

GENGHIS: Jewelry, weapons, clothing bring Khan's huge empire to life

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ral Science, runs through Feb. 7.

"This was an incredibly vibrant time in the history of half the globe, although in our Western mind-set, we don't always realize that because to us it was the Dark Ages," said Jennifer Moss Logan, lead educator for "Genghis Khan." "The action was here. You've got conquering nations and the movement of armies from east to west, silk roads being opened out, trade and religion."

Indeed, Khan's empire once spanned 12 million square miles, four times the size of the Roman empire. Not bad for a nomadic orphan.

"You look at what Genghis Khan did in the short timespan of his life and think, 'This is a character I would not expect this end result from,'" said museum spokeswoman Heather Hope.

The Denver exhibit is the largest-ever collection of Genghis Khan-related pieces, with weaponry, jewelry and more. It includes 200 artifacts from the Mongolian empire, including elaborately woven silk robes from the tomb of a noblewoman, finely-crafted gold bracelets and elaborate swords, saddles and armor.

Housed in the museum's newly renovated Phipps Gallery, the exhibit walks visitors through the history of Khan and his clan. Giant video maps and artifacts tell part of the story, but kid-friendly activities also allow visitors to play a game with sheep's knuckle bones outside a Mongolian tent (or *ger*), launch pingpong balls from a replica trebuchet and make paper replicas of traditional Mongolian hats.

Imposing shaman's costumes and 800-year-old human remains on loan from the Smithsonian also add a solemn element to the exhibit.

The real coup, organizers say, will be exposing the public to such a



A replica of a Mongul horseman, complete with armor and weapons, greets visitors at the Genghis Kahn exhibit. *Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post*

vast, influential, poorly understood empire.

"We did surveys of our visitors when considering this exhibit and found that people usually knew the name Genghis Khan, but it stopped there," said Hope. "People generally don't know a lot about Mongolia today, much less (of) the empire ... at its height."

The exhibit is especially meaningful because Colorado is home to one of the biggest Mongolian populations outside of Mongolia, numbering about 2,500. Members of that community contributed to and consulted on the exhibit. A mix of traditional Mongolian dancers, musicians and contortionists will also perform at the exhibit every day.

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science has upped the ante on "Khan" from the Houston Museum, rechecking and rewriting signage and adding elements and extra space.

The improvements reinforce the harshness and fascinating resilience of centuries-old Mongolian culture, when children learned to ride horses at two and men shot wooden bows with a pull weight of 160 pounds from horseback.

"Mongolia today is a humble, quiet, pastoral kind of place with a rich cultural tradition," said exhibit curator Levine.

"But its history reaches out like tentacles and touches everything. It touches Europe, it touches the Middle East, it touches Asia and everything in the news. The story of the Mongol empire can tie into almost everybody's history."

"GENGHIS KHAN." Museum exhibit. Denver Museum of Nature & Science, 2001 Colorado Blvd. **Today-Feb. 7.** 9 a.m.-5 p.m. \$11-\$20. 303-322-7009 or dmns.org

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