

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

«FROM 1D

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

John Wenzel: 303-954-1642
or jwenzel@denverpost.com



Volunteers walk through the Kublai Khan display at the Genghis Khan exhibit that opens today at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and includes more than 200 artifacts illustrating the 13th-century Mongol's influence. Kublai Khan was a grandson of Genghis Khan; in the room's center is a lacquered leather travel trunk from 1330s China. *Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post*

GENGHIS KHAN GETS A 21ST-CENTURY MAKEOVER

By John Wenzel *The Denver Post*

The greatest irony of Genghis Khan's legacy is not that his Mongolian people went from ruling the Eastern Hemisphere to inhabiting the most sparsely populated nation on Earth. Rather, it's that Khan is remembered as a ruthless, primitive warlord.

For all his cruelty, the 13th-century adventurer was also shockingly open-minded when it came to religion, culture and commerce. A brilliant strategist and gifted statesman, he brought stability, unity and innovation to his people.

"If you look at all the other world conquerors in history, many of them are claiming divine right or spreading religion," said Marc Levine, curator of the "Genghis Khan" exhibit at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. "What surprised me was that Genghis Kahn was tolerant of other religions and a patron of commerce and trade."

The improbable highs and brutal lows of Khan's empire will be on display when the museum debuts "Genghis Khan" today. The interactive exhibit, adapted from one at the Houston Museum of Natu-

GENGHIS » 20D



A Jamsran Tsam mask, on view as part of the Genghis Khan exhibit, pays tribute to a protective warrior god who wards off evil with an eye on the past, present and future.

Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post