



LOST STORIES

KHUTULUN

DAUGHTER OF THE MONGOLIAN
EMPIRE

THE PROJECT

LOGLINE:

In a **fantastical-but-true** story censored from historical records—in a time where the sons of Genghis Khan have drunk away his empire and broken into warring factions—one of his female descendants, **Princess Khutulun**, must use her military cunning, athletic prowess, and ruthless ambition to fight for her own hand in marriage, to **lead her father's army**, and to defend her clan in battle.

OVERVIEW:

The film, *Khutulun: Daughter of the Mongolian Empire*, is a 2D animated short film that uses a mix of rigged 2D animation, paper cutouts, and stop motion shadow puppetry to tell the true story of a woman whose story was deliberately taken out of historical records.

The film takes the intense emotions and high stakes of *Blue Eye Samurai* and combines it with the tactile artistry of *the Adventures of Prince Achmed* and *the Girl Who Cried Pearls*.

History is filled with women whose lives and actions had massive impacts on the world, but whose names have been largely forgotten.

Not lost in the fog of the distant past, but **deliberately and selectively struck from records**. The pharaoh Hatshepsut's name was chiseled away from temple walls on the orders of her nephew—Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings were attributed to her father after her death—and passages relating to the inheritance of Genghis Khan's daughters were *physically cut* from scrolls a hundred years after the ink had set.

By shining a light—*literally* by shining a light onto paper puppets—this film seeks to restore one of these forgotten women to her place in history. The surviving tidbits about Khutulun's life reveal a tantalizing story of a woman who was arrogant *but rightly so*. Her athletic skill in archery, wrestling, and horseback riding have become the stuff of legend.

In this dramatization, her **ambition and pride** is put to the test when she decides to wager her hand in marriage to any man who can defeat her at *Bökh*—Mongolian wrestling. By defeating her suitors and by collecting the horses they wagered against her, she builds up an army of 10,000 horses which she rides into battle against her clan's enemies.

Thematically, it's about knowing your worth, ignoring what other people expect of you, and **taking a risk for something you believe in**. It's got courtly intrigue, jealousy, attacking armies, a warrior princess...and lots and *lots* of Mongolian throat singing.

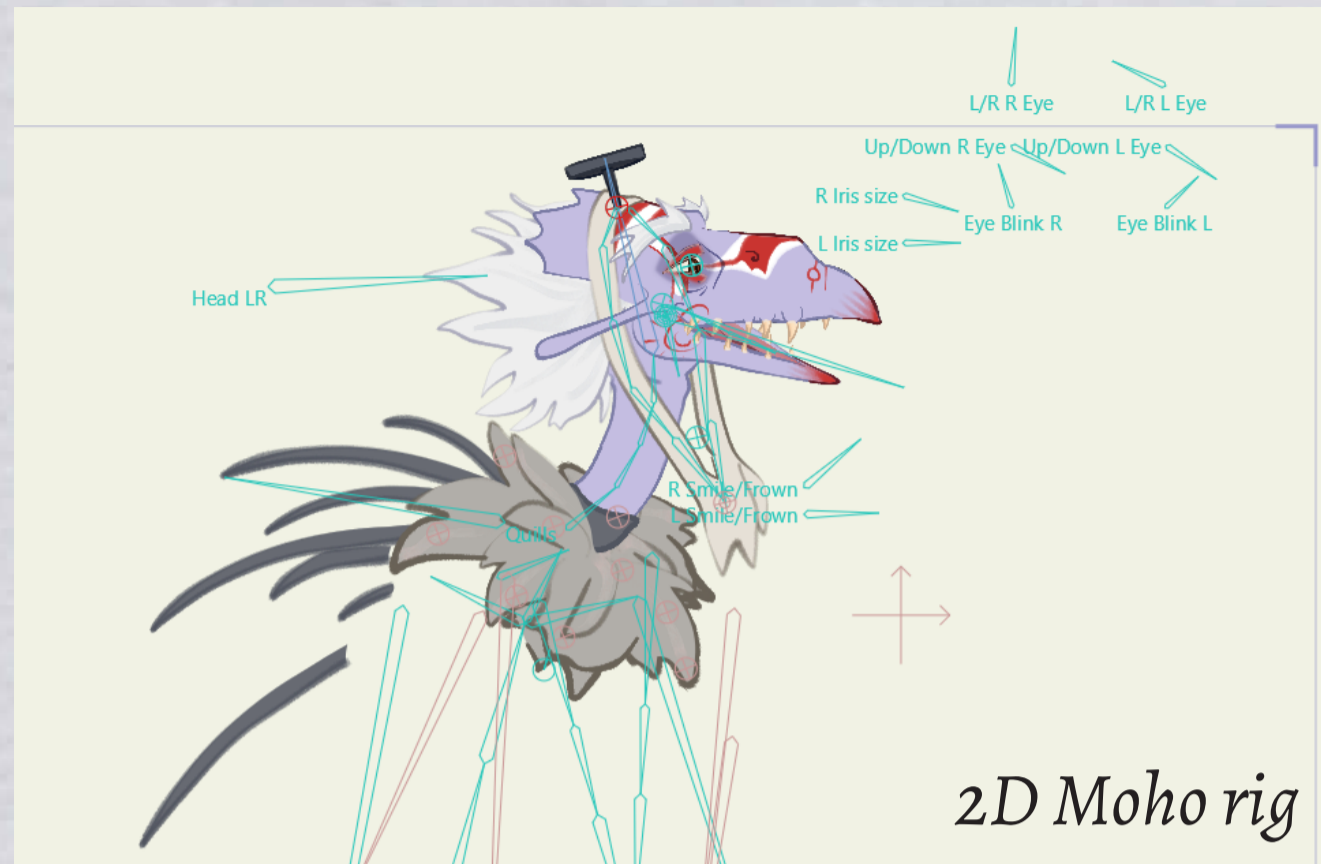
FORMAT

Genre: Historical drama

Audience: Young Adult, TV-14

Runtime: 12 minutes

Medium: Paper cutout animation & shadow puppetry



2D Moho rig



Animation frames cut out with a Cricut



Environment illustration layers



Proof of concept



ANIMATION METHODS

SHADOW PUPPETRY AND 2D RIGS:

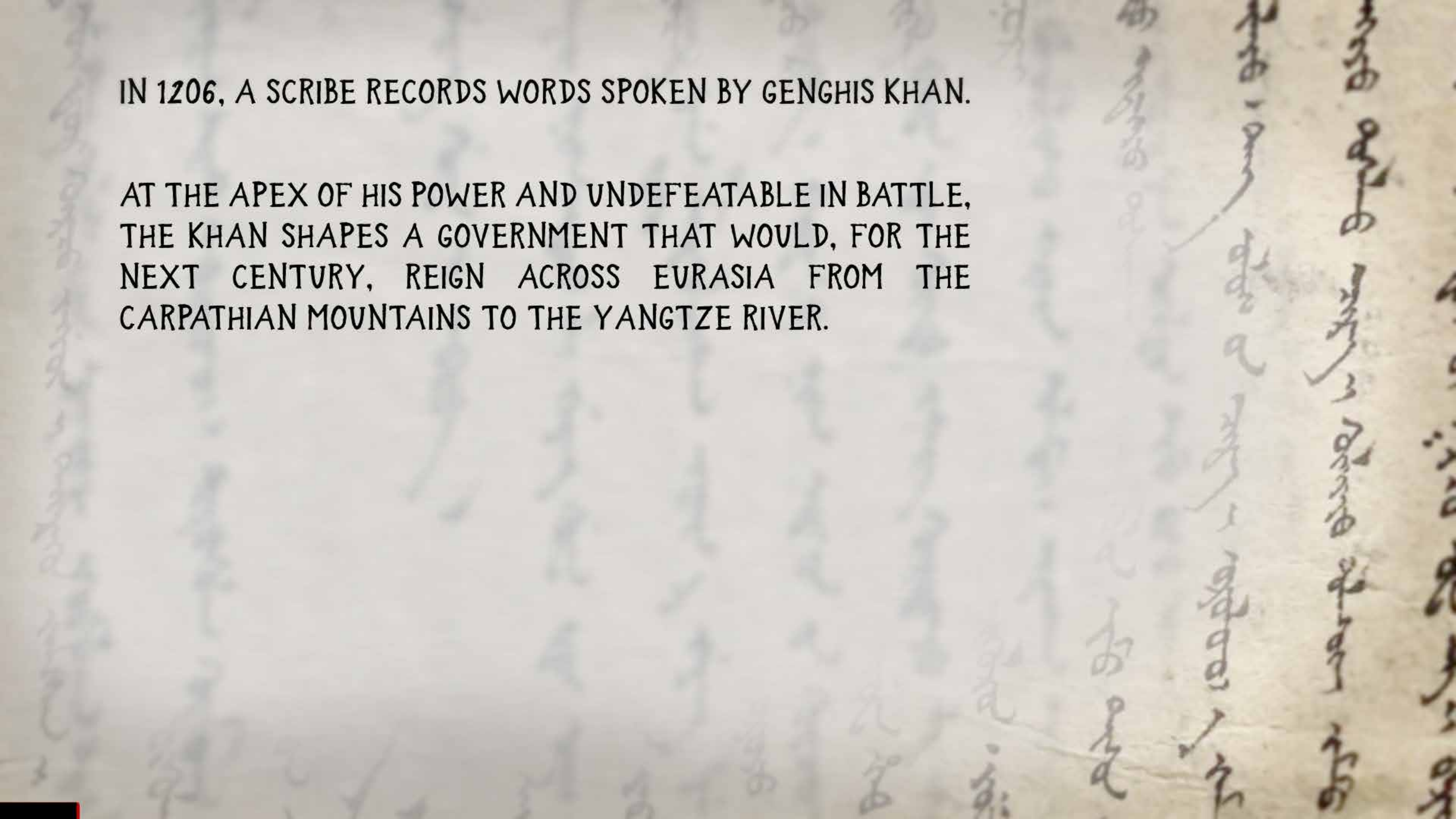
I created an animation test as a proof of concept for this project! The test was made with a character rig I had previously created in Moho—not a character for *Khutulun*, but used to demonstrate my method.

I rigged and animated the 2D character in Moho, then exported the frames of the character animation which I then printed and cut out using a Cricut Maker 4. The environment illustration was also drawn digitally before being cut on the Cricut, and the whole scene was illuminated on a makeshift multi-plane camera with sheets of vellum and glass providing atmosphere. By doing this, I took a digital animation and transferred it into a stop-motion format with shadow puppetry!

THE STORY

IN 1206, A SCRIBE RECORDS WORDS SPOKEN BY GENGHIS KHAN.

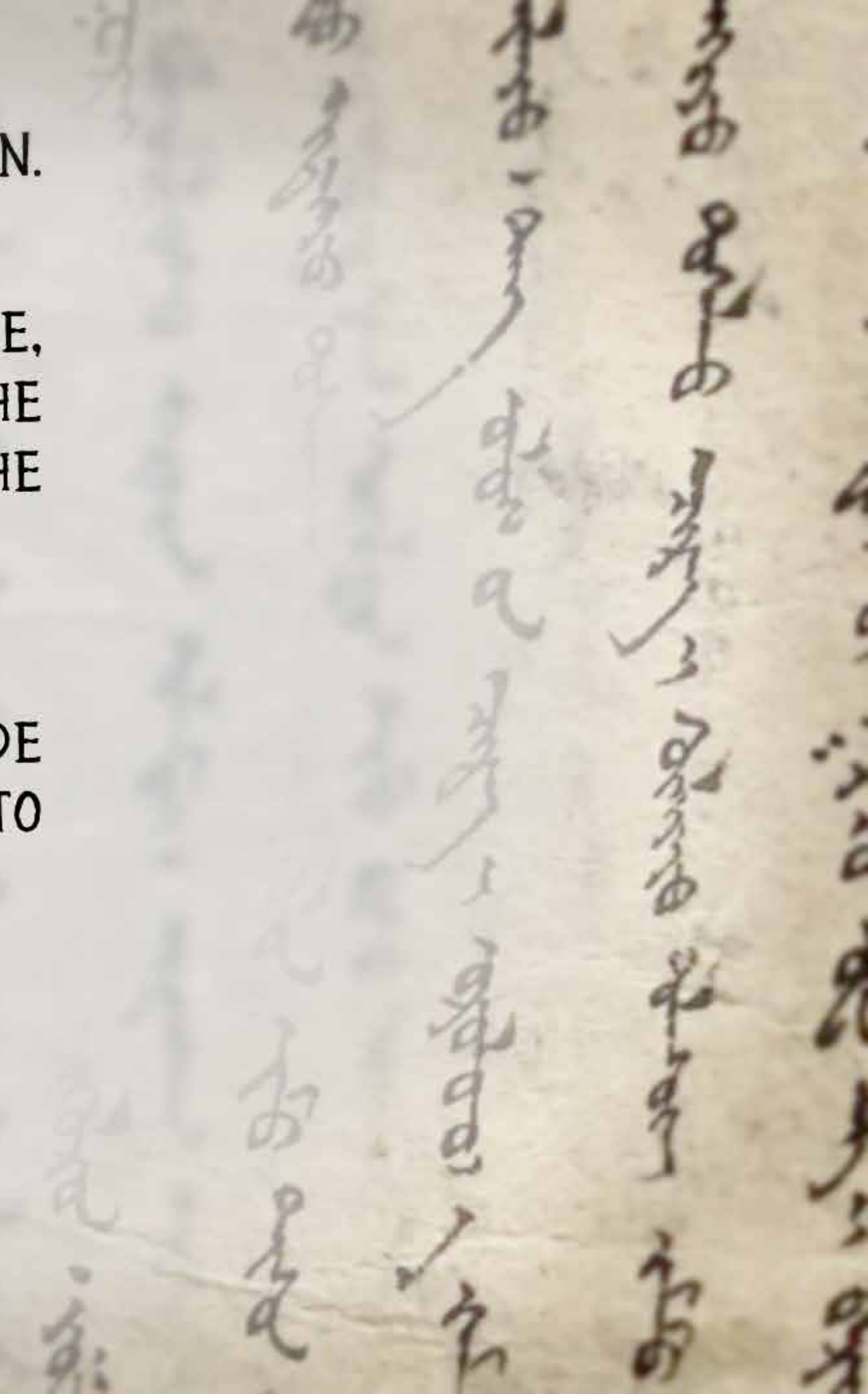
AT THE APEX OF HIS POWER AND UNDEFEATABLE IN BATTLE,
THE KHAN SHAPES A GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD, FOR THE
NEXT CENTURY, REIGN ACROSS EURASIA FROM THE
CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS TO THE YANGTZE RIVER.



IN 1206, A SCRIBE RECORDS WORDS SPOKEN BY GENGHIS KHAN.

AT THE APEX OF HIS POWER AND UNDEFEATABLE IN BATTLE,
THE KHAN SHAPES A GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD, FOR THE
NEXT CENTURY, REIGN ACROSS EURASIA FROM THE
CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS TO THE YANGTZE RIVER.

HIS WORDS, DOCUMENTED AND LOCKED LIKE GOLD INSIDE
TREASURIES THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT GAVE SHAPE TO
THE LEGENDARY MONGOLIAN EMPIRE.

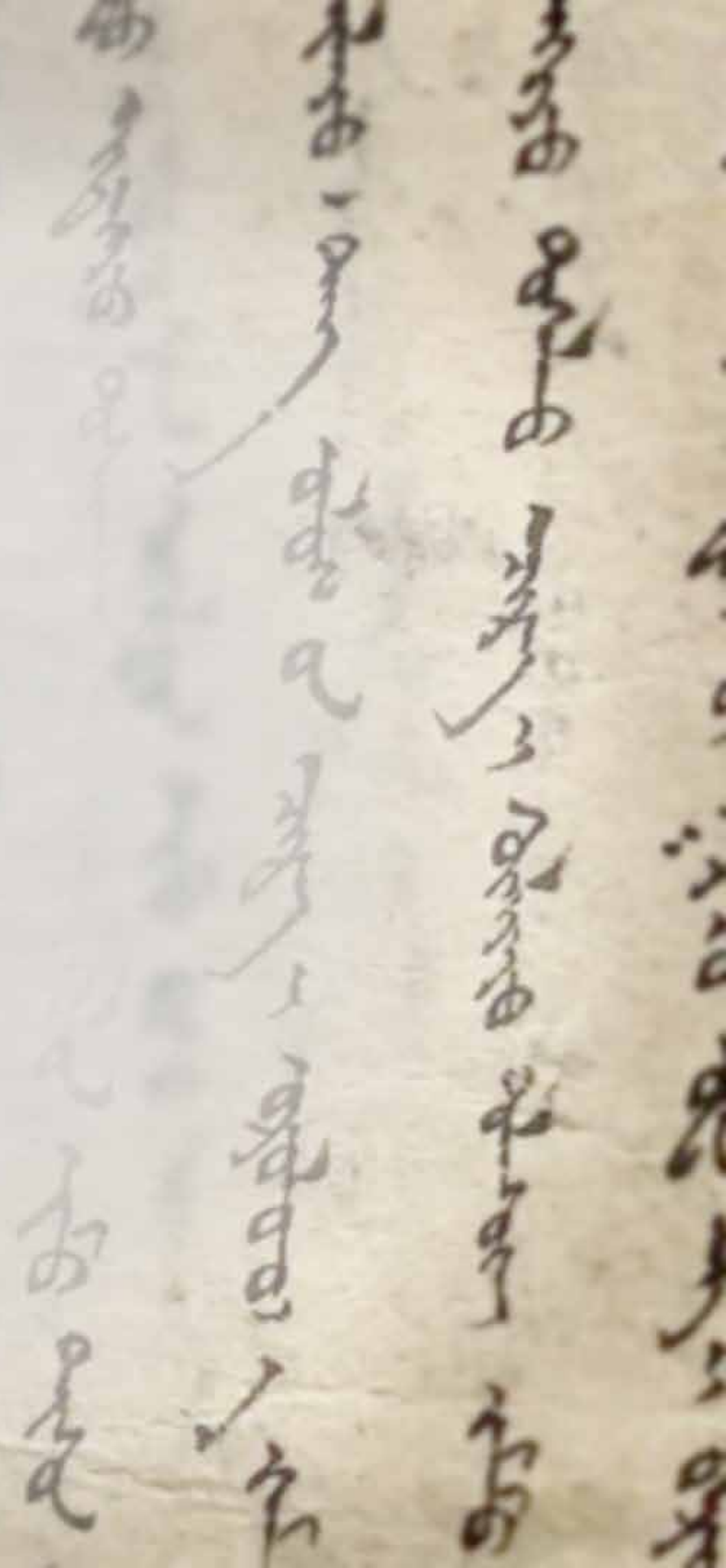


IN 1206, A SCRIBE RECORDS WORDS SPOKEN BY GENGHIS KHAN.

AT THE APEX OF HIS POWER AND UNDEFEATABLE IN BATTLE,
THE KHAN SHAPES A GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD, FOR THE
NEXT CENTURY, REIGN ACROSS EURASIA FROM THE
CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS TO THE YANGTZE RIVER.

HIS WORDS, DOCUMENTED AND LOCKED LIKE GOLD INSIDE
TREASURIES THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT GAVE SHAPE TO
THE LEGENDARY MONGOLIAN EMPIRE.

BUT OVER HUNDRED YEARS LATER, A PIECE WAS CUT AWAY.
IN ITS PLACE, THE CENSOR LEFT A SINGLE SHORT SENTENCE:



"LET US REWARD OUR FEMALE OFFSPRING."

IN THE PRECEDING SECTION,
GENGHIS KHAN HAD APPOINTED
HIS SONS WITH TITLES AND
VAST TERRITORIES.



Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a historical document or manuscript, written in a language that appears to be Persian or Arabic. The text is arranged in vertical columns, reading from right to left. The script is dense and fills the right half of the page.

IN THE PRECEDING SECTION,
GENGHIS KHAN HAD APPOINTED
HIS SONS WITH TITLES AND
VAST TERRITORIES.

THIS SOLIDIFIED THE MONGOL
EMPIRE INTO THE PAGES OF
HISTORY.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Persian or Arabic, covering the right side of the page. The text is arranged in vertical columns, reading from right to left. It appears to be a continuation of the historical narrative mentioned in the printed text on the left.



IN THE PRECEDING SECTION,
GENGHIS KHAN HAD APPOINTED
HIS SONS WITH TITLES AND
VAST TERRITORIES.

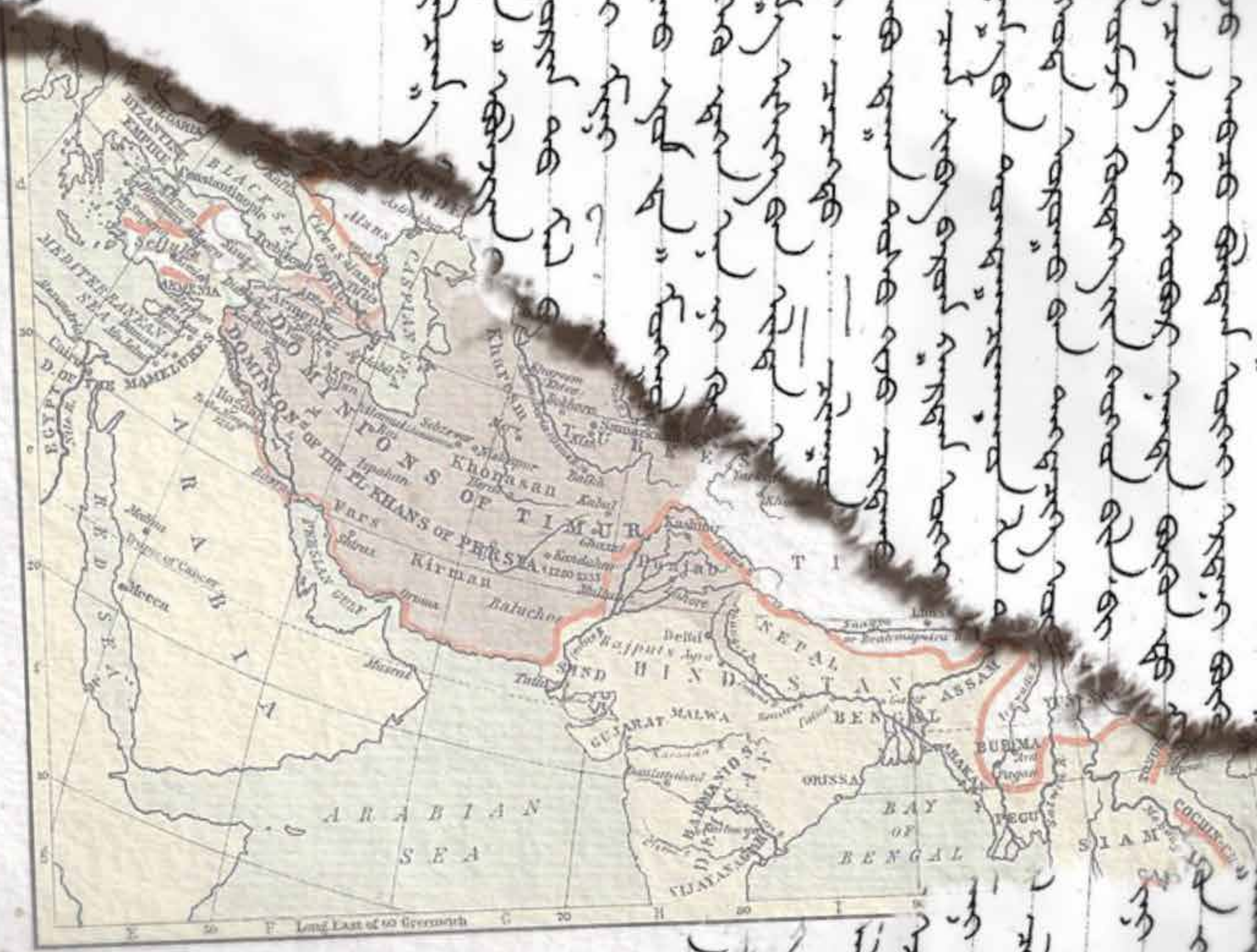
THIS SOLIDIFIED THE MONGOL
EMPIRE INTO THE PAGES OF
HISTORY.

BUT ONCE THE KHAN TURNED
TO ANNOUNCE THE REWARDS
FOR HIS DAUGHTERS..

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Persian or Arabic, covering the right side of the page. The text is written in black ink on a light-colored background. It appears to be a continuation of the text on the left, but the specific content is difficult to decipher due to the cursive style and the presence of a large, faint watermark in the background.

IN THE PRECEDING SECTION,
...HAD APPOINTED

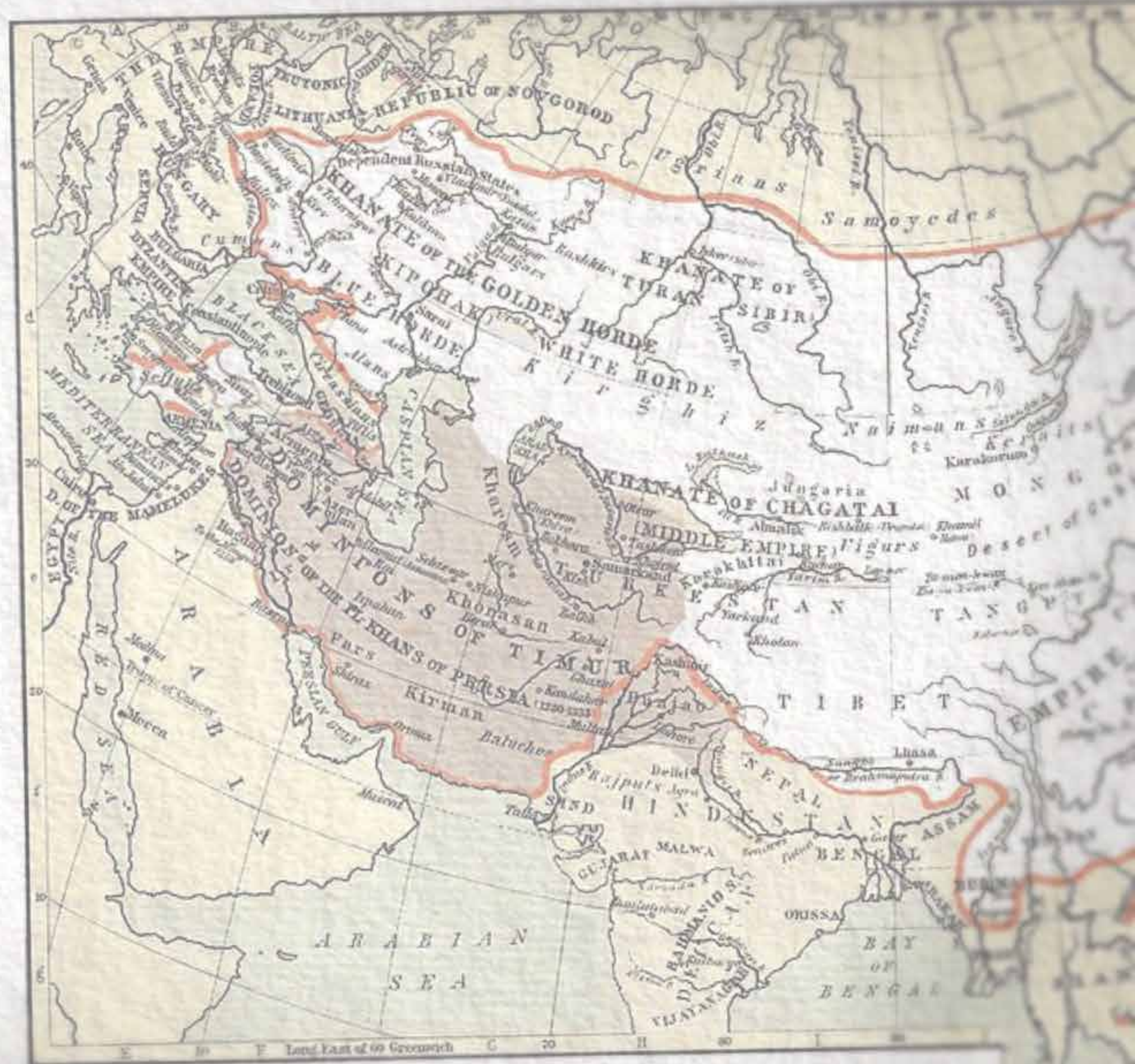
...HIS WORDS WERE STRUCK
FROM THE RECORD.



Handwritten text in Arabic script, written vertically in columns, covering the right side of the page. The text is partially obscured by the tear in the paper.

THE KHAN'S SONS, WHOSE NAMES AND STORIES ARE WELL-DOCUMENTED, PROVED TO BE EXCEPTIONAL AT DRINKING.

THEY WERE MEDIOCRE FIGHTERS. AND POOR AT JUST ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE.

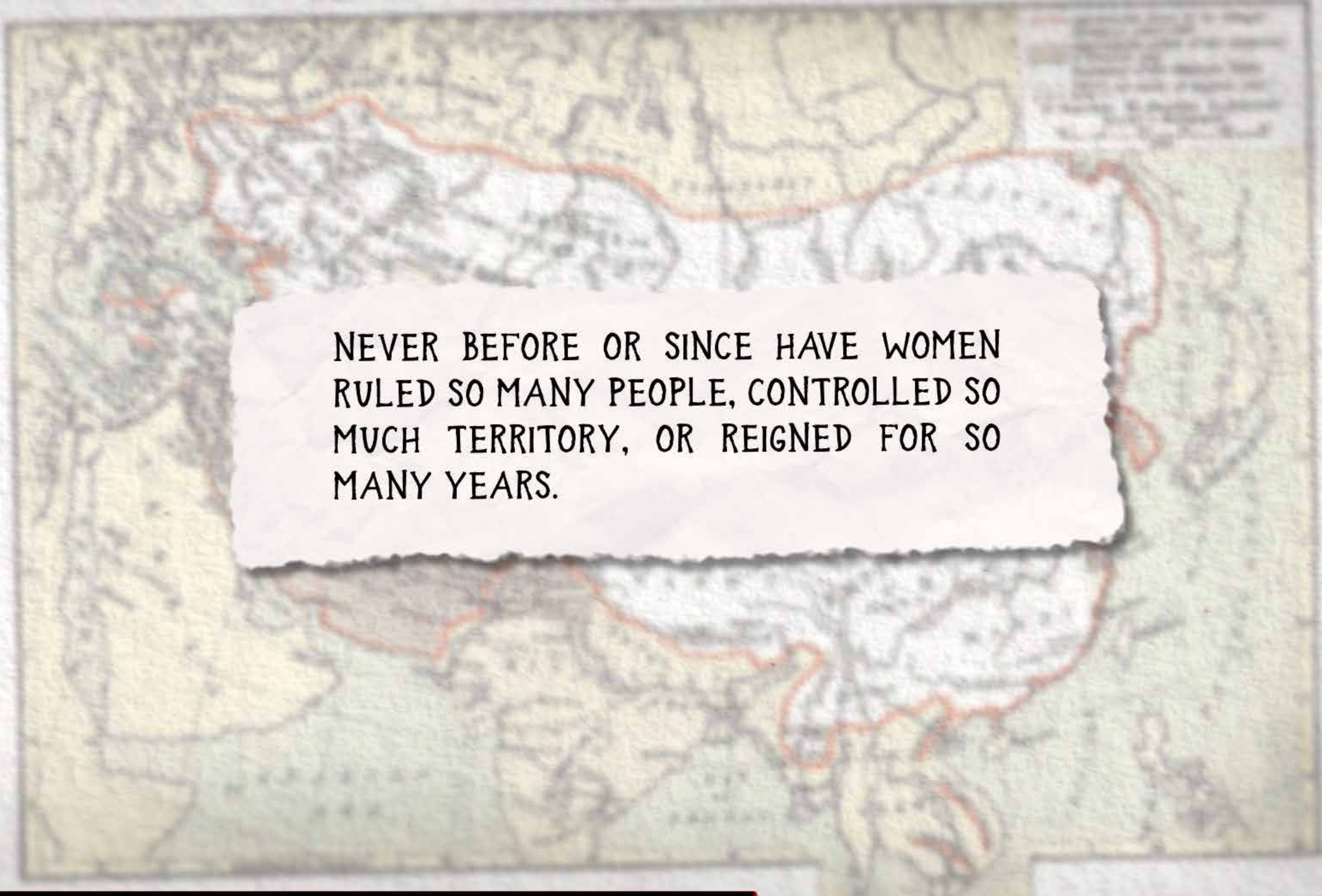


THE KHAN'S SONS, WHOSE NAMES AND STORIES ARE WELL-DOCUMENTED, PROVED TO BE EXCEPTIONAL AT DRINKING.

THEY WERE MEDIOCRE FIGHTERS. AND POOR AT JUST ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE.

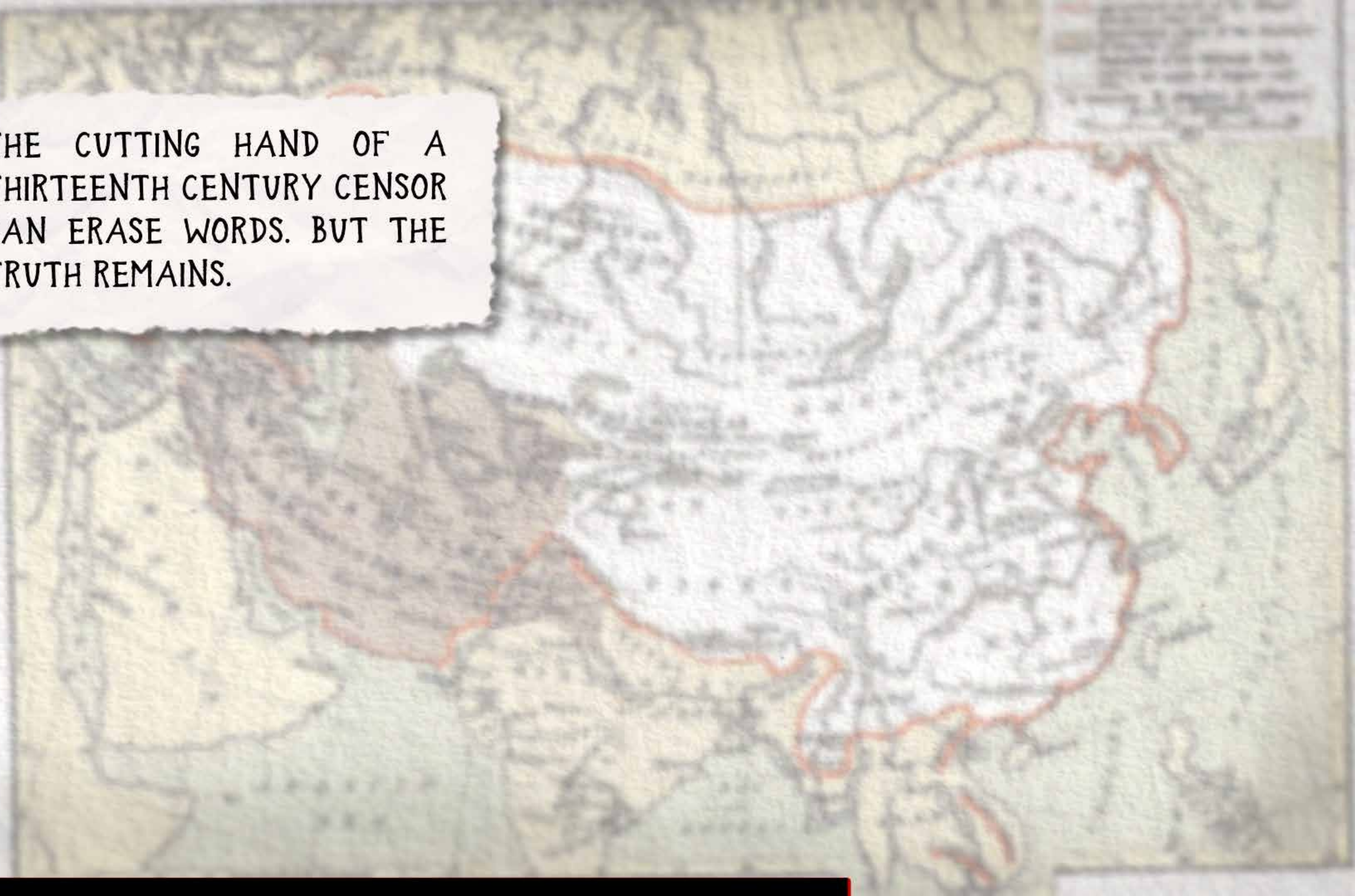
SO, THE MOST STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE EMPIRE WERE ENTRUSTED TO HIS DAUGHTERS.





NEVER BEFORE OR SINCE HAVE WOMEN
RULED SO MANY PEOPLE, CONTROLLED SO
MUCH TERRITORY, OR REIGNED FOR SO
MANY YEARS.

THE CUTTING HAND OF A
THIRTEENTH CENTURY CENSOR
CAN ERASE WORDS. BUT THE
TRUTH REMAINS.



THE CUTTING HAND OF A
THIRTEENTH CENTURY CENSOR
CAN ERASE WORDS. BUT THE
TRUTH REMAINS.

FACTS, UNLIKE INK, CAN'T BE ALTERED.

THEY'RE IN CHAUCER'S RHYMES, PUCCINI'S
OPERAS, AND CARVED INTO THE STONE
OF CONFUSION TEMPLES.

[The background consists of a page of handwritten text in a cursive script, which is mostly illegible due to blurring and the presence of the sticker.]

CUTTING OUT A PIECE OF A
DOCUMENT MERELY LEAVES AN
OUTLINE OF WHAT WAS TAKEN.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Arabic or Persian, arranged in vertical columns. The text is partially obscured by a large, irregular white cutout on the left side of the page. The script is dense and flowing, with many small loops and flourishes. The paper is aged and shows signs of wear, including creases and discoloration.



KHU

UGHTER OF THE MONGO
EMPIRE



• LOST STORIES

• KHUTULU

• DAUGHTER OF THE MONGOLIAN
EMPIRE

A SILHOVETTE OF THE MISSING PIECE.



• LOST STORIES

• KHUTULUN

• DAUGHTER OF THE MONGOLIAN
EMPIRE

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE

This is the story of a woman who, like countless others, has been overlooked and erased from historical record. But despite efforts to downplay women's contributions to society, she made her mark on history.

*After Genghis Khan's death, his empire began to **fracture into four warring khanates**. To the east, the Yuan Dynasty. To the west, the Golden Horde. The Ilkhanate encompasses the southern coast of the continent. **And boxed between them**, in the center of the steppe, is the Chagatai Khanate. In this central khanate, the great grandsons of Genghis Khan—Qaidu Khan of the Chagatai Khanate and Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty—fight for control over the empire.*

PLOT

In the vast plains of steppe, Princess Khutulun arrives at a lonely *ger*—a yurt—and dismounts her horse. She brushes past her father's guards and enters the *ger*. Inside, Qaidu Khan is deep in discussion with **Batu, an envoy of Kublai Khan's army**. Batu espouses the virtues of his clan to Qaidu and attempts to strike a deal with him—powerful appointments, luxurious goods, all in exchange for his vow of loyalty.

Khutulun scoffs at the offer, surprising Batu, who had not expected her to speak. He insults her, saying that she should keep to her sewing and worse, *insults her father* for taking council from his daughter when he has a dozen sons laying about. Khutulun lays into him—**Batu may see his clan as the true successors to Genghis Kahn's empire, but he's lost touch with the ways of their people**. He lives in a castle. Only uses

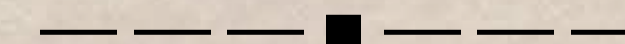
a *ger* when he's on a hunting expedition. And, she says, his horse isn't even properly trained. Their argument breaks into a full-on fight, and protecting her father, Khutulun drives Batu out of their *ger*, but he is able to escape—not very gracefully—on the back of his clumsy horse.

As he rides off, he tells her that he is like a hawk. He will lay waste to her clan and capture her as a trophy for Kublai Khan and bring her to him like a hawk delivers its prey.

He will be back with an army tenfold the size of Qaidu's. Turning to her father, Khutulun stresses the importance to her father of mustering more men and horses for their army. Qaidu asks her how she intends to get all these horses.



A gaggle of suitors ride towards Qaidu Khan's camp, gossiping and boasting amongst themselves. Princess Khutulun has **wagered her hand in marriage to any man who can defeat her at Bökh—Mongolian wrestling**. The suitors must merely put up a wager against her—100 horses each, which they bring with them as they approach the camp.



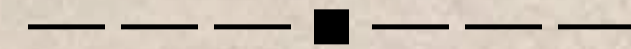
When Khutulun steps onto the field where the crowd has gathered to watch the match, she towers over the first suitor. Very sporting, they shake hands before their match...where Khutulun knocks her first suitor down in mere seconds.

The rules of *Bökh* are straightforward. Only the fighter's feet can touch

SYNOPSIS

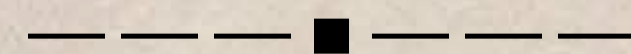
the ground—once any other part of their body makes contact with the ground, the match is over. No striking, no choking, no weight classes, no time limits.

Khutulun quickly dispatches her first round of suitors while **the crowd cheers and sings for her**. A few hundred horses richer, she basks in her victory. Turning, she sees an army of horses riding towards her. Is this the incoming army of Kublai Khan? No—more suitors. Lots more.



Now worn down from her string of matches, Khutulun stops to catch her breath. Her father, the Khan, tells her not to push herself. He opens the curtain of his *ger*, showing her that she has another suitor waiting outside. This one, from the Ilkhanate is also of royal blood, and has brought 500 horses for her—more than a suitable match for her. Khutulun realizes that **her father is asking her to throw the match**.

While Khutulun has fought and won him an army of horses, Kublai Khan's army draws near. But she could leave, go to the Ilkhanate as a bride and be safe.

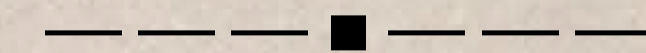


As she faces her new opponent, Khutulun sizes him up. Now, instead of the crowd cheering for Khutulun's victory, **they cheer for her suitor—wishing for her marriage**. They shake hands and exchange words. He tells her that she will be well taken care of in Iran and that he'd be honored to have her for a wife. She says she'll consider it and they both laugh as the match commences.

They tousele and Khutulun whispers that he's a strong fighter. But she's an even better military commander than she is a wrestler. She doesn't want to live in an Iranian palace any more than a Chinese one. With a swift kick, she sweeps her suitor's legs from under him and

he hits the ground.

Looking past him and towards her father in the crowd, she proclaims that her place is by her father's side here in the Chagatai Khanate. She won't leave him to face Kublai Khan's army. She vows to defend her homeland.



Batu leads Kublai Khan's army towards Khutulun's camp. In the distance, he sees her. She sits atop her horse waiting for him at the crest of a hill. Batu calls out to her, taunting her.

She raises her bow and takes out the soldiers on either side of him. At her signal, 1000s of men ride behind her and clash with the enemy horde. Khutulun leads the charge into battle, tearing through her enemies as Batu retreats from the front. She laughs as he goes.

Qaidu Khan rides up beside his daughter and tells her that she will make an excellent Khan someday. She insists that

SYNOPSIS

one of her many brothers should take the mantle. Not because she can't do it, but because she prefers to lead the military on the battlefield—not to sit in court all day.

Qaidu tells her that **she's brought him victory like a hawk brings a rabbit.** Khutulun replies, "let me bring you something else." Indeed, like a hawk, Khutulun rides into the enemy's ranks until she catches up to Batu. But rather than killing him with her arrows, she grabs him off his horse and brings him to her father.

As she looms over Batu, and having proven that she is the embodiment of Mongolian ideals, the paper screen of the film is torn away.

EPILOGUE

*Although Khutulun's story was nearly cut away from the historical record, her actions...and the actions of other women like her...were real. Their impacts on history and culture are tangible and they did shape the world we live in today. **Even if the facts have been forgotten and names lost to time, the truth remains the same.***

Facts, unlike ink, can't be altered.

PROJECT GOALS

DEMONSTRATION OF SKILL

As an early-career animator, I am looking for opportunities to showcase my own design and storytelling sensibilities that make my work unique. This project will demonstrate that I am capable of directing and can be trusted with larger projects and IP. This short could also serve as a part of a larger series on historical women.

DOCUMENTATION OF PROCESS

Because the medium of the film—using a combination of 2D rigs and stop-motion—has a strong emphasis on handmade elements, it could also be a great chance to highlight the artistry that goes into animation. Recording and posting about the progress of the film would honor LAIKA's reputation for the craft as well as building up audience engagement.

DIRECTION AND CONNECTION

By attending and participating in film festivals, I would have a chance to build up my network among other filmmakers. As of now, I am in a bit of a geographic bubble, so getting face-to-face with people in the industry is something that I can't do without this program.

THE ARTIST

ABOUT ME

I've had a lifelong passion for storytelling and stylized animation. I studied storyboarding and animation, earning my Masters from Savannah College of Art and Design in 2021. Since entering the industry, my work has been featured on NOVA and the Discovery Channel, among others. Currently, I'm working on graphics and simulations to help train the next generation of medical doctors.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Women in Animation | Mentorship Circle Programs

Adapting IP & Creating Your Own with Hanna Armour | Summer 2026

Design & Story For Visual Development with Vicki Pui | Spring 2024

Coca-Cola Refreshing Films | Grand Prize Winner

"*Let Loose*" | July 2020

Disney Imaginations Design Competition | Semifinalist

"*Traveler's Bay*" | December 2019

MY ETHOS

Last year, I saw a screening of *the Adventures of Prince Achmed* in DC accompanied by a live orchestra followed the next weekend by a live Persian shadow puppetry show called *Song of the North*. (Fueled by my obsession with *the Dark Crystal*, I had been on a bit of a puppetry binge.) While in the theaters for both these performances, I kept thinking to myself that there is an intersection of puppetry and animation that is still relatively untapped. (Not in 3D, but in 2D.) When Lotte Reiniger pioneered paper silhouette animation in *Prince Achmed*, could she have imagined that artists would have access to a tool like a Cricut or a laser cutter?

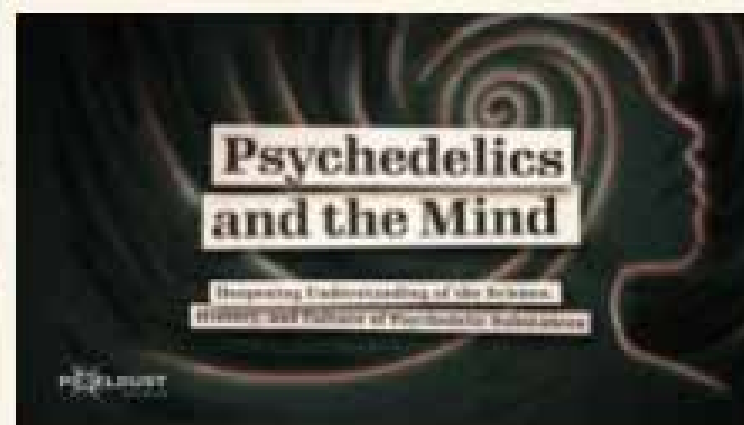
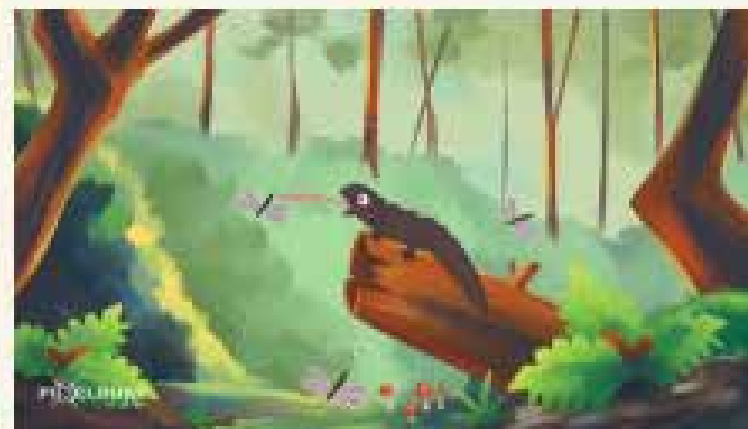
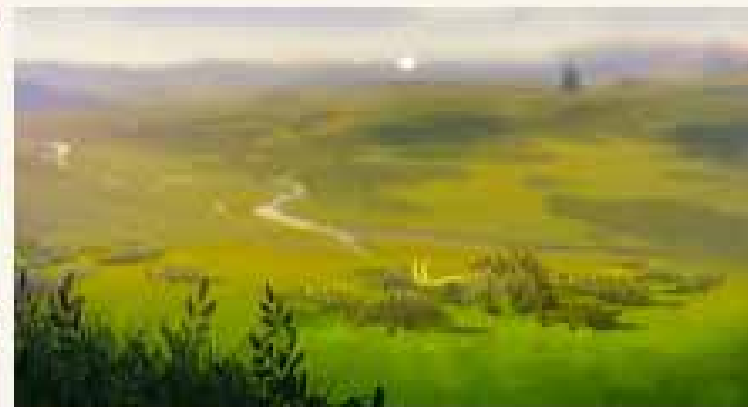
Even since childhood, I've had two consistent passions. One is for animation, and one is for "girl power," which I would later find out is called "feminism." While other kids did their science fair projects on Thomas Edison's lightbulb or the invention of the steam engine, I researched Walt Disney's multi-plane camera. But I wanted to know how female artists have contributed to the medium that I love and to use my own skills to highlight their work.

My ideal project allows me to use the medium of animation to both showcase my own directorial vision while also giving audiences a chance to explore topics relating to women's rights.

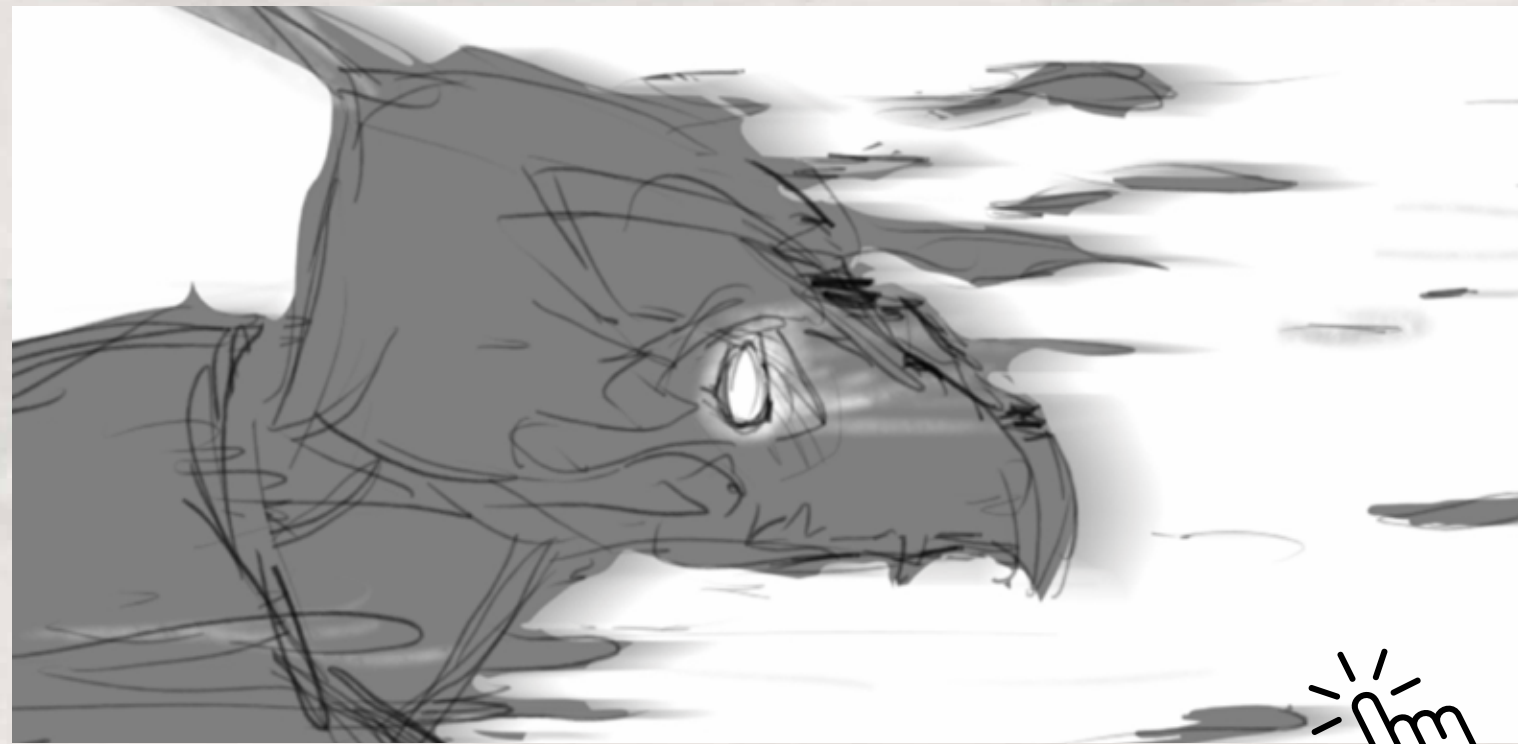
I want to make films that are insightful and creative but also fun! Animation is entertainment, not therapy. Watching complex female characters navigate the social pressures and stigmas of the world is simply more fun if there are also battles to watch and music to listen to.

This film takes everything I love—animation, puppetry, Mongolian music—and puts it all together into one unique if maybe unconventional package.

PREVIOUS WORK | GALLERY



PREVIOUS WORK | FILMS



VISIONS OF THRA

After he receives a prophetic vision of the world's destruction at his own hands, the fearsome warlord—skekGra, the Conqueror—must put his long and sordid past behind him, restore balance to the world of Thra...and find love while doing it!

To hone my storytelling ability and to practice pitching, I decided to create a “mock pitch” for an animated miniseries based off of *the Dark Crystal*.

Developing the story arc and characters over the course of a 9-episode season has pushed me to think bigger and to follow my own artistic sensibilities rather than trying to make something that my clients will like. I'm very proud of the result and hope to continue working on it!



SPECIMEN 7

When an aquatic creature sees an astronaut on a scientific expedition, it thinks it's found a new friend—but taken away from its home planet, the creature recons with the fact that it will surely die in captivity.

This was my Masters thesis film—stylized 3D characters with 2D environment assets. This short film was made almost entirely on my own during COVID shutdowns.

Through necessity, this film got me familiar with animation tools and workflows that I had never learned before—rigging, compositing, 3D character performance, texturing, you name it.



PLEASANT GROVE

A gardener discovers a troublesome turnip spirit hiding in her garden, but as she tries to shoo it away, she learns that it is the spirit of the forest—displaced by humans.

In grad school, I pitched a short film that was selected for production. My team of 20 students had 10 weeks to complete the 2D/3D hybrid project from the day of the pitch to the final screening of the film.

It was my first chance at directing a film, although I had worked on storyboards and previz for other projects. More than just learning how to make a short film, I also discovered how to manage a team and when to trust other artists to execute and improve the initial vision.

THANK YOU!