

ATL Skills: Research

Mongol Conquest: Causes – Environmental

One factor for the cause of the Conquests under Genghis Khan is environmental and ecological. **Read** the excerpts below and answer all questions:

[1]

The violence endemic in the steppes now turned outward to challenge neighboring civilizations. Historians have been tempted to speculate about the reasons. One explanation is environmental. Temperatures in the steppe fell. People farther west on the Russian plains complained that a cold spell in the early thirteenth century caused crops to fail. So declining pastures might have driven the Mongols to expand from the steppes. Population in the region seems to have been relatively high, and the pastoral way of life demands large amounts of grazing land to feed relatively few people. So perhaps the Mongol outthrust was a consequence of having more mouths to feed. Yet the Mongols were doing what steppelanders had always sought to do: dominate and exploit sedentary peoples. The difference was that they did it with more ambition and efficiency than their predecessors.

[2]

In the period from 1180–1220, Mongolia experienced a drop in the mean annual temperature, which meant that the growing season for grass was cut short. Less grass meant a real danger to the Mongols' animals, and, since the animals were truly the basis

of the Mongols' pastoral–nomadic life, this ecological threat may have prompted them to move out of Mongolia

(source: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/conquests/conquests.htm>).

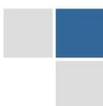
[3]

Pederson and Hessel analyzed 17 trees to chart a yearly record of rainfall back to 658 AD. They saw that from 1211-1230—the exact time of the Mongols' rise—central Mongolia saw one of its wettest periods ever. That time also was unusually warm, as shown by a [2001 paper from other Lamont researchers](#). Pederson and Hessel reasoned that the clement weather could have brought an unusual boom in grass production—and thus a boom in camels, yaks, cattle, sheep and other livestock that have always comprised the country's main wealth. A glut of war horses—each Mongol cavalryman was said to have five or more—could have enabled fighters to travel like never before, along with a mobile meat supply. “The weather may literally have supplied the Mongols with the horsepower they needed to do what they did,” says Pederson. He stresses that the idea is still based on only a small sample, and more data is needed to draw firm conclusions. Pederson, Hessel and an interdisciplinary team including Mongolian scientists are now exploring the hypothesis, with a \$1.4 million [grants from the National Geographic Society and the U.S. National Science Foundation](#). The work will include not only further analyses of tree rings, but lake sediments, historical documents and other sources.

(source: <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2013/05/13/climate-and-conquest-how-did-genghis-khan-rise/>).

Questions:

1. State one point from each of the sources (3).
2. **Compare** and **contrast** the views expressed in sources 1 and 3. (6)



Marks	Description
2	If only one source is discussed.
3	If both sources are discussed but separate without links.
4-5	If both sources are discussed with clear and solid links.
6	If both sources are discussed with clear and solid links in the form of a running commentary with only relevant points.

3. Was the Mongol conquest driven more by survival and hence psychological rather than weather changes? **Explain** your view (5)
4. How different would the Mongol invasion be to modern states that invade for economic and resource reasons? **Discuss** your answer.

