

The Secret History of the Mongol Queens: How the Daughters of Genghis Khan Rescued His Empire

By Jack Weatherford

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The Mongol queens of the thirteenth century ruled the largest empire the world has ever known. Yet sometime near the end of the century, censors cut their story from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, leaving only a hint of a father's legacy for his daughters.

The queens of the Silk Route turned their father's conquests into the world's first truly international empire, fostering trade, education, and religion throughout their territories and creating an economic system that stretched from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. Outlandish stories of these powerful queens trickled out of the Empire, shocking the citizens of Europe and the Islamic world.

After Genghis Khan's death in 1227, conflicts erupted between his daughters and his daughters-in-law; what began as a war between powerful women soon became a war against women in power as brother turned against sister and son against mother. At the end of this epic struggle, the dynasty of the Mongol queens had seemingly been extinguished forever, as even their names were erased from the historical record.

Two centuries later, one of the most unusual and important warrior queens of history--Queen Manduhai--arose to avenge the wrongs, rescue the tattered shreds of the Mongol Empire, and restore order to a shattered world. She led her soldiers through victory after victory. In her thirties she married a seventeen-year-old prince, and she bore eight children in the midst of a career spent fighting the Ming Dynasty of China on one side and a series of Muslim warlords on the other. Her unprecedented success on the battlefield provoked the Chinese into the most frantic and expensive phase of wall building in history. Charging into battle even while pregnant, she fought to reassemble the Mongol Nation of Genghis Khan and to preserve it for her own children to rule in peace.

Despite their mystery and the efforts to erase them from our collective memory, the deeds of these Mongol queens inspired great artists from Chaucer and Milton to Goethe and Puccini. And so their stories live on today. With *The Secret*

History of the Mongol Queens, Jack Weatherford restores the queens' missing chapter to the annals of history.

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Editorial Review

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Though the prolific Genghis Khan fathered numerous sons and daughters, historians have dutifully recorded the foibles and follies of his male heirs while virtually ignoring the accomplishments of his female offspring. Weatherford seeks to remedy this glaring omission by providing a fascinating romp through the feminine side of the infamous Khan clan. Surprisingly, old Genghis himself seems to have been impressed enough by the leadership abilities of his womenfolk to want to reward some of them with pieces of his vast empire. At least four of his daughters became queens of their own countries, exercising power over their courts, their armies, and, of course, their families. Important linchpins in the Mongol Empire, these women supplied the balance of power necessary to appease fractious tribes and territories. Unfortunately, soon after Genghis Khan's death, the female rulers were challenged by their male relatives, and the fragile bonds that held the Mongol Empire together quickly disintegrated. Ironically, it wasn't until the emergence of a new queen, two centuries later, that the once-mighty Mongol nation was reunited. Let's hear it for the girls. --Margaret Flanagan

About the Author

JACK WEATHERFORD is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*; *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*; *The Secret History of the Mongol Queens*; and *The History of Money*, among other acclaimed books. A specialist in tribal peoples, he was for many years a professor of anthropology at Macalaster College in Minnesota and divides his time between the US and Mongolia.

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