

## The Primary Sources for the Lesson

### Document 1

**Information on the source:** This photo is of a woman, possibly Turkman or Kyrgyz, standing on a carpet at the entrance to a yurt, dressed in traditional clothing and jewelry. The photo was taken in the early 1900s, but it depicts a scene on the steppes of Central Asia that is not that different from what would have been common there during the time of the Mongol Empire.



### Document 2

**Information on the source:** An 1870s photo of a woman and four men on horseback in front of a yurt. The photo helps call attention to the central role of the horse in the various cultures that gave birth to the Mongols and other federations of steppe nomads of the past.

### Document 3

**Information on the source:** The Franciscan monk William of Rubruck traveled to the Mongol capital of Karakorum in 1253–55. He wrote a detailed account of his time with the Mongols. The passage here is from *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the eastern parts of the world, 1253–55, as narrated by himself, with two accounts of the earlier journey of John of Pian de Carpine*, translated from the Latin and edited, with an introductory notice, by William Woodville Rockhill (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900).

*Nowhere have they fixed dwelling-places, nor do they know where their next will be... For in winter they go down to warmer regions in the south: in summer they go up to cooler towards the north. The pasture lands without water they graze over in winter when there is snow there, for the snow serveth them as water. They set up the dwelling in which they sleep on a circular frame of interlaced sticks converging into a little round hoop on the top, from which projects above a collar as a*

*chimney, and this they cover over with white felt...*

*And they make these houses so large that they are sometimes thirty feet in width. I myself once measured the width between the wheel-tracks of a cart twenty feet, and when the house was on the cart it projected beyond the wheels on either side five feet at least. I have myself counted to one cart twenty-two oxen drawing one house, eleven abreast across the width of the cart, and the other eleven before them.*

#### Document 4

**Information on the source:** In one of his wars of conquest, Chinggis Khan fought the Khwarezmid Empire in Central Asia and what is now Iran and part of Iraq. After his Mongol army took over the city of Bukhara, he spoke to the Muslim population at a mosque. These words from that speech are reproduced from Ata Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, translated by J. A. Boyle, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 105. Juvaini was a native of an area the Mongols conquered in what is now the northeastern part of Iran.

*O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you.*

#### Document 5

**Information on the source:** In 1243, Pope Innocent IV sent Franciscan friar John Plano Carpini to Karakoram to meet with the Kuyuk Khan, the third Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, to ask him to stop his attacks on Christians. After a wait, Carpini was given a reply, part of which is reproduced here.

*And when you say: "I am a Christian. I pray to God. I arraign and despise others," how do you know who is pleasing to God and to whom He allots His grace? How can you know it, that you speak such words?*

*Thanks to the power of the Eternal Heaven, all lands have been given to us from sunrise to sunset. How could anyone act other than in accordance with the commands of Heaven? Now your own upright heart must tell you: "We [the Pope and monarchs of Europe] will become subject to you, and will place our powers at your disposal." You in person, at the head of the monarchs, all of you, without exception, must come to tender us service and pay us homage, then only will we recognize your submission. But if you do not obey the commands of Heaven, and run counter to our orders, we shall know that you are our foe.*

#### Document 6

**Information on the source:** Another passage from William of Rubruck's account of his travels to the Mongol capital, Karakorum.

*The next day (the Chan) sent his secretaries to me, who said: "Our lord sends us to you to say that you are here Christians, Saracens [Muslims] and Tuins [Buddhists]. And each of you says that his doctrine is the best, and his writings—that is, books—the truest. So he wishes that you shall all meet together, and make a comparison, each one writing down his precepts, so that he himself may be able to know the truth." Then I said: "Blessed be God, who put this in the Chan's heart. But our Scriptures tell us, the servant of God should not dispute, but should show mildness to all; so I am ready, without disputation or contention, to give reason for the faith and hope of the Christians, to the best of my ability." They wrote down my words, and carried them back to him. Then it was told the Nestorians that they should look to themselves, and write down what they wished to say, and likewise to the Saracens, and in the same way to the Tuins.*

## Document 7

**Information on the source:** Perhaps the most famous European visitor to China under Mongol rule was Marco Polo. He left Venice in 1271 and did not return until 1295. His account was treated with some doubts at first, though over time many Europeans had their views of China shaped by it. This passage deals with Khubilai Khan, a grandson of Chinggis Khan who became the fifth Great Khan of the Mongol Empire and the founder of China's Yuan Dynasty. Here Marco deals with Khubilai's views on Christianity and other religions. From *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (London: Penguin Books, 1958).

*It was in the month of November that Kubilai returned to Khanbalik. And there he stayed until February and March, the season of our Easter. Learning that this was one of our principal feasts, he sent for all the Christians and desired them to bring him the book containing the four Gospels. After treating the book to repeated applications of incense with great ceremony, he kissed it devoutly and desired all his barons and lords there present to do the same. This usage he regularly observes on the principle feasts of the Christians, such as Easter and Christmas. And he does likewise on the principle feasts of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters. Being asked why he did so, he replied: 'There are four prophets who are worshiped and to whom all the world does reverences. The*

*Christians say that their God was Jesus Christ, the Saracens Mahomet, the Jews Moses, and the idolaters Sakyamuni Burkhan [Buddha] who was the first to be represented as God in the form of an idol. And I do honour and reverence to all four, so that I may be sure of doing it to him who is greatest in heaven and truest; and to him I pray for aid. But on the Great Khan's own showing he regards as truest and best the faith of the Christians, because he declares that it commands nothing that is not full of all goodness and holiness. He will not on any account allow the Christians to carry the cross before them, and this because on it suffered and died such a great man as Christ.*

## Document 8

**Information on the source:** The Mongol Ilkhanate was founded in the 1200s by Chinggis Khan's grandson Hulagu in what is now mainly Iran and Iraq and nearby parts of Central Asia. It arose at first during Mongol wars against the Khwarezmid Empire. At first the Ilkhanate was sympathetic to Buddhism and Christianity. After 1295, its rulers embraced Islam. This passage is by Persian chronicler Ata Malik Juvaini, who worked for the Mongols. In it, he describes the results of the Mongol destruction of a Shi'a group known as the Assassins. From Ata Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, translated by J. A. Boyle, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

*So was the world cleansed which had been polluted by their evil. Wayfarers now ply to and fro without fear or dread or the inconvenience of paying a toll and pray for the fortune of the happy King who uprooted their foundations and left no trace of anyone of them.*

## Document 9

**Information on the source:** Pegolotti's *Merchant Handbook* offers insight into trade across Central Asia in the 1300s, when the "Golden Horde" was in control of much of the area. The Golden Horde was the name used for the group of Mongols who took control of what is now Russia and other nearby lands. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti worked for a merchant firm in the Italian city-state of Florence. The passages here are from the partial translation in Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, tr. and ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China, Vol. III* (London, 1916).

*The road you travel from Tana to Cathay is perfectly safe [Tana is Azov, at the mouth of the Don River in Russia, Cathay is China], whether by day or by night, according to what the merchants say who have used it...*

*You may calculate that a merchant with a dragoman, and with two men servants, and with goods to the value of twenty-five thousand golden florins, should spend on his way to Cathay from sixty to eighty sommi of silver, and not more if he manage well; and for all the road back again from Cathay to Tana, including the expenses of living and the pay of servants, and all other charges, the cost will be about five sommi per head of pack animals, or something*

*less. And you may reckon the sommi to be worth five golden florins...*

*Whatever silver the merchants may carry with them as far as Cathay the lord of Cathay will take from them and put into his treasury. And to merchants who thus bring silver they give that paper money of theirs in exchange. This is of yellow paper, stamped with the seal of the lord aforesaid. And this money is called balishi; and with this money you can readily buy silk and all other merchandise that you have a desire to buy. And all the people of the country are bound to receive it. And yet you shall not pay a higher price for your goods because your money is of paper.*

## Document 10

**Information on the source:** One unintended result of the more open trade on the Central Asian routes during Mongol times was the ease with which diseases passed from one region to another. In the 1340s, merchants helped spread the terrifying Black Death throughout Europe. Perhaps a third of Europe's population was destroyed by it. Since no one really understood how the disease spread, many blamed outsiders or people who were different in some way. This illustration from a book published in 1493 depicts Jews being burned alive for "spreading the Black Death." The photo of this work of art is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

