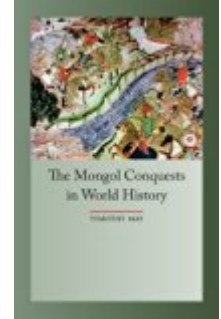


Timothy May. *The Mongol Conquests in World History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011. 304 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-86189-867-8.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The Mongol conquests shook Eurasia and were of significant influence in world history. Since the 1970s, a great number of articles and books have been written or edited that evaluate or reexamine their heritage. Among those works, J. J. Saunders's *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (1971) and David Morgan's *The Mongols* (1986; second edition 2007) are of great use for students and experts of Mongol history. In the past two decades, Thomas T. Allsen has made an immense contribution on this topic. His books *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (1997) and *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (2001) expand our vision of the cultural exchange in Eurasia. As new archaeological evidences are found, we can better understand the technological and material exchange between East Asia and the Middle East. Many articles about these topics have been collected into books, such as *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353* (edited by Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni, 2002) and *Beyond the*

Legacy of Genghis Khan (edited by Linda Komaroff, 2006). Building on these works, May's new book *The Mongol Conquests in World History* digests their findings and shows us the latest development in this field.[1]

Opening with a concise introduction of sources and theoretical concerns, May's book is divided into two parts: "The Mongol Conquests as Catalyst" and "The Chinggis Exchange." May considers the Mongol conquests to have changed the political map of Eurasia and offered a platform for the Chinggis Exchange, a term which was coined by its initiator, Chinggis Khan. The first part has three chapters and respectively deals with the formation, dissolution, and aftermath of the Mongol empire. Since May is an expert on Mongol military history, he offers his readers a fairly clear account of Mongol conquests in Eurasia. The third chapter is a succinct overview of the Eurasian regimes in the post-Mongol era.

The second part includes seven chapters, each discussing a different dimension of the

Chinggis Exchange: trade, warfare (and technology), administration, religion, germs (e.g., the bubonic plague), demographics, and culture. In the trade chapter, May discusses how Chinese paper money influenced the monetary reform in the Middle East (pp. 128-129). He also points out that the Mongol capitals Karakorum and New Saray rose and fell with the development of the Mongol empire since the Mongols deliberately arranged the post road routes (relay stations with horses and security that facilitated imperial communication and made postal services available to commercial users) for merchants (pp. 119, 126). The warfare chapter is based on May's first book and is an admirable account of the Mongol military and its modern influence. He is also cautious in pointing out that at that time gunpowder might not have been applied outside of China since we have no archaeological evidence and philology is not enough to support this theory (p. 152).[2] In the administration chapter, May demonstrates that the Mongol governance was coherent inside of the empire by means of taxation, and the pervasive census facilitated the implementation of taxation. The Mongols left their successors a new model for administrating their territories. As for religion, the Mongols were known for being tolerant of world religions, but they did not convert to any of them until the dissolution of their empire. In May's opinion, the main reason is that the Mongols believed they had obtained a mandate from heaven to conquer the world, and to adopt another religion meant losing their identity. Even though the Mongols converted to Buddhism and Islam, they actually adopted syncretic forms of those religions, which were more open to foreign elements. Therefore their conversion did not necessarily come at the expense of changing their identity. In the migration chapter, May argues that the Pax Mongolica not only facilitated migration, but also contributed to the establishment of Turkic states in Eurasia. In the final chapter, May probes some cultural exchanges which have been undervalued, such as food and apparel.

Although May has done a good job evaluating the roles of different peoples under the Mongol rule, the part concerning the importance of the Uighurs could still be elaborated. It is correct that Xi Xia was the first sedentary power that the Mongols invaded (p. 38). But we need to note that the first sedentary power that joined the Mongol camp was the Uighurs. The Uighurs' obligations to the Mongols became a model for later states that were incorporated into the Mongol empire. For instance, the subordinate ruler had to pay homage to the Mongol khan in person, he had to send his relatives as hostages, and his territory was subject to Mongol taxation, military recruitment, and the post road system. As for Uighur cultural influence on the Mongols, Chinggis Khan adopted the Uighur script for writing Mongolian. Tata Tong'a, the creator of Mongolian writing, was Uighur. Uighur script and scribes were popular for the Mongol administration. Chinqai (?-1252), chief minister of Ögedei and Güyüg Khan, was also Uighur. The Mongol conquests also made the Uighur culture spread across Eurasia.[3]

As for the transformation of the Mongol identity, May mentions the Khamag Mongol Ulus, a common identity created by Chinggis Khan to replace the old ethnic identities, such as the Kereits and the Naimans (pp. 36-37). May uses this term as a proper noun and suggests that there existed a Khamag Mongol Ulus in the pre-Chinggis era. Therefore, Khamag Mongol Ulus served as the prototype for the Yeke Monggol Ulus (p. 213). Although some Soviet and Mongol scholars have made the same assumption, Igor de Rachewiltz has demonstrated that this may be an inaccurate reading and that the khamag Mongol ulus simply means all the Mongols, and is not a proper noun or an appellation for the pre-Chinggis Mongol state.[4]

Some minor mistakes in the editing were found in the book. Zhao Gong 趙珙, the author of *Mengda beilu* (Record of the Mongols and Tatars), is erroneously transcribed as Zhao Hong (p. 17).

Zhongxing 中興, the capital of Xi Xia, is wrongly transcribed as Zhongxiang (p. 39, 45). The famous Mongol Buddhist monastery Erdene Zuu was not sponsored by Altan Khan of Tümed, but Abatai Khan of Khalkha (p. 116).

May's book reveals to us that during the Chinggis Exchange of the medieval period the Mongols played an active role. Before the rise of the Mongols, the Islamic Middle East and the Confucian East Asia were not interested in international exchange. Without the Mongols, the major Eurasian civilizations might not have been forced to start large-scale interactions and exchanges since they were all highly conceited and looked down on other civilizations. As the subject of world history becomes more and more popular, May's work is an admirable contribution to this field and a necessary guide for teaching and research today.

Notes

[1]. Although Morris Rossabi has recently published two books about the Mongols, one is geared toward students and the other is aimed at a general audience. Neither is directed to academic researchers. See Rossabi, *The Mongols and Global History: A Norton Documents Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), and *The Mongols: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2]. See Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007).

[3]. For the Uighurs under Mongol rule, see Thomas T. Allsen, "The Yüan Dynasty and the Uighurs of Turfan in the 13th Century," in *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 261-269.

[4]. Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle*

of the Thirteenth Century, 2nd impr. with corr. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 296.

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