counterparts in other contemporaneous civilizations. While responsible for tending to animals, nomadic women were horse riders and skilled archers.
    4. *Nomadic Religion* – Earliest turkish peoples had shamans who possessed supernatural powers, such as communicating with the gods and nature spirits, invoking divine aid, and informing their companions of their god’s will. By the 6th century, many turks had converted to Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, or Manichaeism as they interacted with other Eurasian peoples.
    5. *Turkish Conversion to Islam* – In the tenth century, the Saljuq Turks turned to Islam and migrated to Iran in hopes of improving their fortunes through alliance with Abbasid authorities and service to the caliphate. Most Turkish clans on the steppes of central Asia also adopted Islam, and carried the new religion with them when they expanded their political and military influence.
    6. *Military Organization* – nomadic leaders known as *khans* took control over vast confederations of nomadic peoples. They were skilled equestrians and archers, whse mobility and organization allowed them to conquer in ways unimaginable prior.
  1. Turkish Empires in Persia, Anatolia, and India
     1. *Seljuk Turks and the Abbasids* – My the mid- to late tenth century, Seljuk Turks served in Abbasid armies and lived within the Abbasid realm. By the mid-eleventh century, the Seljuks overshadowed the Abbasid caliphs, with the caliph recognizing the Seljuk leader Tughril Beg as *sultan*. He tightened his hold on the Abbasid capital at Baghdad, then he and his successors extended Turkish rule to Syria, Palestine, and other parts of the realm. From here on, the caliphs served as figureheads while the sultans had the actual power.
     2. *Seljuk Turks and the Byzantines* – In the eleventh s century, Seljuk forces defeated a Byzantine army at Manzikert in eastern Anatolia and took the Byzantine emperor captive (1071). The Seljuks entered Anatolia, winning over the peasants, who supported them as liberators from their Byzantine overlords.

1. Mongol Empires
   1. *Chinggis Kahn and the Mongol Empire* – Temüjin was born 1167 into noble family, but his powerful noble father was poisoned by so-called allies. During the late twelfth century, Temüjin made an alliance with an important clan leader, and gradually strengthened his position by forging useful alliances and brought all Mongol tribes into a single confederation. He was soon proclaimed Chinggis Khan or Genghis Khan (universal leader).
   2. *Mongol Political Organization* – Chinggis Khan broke up tribal armies and forced men into new military units, choosing officers on merit rather than family.
   3. *Mongol Conquest of Northern China* – The Mongols soon dominated northern China, establishing himself as ruler where since 1127 C.E. the nomadic Jurchen people had ruled. By 1215, the Mongols had captured the Jurchen capital city, while the Song dynasty still maintained control over southern China.
   4. *Mongol Conquest of Persia* – Chinggis led a force to Afghanistan and Persia, seeking revenge for his attempted murder by the Khwarazm shah. They shattered his army and seized control of the realm.
2. Mongol Empires after Chinggis Khan
   1. *Kublai Khan* – Under Kublai Khan, Buddhism was promoted while Daoism, Islam, and Christianity was supported. Marco Polo praised him for his generosity. He was able to extend rule over Southern China.
   2. *Mongols in Southern China* – By relentlessly attacking the Song Dynasty, the capital Hangzhou fell to Mongol forces in 1276 and within three years, Khubilai had eliminated resistance throughout China. In 1279, he established himself emperor of the Yuan dynasty, which ruled China until 1368. Khubilai also ruled Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, although it failed to conquer Japan because of tsunamis and typhoons.
   3. *The Golden Horde* – The cousins and brothers of Khubilai overran Russia between 1237 and 1241, maintaining large armies to the north of Russia which they regarded as prized lands for their animals. Russia itself was not occupied as it was seen as an unattractive land of forests, but the Mongols had Russian cities pay them tribute. Until the late 18th century, Mongol khans continued to rule the Crimea.
   4. *The Il Khanate of Persia* – In 1258, the Abbasid capital of Baghdad was conquered after a brief siege, and Khubilai’s brother Hülegü established himself as ruler. From there, the Mongols crushed other Middle Eastern regimes, but had no experience administering complex societies with complex government organizations. They never became comfortable with this role, and lost their conquests within a century.
3. Decline of the Mongols in Persia and China
   1. *Collapse of the Ilkhanate –* Excessive spending in Persia strained the treasury, and overexploitation of the peasantry led to reduced revenues. Government in Persia devolved to local levels until late in the fourteenth century when Turkish peoples reintroduced effective central government. The Yuan Dynasty declined in China because the Mongols did not maintain enough reserves of the bullion that backed the paper notes introduced by the Song Dynasty.
   2. *Plague* – The Mongols played an important role in spreading the Bubonic plague throughout Eurasia. Killing almost half of the populations it encountered, the plague weakened China and the Mongol regime.
4. After the Mongols
   1. Tamerlane the Whirlwind
      1. *Tamerlane’s Conquests*
      2. *Tamerlane’s Heirs*
   2. The Foundation of the Ottoman Empire
      1. *Osman, the Ottomans, and Conquering Constantinople –* In 1453, Mehmet II finally succeeded in the long lists of attempts to take Constantinople -- the capital of the now crumbling Byzantine Empire. Ottoman cannons finally blasted holes in the great defensive walls of the city , conquered it, and renamed it Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire enjoyed a golden age under Suleyman (r. 1520-1566), a brilliant general who conquered many new lands, pushing into the Middle East and Kurdistan and Georgia in the Caucasus Mountain region.