5. Nomadic Empires

1. Why was trade so significant to the Mongols?

Answer:

- Trade was so significant to the Mongols because of the scant resources of the steppe lands.
- The Mongols traded with their sedentary neighbours in China.
- Agricultural produce and iron utensils from China were exchanged for horses, furs and the wild animals trapped in the steppe.

2. Why did Genghis Khan feel the need to fragment the Mongol tribes into new social and military groupings?

Answer:

- Among the Mongols, all the able-bodied males of the tribe were part of the armed forces and fought against enemies.
- Genghis Khan had united the different Mongol tribes into a powerful army. New conquests also added fresh groups (the Turkic Uighurs and the Kereyits) into his force.
- There were soldiers with various identities. This had changed the army into an extremely heterogeneous mass of people.
- Genghis Khan worked to systematically erase the old tribal identities of the different groups. He reorganized the army based on the old steppe system of decimal units.

3. How do later Mongol reflections on the *yasa* bring out the uneasy relationship they had with the memory of Genghis Khan.

Answer:

- The *yasa* (the code of law) was promulgated at the *quriltai* of 1206 by Genghis Khan.
- The law codes dealt with customary traditions of the Mongol tribes, their administrative rules on the hunt, the army and the pastal system.
- However, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the Mongols had started treating the *yasa* as the 'legal code of Genghis Khan'.
- They used these laws to hide their uneasy relationship with the memory of Genghis Khan's cruel killings in the past.

- They also laid claim to a 'lawgiver' (Genghis Khan) like Moses and Solomon. They imposed these rules on their subjects.

4. 'If history relies upon written records produced by city-based literati, nomadic societies will always receive a hostile representation.' Would you agree with this statement? Does it explain the reason why Persian chronicles produced such inflated figures of casualties resulting from Mongol campaigns?

Answer:

- The nomadic societies which lived in the steppes did not produce any historical account, so our knowledge of their societies comes mainly from the writings produced by city-based literati.
- These authors often produced ignorant and biased reports of nomadic life. They came from a variety of backgrounds- Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Turkish and Muslim, and were not familiar with Mongol customs and histories.
- This explains the reason why Persian chronicles produced such inflated figures of casualties resulting from Mongol campaigns.
- Persian chronicles produced in 11-Khanid Iran exaggerate the number of killings by the Great Khan. For example, in contrast to an eyewitness report that 400 soldiers defended the citadel of Bukhara, an 11- Khanid chronicle reported that 30,000 soldiers were killed in the attack on the citadel.

ANSWER IN A SHORT ESSAY

5. Keeping the nomadic element of the Mongol and Bedouin societies in mind, how, in your opinion, did their respective historical experiences differ? What explanations would you suggest account for these differences?

Answer:

The Mongol and Bedouin societies had very different historical experiences in terms of geography, customs and their political integration into a larger empire.

Historical experiences of the Bedouins:

- The Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula were the desert tribes; they moved from dry to green areas (oases) of the desert in search of food (mainly dates) and fodder and water for their camels.
- The integration of the Bedouins into an imperial empire began with Islam, a belief system started by Muhammad. In 612 CE, he declared himself to be the messenger *(rasul)* of God and preached that Allah alone should be worshipped.

- To consolidate and protect his followers, Muhammad created a political order- the *Umma* in Medina. This was the beginning of the Islamic state.
- The Quran written by Muhammad gave the legal guidance to the Islamic states.
- Impressed by Muhammad's achievements, many Bedouins joined the community by converting to Islam.

Historical experiences of the Mongol nomad:

- The Mongols were a diverse body of people. Some of them were pastoralists while others were hunter gatherers. They nomadised in the steppes of Central Asia.
- In the thirteenth century, Genghis Khan had united them into a powerful army.
- Genghis Khan believed that he had a mandate from God to rule the world. His political vision went beyond the creation of a confederacy of Mongol tribes in the steppes of Central Asia.
- The Mongols established a transcontinental empire under the leadership of Genghis Khan, in Europe and Asia.
- They imposed the *yasa* (the law of code), shaped by the Mongols' historical tradition, on the subjects to integrate them into the empire.

6. How does the following account enlarge upon the character of the Pax Mongolica created by the Mongols by the middle of the thirteenth century?

The Franciscan monk, William of Rubruck, was sent by Louis IX of France on an embassy to the great Khan Mongke's court. He reached Karakorum, the capital of Mongke, in 1254 and came upon a woman

from Lorraine (in France) called Paquette, who had been brought from Hungary and was in the service of one of the prince's wives who was a Nestorian Christian. At the court he came across a Parisian goldsmith named Guillaume Boucher, 'whose brother dwelt on the Grand Pont in Paris'. This man was first employed by the Queen Sorghaqtani and then by Mongke's younger brother. Rubruck found that at the great court festivals the Nestorian priests were admitted first, with their regalia, to bless the Grand Khan's cup, and were followed by the Muslim clergy and Buddhist and Taoist monks...

Answer:

The account reveals that the Franciscan monk, William of Rubruck, witnessed people with different cultural backgrounds and skills at the great Khan Mongke's court.

First, he encounters a French woman serving a prince's wife who was a Nestorian Christian. Then he meets a Parisian Gold smith employed by Mongke's younger brother. Rubruck also finds that at the great court festivals, the Nestorian priests, the Muslim clergy, Buddhist and Taoist monks were admitted to bless the Grand Khan's cup. Thus, the account tries to highlight how the peace ushered in by Mongol conquest (Pax Mongolica) had brought skills and identities of various groups together through trade. The Pax Mongolica was possible because the Mongols linked all the territories in Europe and China.