

The Mongol People

Document A

Source: Italian friar John of Plano Carpini, who spent several months in the Great Khan's court in the late 1240's.

They are extremely arrogant toward other people, [and] tend to anger . . . easily . . . They are the greatest liars in the world in dealing with other people . . . They are crafty and sly . . . [and] have an admirable ability to keep their intentions secret . . . They are messy in their eating and drinking and in their whole way of life, [and] cling fiercely to what they have. They have no conscience about killing other people . . . If anyone is found in the act of plundering or stealing in the territory under their power, he is put to death without any mercy.

Document B

Source: French friar William of Rubruck who spent several months in the Great Khan's court in the early 1250's.

It is the duty of the women to drive the carts, get the dwelling on and off them, milk the cows, make butter and to dress and sew skins . . . They also sew the boots, the socks, and the clothing, and cover the houses.

The men make the bows and arrows, manufacture stirrups and bits, do the carpentering on their dwellings and carts; they take care of the horses, milk the mares [female horse], churn the mares' milk, make the skins in which it is put; they also look after the camels. Both sexes look after the sheep and goats.

Document C

Source: Description by Matthew Paris, English chronicler, in the 1270's.

They are inhuman and beastly, rather monsters than men, thirsting for and drinking blood, tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and men, dressed in ox-hides, armed with plates of iron . . . bulky, strong, invincible, untiring . . . They are without human laws, know no comforts, are more ferocious than lions or bears . . . They know no other language than their own, which no one else knows; for until now there has been no access to them....so that there could be no knowledge of their customs or persons . . . They wander about with their flocks and their wives, who are taught to fight like men.

Document D

Source: Marco Polo, a European adventurer and travel writer, written in 1298 based on his travels from 1274 to 1290.

Their arms are bows, iron clubs, and in some instances, spears; but the first is the weapon at which they are the most expert, being accustomed, from children, to employ it in their sports. They wear defensive armor made from buffalo and hides of other beasts, dried by the fire, and thus rendered extremely hard and strong. They are brave in battle, almost to desperation, setting little value upon their lives, and exposing themselves without hesitation to all manner of danger. Their character is cruel.

They are capable of supporting every kind of hardship, and when there is a necessity for it, can live for a month on the milk of their mares, and upon such wild animals, as they may chance to catch. Their horses are fed upon grass alone, and do not require barley or other grain. The men are trained to remain on horseback during two days and two nights, without dismounting.... No people on earth can surpass them in strength under difficulties, nor show greater patience under wants of every kind. They are most obedient to their chiefs.

Questions to think about:

What can you infer about the economy, ideology, or technology of the Mongols from the descriptions given?

Which of their characteristics would be helpful to them during their career of conquest?

Why would this characteristic be helpful to them during their career of conquest?

The Mongol People

Document A

Source: Italian friar John of Plano Carpini, who spent several months in the Great Khan's court in the late 1240's.

They are extremely arrogant toward other people, [and] tend to anger . . . easily . . . They are the greatest liars in the world in dealing with other people . . . They are crafty and sly . . . [and] have an admirable ability to keep their intentions secret . . . They are messy in their eating and drinking and in their whole way of life, [and] cling fiercely to what they have. They have no conscience about killing other people . . . If anyone is found in the act of plundering or stealing in the territory under their power, he is put to death without any mercy.

Document B

Source: French friar William of Rubruck who spent several months in the Great Khan's court in the early 1250's.

It is the duty of the women to drive the carts, get the dwelling on and off them, milk the cows, make butter and to dress and sew skins . . . They also sew the boots, the socks, and the clothing, and cover the houses.

The men make the bows and arrows, manufacture stirrups and bits, do the carpentering on their dwellings and carts; they take care of the horses, milk the mares [female horse], churn the mares' milk, make the skins in which it is put; they also look after the camels. Both sexes look after the sheep and goats.

Document C

Source: Description by Matthew Paris, English chronicler, in the 1270's.

They are inhuman and beastly, rather monsters than men, thirsting for and drinking blood, tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and men, dressed in ox-hides, armed with plates of iron . . . bulky, strong, invincible, untiring . . . They are without human laws, know no comforts, are more ferocious than lions or bears . . . They know no other language than their own, which no one else knows; for until now there has been no access to them....so that there could be no knowledge of their customs or persons . . . They wander about with their flocks and their wives, who are taught to fight like men.

Document D

Source: Marco Polo, a European adventurer and travel writer, written in 1298 based on his travels from 1274 to 1290.

Their arms are bows, iron clubs, and in some instances, spears; but the first is the weapon at which they are the most expert, being accustomed, from children, to employ it in their sports. They wear defensive armor made from buffalo and hides of other beasts, dried by the fire, and thus rendered extremely hard and strong. They are brave in battle, almost to desperation, setting little value upon their lives, and exposing themselves without hesitation to all manner of danger. Their character is cruel.

They are capable of supporting every kind of hardship, and when there is a necessity for it, can live for a month on the milk of their mares, and upon such wild animals, as they may chance to catch. Their horses are fed upon grass alone, and do not require barley or other grain. The men are trained to remain on horseback during two days and two nights, without dismounting.... No people on earth can surpass them in strength under difficulties, nor show greater patience under wants of every kind. They are most obedient to their chiefs.

Questions to think about:

What can you infer about the economy, ideology, or technology of the Mongols from the descriptions given?

Which of their characteristics would be helpful to them during their career of conquest?

Why would this characteristic be helpful to them during their career of conquest?