Sample DBQ: The Mongols DBQ

**Note: This is just an example of a DBQ that would earn all 7 points if scored. Please note how the argument is supported throughout the paper, and how much analysis is needed to earn the points for contextualization and complex understanding.**

Since the Neolithic Revolution, the steppes of Eurasia have been home to nomadic pastoralists. Unable to practice agriculture in the steppes, the people who called this region home instead began domesticating animals and relied on them for transportation and sustenance. Nomadic pastoralists of the steppes have a long history of interaction with their settled agricultural neighbors in outer Eurasia, including China, India, and Persia. Sometimes nomadic pastoralists would cooperate peacefully with settled societies, engaging in trade, while other times pastoralists would raid frontier villages for supplies, crops, and other things they could not obtain on their own. These nomadic pastoralists were organized primarily into kinship-based clans, with unification being sporadic (such as during the Xiongnu Confederacy) and rarely resulting in sustained political or economic power. This changed when a man named Temujin unified the various clans of the steppe, becoming Genghis Khan and forming the mighty Mongol Empire. The Mongols were able to establish a massive empire due to their unique military tactics, their brutality, and their discipline.

The Mongols used their unorthodox military tactics to their advantage in conquering neighboring civilizations, helping them to form their large empire. This is best exemplified by their use of the fake retreat, which the Mongols implemented against the Chin Empire in northern China (Doc 1). By withdrawing and making the enemy believe they had left, the Mongols had actually drawn the enemy out from their fortifications, only to return in full force to attack and defeat them. The Mongols utilized the element of surprise with the fake retreat, which enabled them to defeat a more powerful enemy, even though they were outnumbered and typically had less resources at their disposal. Since the story of this conquest comes from Mongol Oral Traditions, it is likely that this document was created as a means of preserving these stories for future generations of Mongols, so that the unique military tactics and approaches that enabled them to conquer empires such as China and establish their empire would not be forgotten.

The Mongols’ brutality earned them a fierce reputation across Eurasia, and this reputation further helped the Mongols in their quest to take over as much land as possible. When the Tartars, another nomadic pastoralist group of the steppes, became incorporated into the Mongol horde, they joined the effort to conquer settled societies, focusing their particular efforts on Russia. At Novgorod, the Tartars entered and destroyed the town, killing many in the process and committing horrible atrocities (Doc 2). By displaying such ferocity, these nomadic invaders furthered their fearsome reputation, lessening the likelihood that others would dare resist them. With less opposition, the path to domination had fewer obstacles as the Mongols conquered territory and established their empire. The authors of this document, monks, likely created this document to show the sheer brutality of the Tartar-Mongolian conquest of Russia, and how this savagery helped these invaders to establish control of nearby societies. Such brutality was witnessed just about everywhere the Mongols invaded. Motivated by revenge,
Genghis Khan wiped out the Tangqut people who had rebelled against him (Doc 7). With this act, the Mongols showed themselves to have no mercy on those who would rebel against them, further solidifying their reputation as they gained additional territory through brutal conquest. This reputation even reached as far away as western Europe, as evidenced by a letter from Pope Innocent IV to Genghis Khan (Doc 8). The fact that stories of brutal Mongol invasions reached territories far beyond the Mongol empire itself further supports the idea that the Mongols were building their reputation as they expanded their empire further across Eurasia. There are countless other examples of the brutality of the Mongols, but this was also seen when the Mongols enacted revenge against the Abbasid caliphate for murdering a Mongol messenger. The Mongols, who had a rule that they would not spill royal blood, instead rolled up the Abbasid leader in a carpet and trampled on him with horses, killing him and sending a message that they would not tolerate insurrection. Clearly, actions such as these further support the Mongols’ reputation and prevents others from resisting them.

Finally, the Mongols were successful in conquering a massive empire largely because of their discipline. The Italian traveler Marco Polo, who visited the Yuan court in China and was personally employed by Kublai Khan to document his experiences across the Khanate of the Great Khan, took notice of their bravery and dedication in battle, as well as their hardiness while on their horses (Doc 3). Traits such as these strongly indicate that the Mongols were trained from a young age to be strong and dedicated, which helped them launch successful invasions as they built their empire. Marco Polo was likely motivated to write accounts of the Mongols’ traits that aided their success since he was a foreigner in China, and wanted to bring the stories of what he noticed back to Europe with him. This discipline of the Mongols also translated into their military, as they were organized in a very efficient way, with commanders overseeing groups of warriors, all of whom reported to the khan (Doc 4). This efficient organization further supports the idea of the Mongols as a disciplined group, dedicated to ensuring that their military efforts will be a success. Finally, the Mongols demonstrated their discipline in terms of the division of labor they employed. Every citizen, man and woman, had certain tasks to perform (Doc 5). By working together, all of the Mongol citizens showed their dedication and personal discipline, as well as support for the larger cause of expanding the Mongol Empire.

In summary, the Mongols were able to establish the largest land empire the world has ever seen through their unique military tactics, their brutality, and their discipline. Tactics such as these also enabled Alexander the Great to similarly conquer a massive empire during the Classical Era, his Hellenistic (Greek) Empire. Like the Mongols, Alexander employed a brutal and disciplined fighting force in his quest to conquer the known world. He utilized new military formations, such as the phalanx, and was known for his determination and fierceness in battle. Both the Mongols and Alexander’s Greek army used these attributes to quickly conquer huge empires, cementing their reputations in history.