

HMDC Presents... MONGOL 1225: Quick Guide

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Mongol Empire 1225: the death of Genghis Khan and who rules next.

WHAT WE ARE DEBATING

We sit at the Mongol court in 1225, and Genghis Khan is close to death. His huge empire has no fixed rule for who rules next. We must choose the next ruler, keep the family and army together, and decide how to govern the conquered lands. In a crisis committee, the staff adds surprise events that never really happened.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

1. **Keeping the empire united:** The family and army stay together after the khan dies.
2. **Passing power steadily:** We need a plan for the next ruler that the whole court accepts.
3. **Building lasting systems:** We shape the empire's rules for government, money and the army, which last longer than one person.

FIVE NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

1. **9 million square miles:** It was the largest connected land empire in history. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Last Accessed: October 2026)
2. **15 years:** The conquests came during 15 wet years in a row that grew grass for the horses. (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, March 25, 2014)
3. **19 years:** After Ögedei died in 1241, the family argued about the next khan for 19 years. (Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026)
4. **2 years:** Tolui ruled as regent from 1227 to 1229, before the next khan was chosen. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, July 14, 2026)
5. **20 miles:** Relay stations stood about every 20 miles, so orders moved fast. (Columbia University Asia for Educators, Last Accessed: October 2026)

KEY EVENTS AND POWERS

1. **Jochi in the west:** The eldest son has been distant from his father since about 1221, so we bring him back or limit his power.
2. **The Tangut war:** In the last campaign, we decide whether to punish the Tangut people or govern them.
3. **Terror or mercy:** We can order the army to spare every city that surrenders, because dead farmers pay no taxes.
4. **The relay network and travel passes:** We control the stations and passes that carry orders and news.
5. **Keeping the death secret:** Hiding the death could stop uprisings, but the hidden funeral is an old story, not a proven fact.

THE MAIN SOLUTIONS

1. **Confirm Ögedei through a kuriltai:** A great assembly approves the khan's choice of his third son.
 - **Help:** The new khan has his father's wish and the nobles' approval.
 - **Harm:** His older brothers' families may feel passed over.
2. **A regency under Tolui:** The youngest son rules while the family gathers.
 - **Help:** The empire keeps running while princes travel home.
 - **Harm:** A regent with an army may become a rival.
3. **Divide the empire into family lands:** Each son rules his own land under one Great Khan.
 - **Help:** Each branch has its own land, so there are fewer fights.
 - **Harm:** The family lands grew into separate countries that sometimes fought.
4. **Govern by taxes instead of destruction:** We tax farmers and merchants instead of killing them.
 - **Help:** Steady income, and skilled workers stay alive.
 - **Harm:** Traditional Mongols want grazing land, not farms.

WHERE THE MAJOR BLOCS STAND

1. **The house of Jochi:** Jochi holds the west, and his son Batu later claimed a better right to rule.
2. **The house of Chagatai:** Chagatai is the oldest surviving son, so his family may feel hurt if he is passed over.
3. **The houses of Ögedei and Tolui:** Ögedei is the chosen heir, and Tolui guards the homeland.
4. **The advisers from conquered peoples:** Yelü Chucai and Chinkai want to tax settled lands, not destroy them.
5. **The old-style Mongols and army leaders:** They want to keep moving with their herds, and the army leaders were loyal to Genghis Khan himself.

KEY WORDS IN OUR TOPIC

1. **kuriltai:** When we say kuriltai, we mean the great meeting of nobles that approves a new khan.
2. **succession:** When we say succession, we mean the way power passes from one ruler to the next.
3. **regent:** When we say regent, we mean a person who rules until the new ruler is chosen.
4. **ulus:** When we say ulus, we mean the land and people a prince rules under the Great Khan.
5. **khagan:** When we say khagan, we mean the Great Khan, which is the ruler above all other khans.
6. **Yasa:** When we say Yasa, we mean Mongol law linked to Genghis Khan, which history experts think was never written down.
7. **decimal system:** When we say decimal system, we mean the army's units of 10, 100, 1,000 and 10,000 soldiers.
8. **Pax Mongolica:** When we say Pax Mongolica, we mean the Mongol Peace, when traders travelled safely.

QUESTIONS WE CAN ASK IN DEBATE

1. If the khan's choice is enough, why did the Mongols hold a kuriltai?
2. How does our plan stop the generals from switching sides?
3. If we divide the empire into family lands, what keeps each land loyal to the Great Khan?
4. If the army keeps destroying cities, who will pay the taxes the empire needs?

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