**World History**

**Primary sources about the Mongolians: Women and the Pastoral Life**

***Two European travelers to lands controlled by the Mongols in Central Asia leave us their documented observations. Both contain impressions about the lives of Mongol women, who at the time had more rights in Mongolia than in China, Europe, or many other cultures. Giovanni DiPlano visited the Mongols between 1245-1247 at Pope Innocent IV's command. He is credited with being the first European to produce a firsthand report about the Mongols. Marco Polo (1254-1324) was a keen observer of the lives of the women in his detailed account of Mongol life on the steppes in chapter 47 of his book, “Il Milione,” or “The Travels of Marco Polo.”***

**Giovanni DiPlano Carpini:** “Girls and women ride and gallop as skillfully as men. We even saw them carrying quivers and bows, and the women can ride horses for as long as the men; they have shorter stirrups, handle horses very well, and mind all the property. The Tartar (commonly used term for Mongols) women make everything: skin clothes, shoes, leggings, and everything made of leather. They drive carts and repair them, they load camels, and are quick and vigorous in all their tasks. They all wear trousers, and some of them shoot just like men."

**Marco Polo:***“Chapter 47: Of the wandering life of the Tartars--of their domestic manners, their food, and the virtue and useful qualities of their women.* “...Now that I have begun speaking of the Tartars, I will tell you more about them. The Tartars never remain fixed, but as the winter approaches remove to the plains of a warmer region, to find sufficient pasture for their cattle; and in summer they frequent cold areas in the mountains, where there is water and verdure, and their cattle are free from the annoyance of horse- flies and other biting insects. During two or three months they go progressively higher and seek fresh pasture, the grass not being adequate in any one place to feed the multitudes of which their herds and flocks consist. Their huts or tents are formed of rods covered with felt, exactly round, and nicely put together, so they can gather them into one bundle, and make them up as packages, which they carry along with them in their migrations upon a sort of car with four wheels. When they have occasion to set them up again, they always make the entrance front to the south. Besides these cars they have a superior kind of vehicle upon two wheels, also covered with black felt so well that they protect those within it from wet during a whole day of rain. These are drawn by oxen and camels, and convey their wives and children, their utensils, and whatever provisions they require.

The women attend to their trading concerns, buy and sell, and provide everything necessary for their husbands and their families; the time of the men is devoted entirely to hunting, hawking, and matters that relate to the military life....Their women are not excelled in the world for chastity and decency of conduct, nor for love and duty to their husbands. Infidelity to the marriage bed is regarded by them as a vice not merely dishonorable, but of the most infamous nature; while on the other hand it is admirable to observe the loyalty of the husbands towards their wives, amongst whom, although there are perhaps ten or twenty, there prevails a highly laudable degree of quiet and union. No offensive language is ever heard, their attention being fully occupied with their traffic (as already mentioned) and their several domestic employments, such as the provision of necessary food for the family, the management of the servants, and the care of the children, a common concern. And the virtues of modesty and chastity in the wives are more praiseworthy because the men are allowed the indulgence of taking as many as they choose. Their expense to the husband is not great, and on the other hand the benefit he derives from their trading, and from the occupations in which they are constantly engaged, is considerable; on which account when he receives a young woman in marriage, he pays a dower to her parent. The wife who is the first espoused has the privilege of superior attention, and is held to be the most legitimate, which extends also to the children borne by her. In consequence of this unlimited number of wives, the offspring is more numerous than amongst any other people. Upon the death of the father, the son may take to himself the wives he leaves behind, with the exception of his own mother. They cannot take their sisters to wife, but upon the death of their brothers they can marry their sisters-in-law. Every marriage is solemnized with great ceremony.”

*from* [*http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/silk-road-114.html*](http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/silk-road-114.html)