

A Mongol Oath to Genghis Khan



ABOUT THE READING Genghis Khan, one of the most well-known leaders in history, lived from the mid-1100s until 1227. The *Secret History of the Mongols* was written in about 1240 by an unknown Mongolian writer. The excerpt below is an oath of loyalty.

VOCABULARY

multitudinous numerous

comely attractive



As you read consider how reliable this oath might be and whether the writer wanted to create a particular image of the Mongols.

[The Mongols] declared: “We wish to make you khan”, and they swore the following oath of allegiance: “When you are khan, Temuchin, we will ride as your spearhead against the **multitudinous** enemy and bring back their beautiful women and maidens and their ceremonial tents; and from the foreign tribes we will bring **comely** women and maidens, also their fine-limbed [horses] at a trot, and present them to you. When we hunt the wild animals, we will be in the van of the hunters and will give you [the slaughtered animals]. We will drive the steppe animals towards you in such numbers that their bellies touch, the mountain animals in such numbers that their rumps touch. If, on the day of battle, we do not obey your commands, separate us from our belongings, from our wives and our women and throw our black heads away on the empty steppe. If, in time of peace, we break our word to you, separate us from our servants, from our women and children and banish

The speakers in the story are two members of Genghis Khan’s clan.

Temuchin was the name given to Genghis Khan at his birth.

“In the van” here means “at the very front.”

A steppe is a region of grassy plains.

From “Rise to Supremacy on the Steppe” (retitled “A Mongol Oath to Genghis Khan”) from *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy* by Paul Ratchnevsky, translated and edited by Thomas Nivison Haining. Copyright © 1991 by Basil Blackwell Ltd. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

A Mongol Oath to Genghis Khan, *continued*

Primary Source

us to a leaderless land.” Having sworn this oath they made Temuchin Khan, naming him Genghis Khan.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1.** What inferences can you make from this oath about the way of life of the Mongols?

- 2.** Do you think that people actually swore this oath to Genghis Khan? Explain your answer.

- 3.** How would you describe the attitude of the Mongol clans toward Genghis Khan? Use passages from the oath to support your answer.
