

## **Perspectives on the Mongols**

How did the Mongols understand themselves and the enormous empire they had created? The following two documents derive from Mongol sources and require reflection on the relative usefulness of sources that come from the Mongols themselves.

**Directions:** Read, highlight, and annotate in preparation for a graded discussion.

### **Document A ~ Mongol History from a Mongol Source**

*The major literary work to emerge from the Mongols themselves, widely known as *The Secret History of the Mongols*, was written a decade or two after the death in 1227 of Chinggis Khan. The unknown author of this work was clearly a contemporary of the Great Khan and likely a member of the royal household. The first selection discusses the Mongol practice of *anda*, a very close relationship between two unrelated men. The *anda* relationship of Temujin, the future Chinggis Khan, and his friend Jamugha was important in Temujin's rise to power, although they later broke with one another. The second selection from the *Secret History* describes the process by which Temujin was elevated to the rank of Chinggis Khan, the ruler of the united Mongol nation, while the third recounts the reflections of Ogodei, Chinggis Khan's son and successor, probably toward the end of his reign, which lasted from 1229 to 1241.*

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#### ***The Secret History of the Mongols, ca. 1240***

##### **Anda: Temujin and Jamugha**

Temujin and Jamugha pitched their tents in the Khorkonagh Valley. With their people united in one great camp, the two leaders decided they should renew their friendship, their pledge of *anda*. They remembered when they'd first made that pledge and said, "We should love one another again."

The first time they'd met Temujin was eleven years old....So Temujin and Jamugha said to each other. "We've heard the elders say, 'When two men become *anda* their lives become one, one will never desert the other and will always defend him.' This is the way we'll act from now on. We'll renew our old pledge and love each other forever."

Temujin took the golden belt he'd received in the spoils from Toghtoga's defeat and placed it around Anda Jamugha's waist. Then he led out the Merkid chief's warhorse, a light yellow mare with black mane and tail, and gave it to Anda Jamugha to ride. Jamugha took the golden belt he received in the spoils from Dayir Usun's defeat and placed it around the waist of Anda Temujin. Then he led out the whitish-tan warhorse of Dayir Usun and had Anda Temujin ride on it.

Before the cliffs of Khuldaghar in the Khorkonagh Valley, beneath the Great Branching Tree of the Mongol, they pledged their friendship and promised to love one another. They held a feast on the spot and there was great celebration. Temujin and Jamugha spent that night alone, share one blanket to cover them both. Temujin and Jamugha loved each other for one year, and when half of the second year had passed they agreed it was to move camp....

## **Temujin Becomes Chinggis Khan**

Then they moved the whole camp to the shores of Blue Lake in the Gurelgu Mountains. Altan, Khuchar, and Sacha Beki conferred with each other there, and then said to Temujin: "We want you to be khan. Temujin, if you'll be our khan we'll search through the spoils for beautiful women and virgins, for the great palace tents...for the finest geldings and mares. We'll gather all these bring them to you. When we go off to hunt for wild game, we'll go out first to drive them together for you to kill. We'll drive the wild animals of the steppe together so that their bellies are touching. We'll drive the wild game of the mountains together so that they stand leg to leg. If we disobey your command during battle, take away our possessions, our children, our wives. Leave us behind in the dust, cutting off our heads where we stand and letting them fall to the ground. If we disobey your counsel in peacetime, take away our tents and goods, our wives, and our children. Leave us behind when you move, abandoned in the desert without a protector." Having given their word, having taken his oath, they proclaimed Temujin khan of the Mongols and gave him the name Chinggis Khan....

## **Reflections of Ogodei**

Then Ogodei Khan spoke these words: "Since my father the Khan passed away and I came to sit on his great throne, what have I done? I went to war against the people of Cathay (China) and I destroyed them. For my second accomplishment I established a network of post stations so that my words are carried across the land with great speed. Another of my accomplishments has been to have my commanders dig wells in the desert so that there would be pasture and water for the people there. Lastly I placed spies and agents among all the people of the cities. In all directions I've brought peace to the Nation and the people....

"Since the time of my father the Khan, I added these four accomplishments to all that he did. But also since my father has passed away and I came to sit on his great throne with the burden of all the numerous people on my shoulders, I allowed myself to be conquered by wine. This was one of my mistakes. Another of my mistakes was to listen to a woman with no principles and because of her take away the daughters who belonged to my Uncle Odchigin. Even though I'm the Khan, the Lord of the Nation, I have no right to go against established principle, so this was a mistake.

"Another mistake was to secretly harm Dokhorkhu. If you ask, "Why was this wrong?" I would say that to secretly harm Dokhorkhu, a man who had served his proper lord, my father the Khan, performing heroic deeds in his service, was a mistake. Now that I've done this, who'll perform heroic deeds in my service? Then my last mistake was to desire too much, to say to myself, 'I'm afraid that all the wild game born under Heaven will run off toward the land of my brothers.' So I ordered earthen walls to be built to keep the wild game from running away, but even as these walls were being built I heard my brothers speaking badly of me. I admit that I was wrong to do this. Since the time of my father the Khan I've added four accomplishments to all that he'd done and I've done four things which I admit were wrong.

***Source: Paul Kahn, The Secret History of the Mongols: The Origins of Chinggis Khan (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984). 44-45, 48-49, 192-193.***

## Document B ~ Chinggis Khan and Changchun

The following source begins with a remarkable letter that Chinggis Khan sent to the seventy-two-year-old Chinese Daoist master Changchun in 1219, requesting a personal meeting with the teacher.

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### Chinggis Khan, *Letter to Changchun, 1219*

Heaven has abandoned China owing to its haughtiness and extravagant luxury. But I, living in the northern wilderness, have not inordinate passions. I hate luxury and exercise moderation. I have only one coat and one food. I eat the same food am dressed in the same tatters as my humble herdsmen. I consider the people my children, and take an interest in talented men as if they were my brothers....At military exercises I am always in the front, and in time of battle am never behind. In the space of seven ears I have succeeded in accomplishing a great work, and uniting the whole world into one empire. I have not myself distinguished qualities. But the government of the [Chinese] is inconstant, and therefore Heaven assists me to obtain the throne....All together have acknowledged my supremacy. It seems to me that since the remote time...such an empire has not been seen....Since the time I came to the throne I have always taken to heart the ruling of my people; but I could not find worthy men to occupy [high offices]....With respect to these circumstances I inquired, and heard that thou, master, hast penetrated the truth....For a long time through has lived in the caverns of the rocks, and hast retired from the world; but to thee the people, who have acquired sanctity repair, like clouds on the paths of the immortals, in innumerable multitudes....But what shall I do? We are separated by mountains and plains of great extent, and I cannot meet thee. I can only descend from the throne and stand by the side. I have fasted and washed. I have ordered adjutant...to prepare an escort and a cart for thee. Do not be afraid of the thousand li (a great distance). I implore thee to move they sainted steps. Do not think of the extent of the sandy desert. Commiserate the people in the present situation of affairs, or have pity on me, and communicate to me the means of preserving life. I shall serve thee myself. I hope that at the least thou wilt leave me a trifle of they wisdom. Say only one word to me and I shall be happy.

*[After a long journey, Changchun arrived at the camp of Chinggis Khan, located in what is now Afghanistan. One of Changchun's disciples recorded what happened in their initial meeting.]*

[T]he master presented himself to the Emperor, who greeted him and said: "You were invited by the other courts (the Kin and Sung), but you refused. Now you have come to see me, having traversed a road of ten thousand li. I am much gratified." The master answered: "The wild man of the mountains came to see the emperor by order of your majesty; it was the will of Heaven." Chingiz invited him to sit down, and ordered a meal to be set before him. After this he asked: "Sainted man, you have come from a great distance. Have you a medicine of immortality?" The master replied: "There are means for preserving life, but no medicines for immortality." Chingiz lauded hum for his sincerity and candour. By imperial order two tents were pitched for the master east of the emperor's tents. The emperor gave him the title *shen sien* (the immortal).

Source: E. Bretschneider, *Medieaval Researches from Easter Asiatic Sources, vol. 1* (London, 1875), 37-39, 86.

## **Perspectives on the Mongols ~ Discussion Questions**

### **Document A ~ Mongol History from a Mongol Source**

1. How would you describe the anda relationship?
2. What does the *Secret History* suggest about the nature of political authority and political relationships among the Mongols?
3. What did Ogodei regard as his greatest achievements and his most notable mistakes?
4. What evidence do these selections from the *Secret History* provide that the author was an insider?

### **Document B ~ Chinggis Khan and Changchun**

5. Why did Chinggis Khan seek a meeting with Changchun? Do you think he was satisfied with the outcome of the meeting?
6. How does Chinggis Khan define his life's work? What is his image of himself?
7. How would you describe the tone in Chinggis Khan's letter to Changchun? What does the letter suggest about Mongol attitudes toward the belief systems of conquered peoples?

### **Corroboration (Both Documents)**

8. How do both documents A and B help explain the success of the Mongols' empire-building efforts?
9. What core Mongol values do these documents suggest?