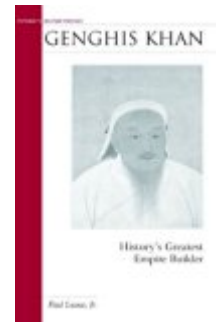


Paul Lococo. *Genghis Khan: History's Greatest Empire Builder.* Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008. ix + 91 pp. + 4 pp. of plates \$13.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-57488-746-4.



Reviewed by Timothy May

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Commissioned by Brian G.H. Ditcham

Genghis Khan, or more accurately Chinggis Khan, is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating people in military history. Thus it is not surprising that Potomac Books has included him in their Military Profile series along with General Patton and Alexander the Great. As with all of the books in the series, the volume is not an in-depth study presenting new revelations, but rather a concise introduction to a key figure in military history accompanied by some analysis of the topic's activities.

Paul Lococo Jr. adeptly summarizes the life and career of Chinggis Khan, an impressive feat for the brevity of the book. The book is divided into seven chapters. The first is a standard chapter on the geographical, political, and social state of Mongolia in the medieval period. This is followed by a chapter on the early years of Chinggis Khan and a chapter on the wars that unified Mongolia under Chinggis Khan. Chapter 4 provides a lucid discussion of the military revolution of Chinggis Khan. Chapters 5 through 7 focus on Chinggis

Khan's military conquests outside of Mongolia. One chapter is devoted to north China, another to Central Asia, and yet another deals with his death during the campaign to suppress a revolt in the state of Xixia. There is also a bibliographic note rather than a general bibliography. The maps are useful, but have the oddity for Chinese locations of using both Wade-Giles and Pinyin transliteration systems; additionally, the kingdom of Koryo is identified as Goryo.

A major issue is the author's misunderstanding of tribal structure and identity in medieval Mongolia. Several instances of this appear. In the first, although Lococo recognizes the Tatars as a separate tribe, he states "it was common for the tribes, including the Mongols, to refer to themselves and their language as 'Tatar' not Mongol" (p. 3). This is a misunderstanding of his reading of Leo de Hartog's *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World* (1989). Hartog, in speculating why the Mongols are often referred to as Tatars during the Mongol conquests, gives several possibilities;

however, he states that often the Chinese sources refer to all of the nomadic tribes as Tatars. This is a far cry from the other steppe tribes calling *themselves* Tatars. Indeed, as the Mongols and Tatars often battled for dominance in twelfth-century eastern Mongolia, it remains very unlikely that the Mongols called themselves Tatars. Furthermore, from the Mongolian sources, as well as from Persian and Chinese sources that draw upon steppe nomad informants, it is apparent that the nomads were quite clear on who belonged to what tribe. In the second instance, Lococo states that after the first Mongol Khan of note was killed in the twelfth century (Kabul Khan), he was succeeded by his brother Ambakhai (p. 6). Ambakhai was in fact Kabul Khan's cousin. Although these may seem to be minor issues, the dynamics of Ambakhai's succession do play a role in the rise of Temujin (the given name of Genghis or Chinggis Khan), as Ambakhai's clan is the Taichiut, while Temujin's clan is the Borjigin. Warfare between the two clans erupted during Temujin's lifetime because of the Taichiut's determination to maintain the ascendancy gained from Ambakhai's line and not from Kabul Khan's. Another instance of confusion occurs with Temujin's enslavement by the Taichiut while in his teens. The author states that, after he escaped from them, Temujin married Borte, to whom he was betrothed around age eight or nine. Lococo believes that Temujin's escape from the Taichiut enhanced his prestige, as Borte's father would not have allowed her to marry an otherwise destitute man. Lococo may be correct in that Temujin's escape enhanced his reputation, but he misses the nuances of the events in the primary source of Chinggis Khan's life, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (2004).

This indeed is the crux of the problem. On the surface, the book is a decent narrative of events--well written and interesting. Unfortunately because of Lococo's reliance on outdated or second-tier sources, however, many nuances are missed. All of the above errors could have avoided by sim-

ply using Igor de Rachewiltz's marvelous translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*. While Lococo mentions it in the bibliographical note, he eschews it for Paul Kahn's adaptation of *The Secret History* (1984), which one might describe as a modern English translation of Frances Cleaves's English 1980 translation of *The Secret History*. For his own reasons, Cleaves decided that King James English provided a more authentic flavor to it. Unfortunately, while Kahn's rendition is easy to read, it is not annotated nor complete as the author omits many of "the begats" as some readers of the Bible might say.

One might say that the lack of proper context is the true issue, particularly in the events in Mongolia. There is an inconsistency between the chronology supplied and the narration of events in the text. Lococo provides a chronology giving 1162 as the date of Chinggis Khan's birth. This is the date used by government of Mongolia. Many scholars reject it and cite 1165 or even 1167. In truth, we may never know the correct one, so Lococo's choice of date is not in itself a problem. He then, however, states that Chinggis Khan's mother, Hoelun, was married to a Merkit prince in 1164, and it was Chinggis Khan's father, Yesugei, that kidnapped her. How could she have given birth to Temujin in 1162 when she had not been kidnapped by Yesugei until 1164? Lococo solves this problem by then placing Temujin's birth in 1165. The date itself is not truly significant, but the inconsistency in the facts undermines confidence in the narration. Lack of context also occurs when Lococo mentions that Temujin assisted his overlord, the Toghril Wang Khan, to regain his throne (p. 20). Yet how or when Wang Khan lost his throne is never mentioned. One senses that perhaps something was cut from the book in the editorial process.

Another egregious error deals with Temujin's decision to change the distribution of plunder after a battle. In 1202, he decreed that no one should plunder during a battle. Lococo states that

there was no resistance to this revolutionary decree because he had centralized his army and his fierce reputation quelled those who thought otherwise (p. 22). Unfortunately this is not accurate, as some of Temujin's uncles disobeyed the order. They were stripped of their possessions and ultimately fled. This new distribution policy actually served as a major bone of contention between the old elites and Temujin's new visions of Mongolia.

After unifying Mongolia, Lococo then discusses Mongol activity outside of Mongolia. He rightly notes that the unification of Mongolia may not have lasted if the Mongols had not raided outside of the region, as old tribal feuds may have been resurrected. Unfortunately, then he falls into the tired trap of viewing the conquest of northern China as the ambition of every nomad. This may be his own failing or indicate that Lococo is following David Morgan's lead in the latter's classic *The Mongols* (1986). While *The Mongols* remains the standard introduction to the subject of the Mongol Empire, Morgan's views have changed over the years on many topics, and he is not a scholar who is afraid to say when he was wrong. In the second edition of *The Mongols* (2007) he states that it is doubtful if Chinggis Khan wanted to conquer China.

Another example of the lack of context is in the discussion of the conquest of Xixia in 1209. The author states that as part of the surrender terms, Xixia would provide the Mongols with troops, but "in fact, never sent any help to the Mongols" (p. 71). This ignores the fact that Xixia opened a front against the Jin Empire (1126-1234) during the Mongol wars with the Jin Empire in northern China. Also, approximately 50,000 troops from Xixia served under the overall command of Muqali, one of Chinggis Khan's most talented generals.

In general, Lococo's narrative of events during the conquest of northern China and Central Asia is acceptable, but again some factual mis-

steps occur. Lococo assumes that Chinggis Khan intended to conquer the world and that, after northern China, he would turn on the Khwarazmian empire that dominated much of Central Asia. Although, Lococo does point out that the Khwarazmian ruler is ultimately the one who triggered a war in 1218-19, by massacring a Mongol-sponsored caravan at Otrar, he gives the impression that Chinggis Khan was hankering for a war even while engaged in China. The Islamic sources, even those hostile to the Mongols, are quite explicit in stating that Chinggis Khan took great measures to try and avoid a war with the Khwarazmian Empire.

The book also suffers from a lack of editorial oversight on spellings. For instance, Lococo lists the mountain ranges of Mongolia (p. 2). One range is spelled as "Khyngan" and another is spelled as "Hangay." The latter is a more modern spelling while the use of the "kh" is an older and traditional form for the same letter in the Mongolian alphabet. Other instances of this occur in names of people, places, and tribal groups, indicating that the author is perhaps too reliant on the spellings of many of the outdated sources he uses rather than what has become standard in the field.

Lococo's work is a mixed bag. On one hand it fulfills the scope and goal of the book series of which it is a part. In this, he presents a succinct narrative and analysis in lucid writing. Yet at the same time, it can never be more than an introduction due to the errors and out-dated sources used in the book. While the author undoubtedly read many more works than listed in the bibliographic note, those included are largely outdated and/or intended for popular audiences rather than scholarly works.

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