**The Rise of the Mongol Empire**

**Strong Central Leadership:**

Genghiz Khan was born Temujin, or Ironsmith in 1162. According to Mongol tradition, he was marked for greatness from the moment of his birth. While Temujin was still a boy, his father was poisoned by a rival clan. Unprepared to lead his father’s armies, Temujin suffered major disasters in battle. At the age of fifteen he was taken prisoner. For the rest of his life, he never forgot the humiliation of being locked in a wooden collar and paraded before his enemies.

As he grew up he acquired a reputation for courage and as a genius in military leadership. He first took revenge on the clan that enslaved him. Then, before the age of 40, he was elected supreme ruler of all the Mongols. He was now known as Genghiz Khan, “World Emperor.” As emperor he imposed strict military discipline and demanded absolute loyalty. His armies were tough, skilled warriors who lived in the saddles of their shaggy ponies. The highly trained mobile armies were possibly the most skilled horsemen in the world. Genghiz Khan died in 1227. The domain of the “World Emperor” was indeed the largest the world had yet seen.

**Territorial Expansion:**

As Mongol armies advanced into China they turned to Chinese and Turkish military experts to teach them to use the cannon and other new weapons. Both the Mongols and Chinese launched missiles at one another. This use of the cannon in warfare would soon spread westward to Europe. Khan did not live to complete conquest of China. Before his death however, he had shattered the settled lives of peoples across Eurasia and become the world’s most successful conqueror. The heirs of Khan continued to expand the Mongol empire. For the next 150 years, they dominated much of Asia. Their furious assaults toppled empires and spread destruction from southern Russia through Muslim lands in the Middle East to China. In China, the Mongols devastated the province of Sichuan and destroyed its capital city of Chengdu.

**Unification of Diverse People:**

Khan had set an example for his successors by ruling conquered lands with tolerance and justice. The Mongol warrior respected the scholars, artists, and artisans. He listened to the ideas of Confucian and Muslim scholars, Buddhist monks, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. In the 1200s and 1300s the sons and grandsons of Khan established peace and order within the domains. Political stability set the stage for economic growth within the empire.

**Cultural Diffusion:**

Under the protection of the Mongols, who now controlled the great Silk Road, trade flourished across Eurasia. Cultural exchanges increased as foods, tools, inventions, and ideas spread along the trade routes. From China the use of the windmills and gunpowder moved westward. Techniques of papermaking reached the Middle East, while crops and tress from the Middles East were carried into Asia.

**The Rise of the Islamic Empire**

**Strong Central Leadership:**

Troubled by the idol worship of the Arabs and by the moral ills of society Muhammad went to a cave to mediate. It was there, when he was about 40, that he heard a voice saying “Proclaim.” According to Muslim belief the voice was that of the angel Gabriel. After working to unite the Arabs for a number of years Muhammad died in the year 632. His death plunged his followers into grief. With the help of Abu Bakr, an early Islamic convert Islam survived the death of its prophet. Bakr was elected the first caliph, or successor to Muhammad.

**Territorial Expansion:**

Under the first four caliphs, Arab armies marched from victory to victory. They conquered great chunks of the Byzantine Empire, including the provinces of Syria and Palestine with the cities of Damascus and Jerusalem. Next, they demolished the Persian Empire. The Arabs then moved into Egypt. Later Muslim armies dashed west, defeating Byzantine forces across North Africa. In 711, they crossed the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain and pushed up the Peninsula into France. At the other end of the Mediterranean, they crossed the Bosporus to besiege the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The expansion of the Arab conquests did not slow down until nearly 100 years after Muhammad’s death.

**Unification of Diverse People:**

Shortly after Muhammad’s death and attempts to unify the Arabs, divisions arose within Islam over his successor. The split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims had a profound impact on later Islamic history. The Sunnis felt that the caliph should be chosen by leaders of the Muslim community. Although the Sunnis should be a pious Muslim, they viewed him simply as a leader, not as a religious authority. The Shiites, on the other hand, argued that the only true successors to the prophet were descendants of Muhammad’s daughter and son-in-law, Fatima and Ali. The Shiite’s believed that the descendants of the prophet were divinely inspired. The division between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims has lasted more than 1,300 years.

**Cultural Diffusion:**

Muslim society was more open than that of medieval Europe. People could move up in society, especially through religious, scholarly, or military achievements. As in Greece and Rome, slavery was common in the cities of the Muslim world. Slaves were brought from lands in Spain, Greece, Africa, India and Central Asia. Merchants were honored in the Muslim world in part because Muhammad had been a merchant. Between 750 and 1350, merchants built vast trading network across the Muslim worlds and beyond. Trade spread both products and technology. Extensive trade and a prosperous money economy led Muslims to pioneer new ways of doing business. They set up partnerships, bought and sold on credit, and formed banks to change currency. Muslims also invented the ancestors to today’s bank checks.