

Between Roman and Chinese Legions

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My family has married me off to the ends of the earth,
To live far away in the alien land of the Ásvin king.
A yurt is my dwelling, of felt are my walls;
For food I have meat, with koumiss to drink.
I'm always homesick and inside my heart aches;
I wish I were a yellow swan and could fly back home.

—Princess Hsi-chün of Han

The First Regional Empire Period in Eurasia

The central period of Classical Antiquity, from the third century BC to the third century AD, was marked most notably by the development of the Roman and Chinese empires. Agricultural, partly urbanized cultures, they expanded to great size until they dominated the western and eastern extremes of the Eurasian continent. Both expanded deep into Central Eurasia.

In the Western Steppe, the Sarmatians, the successors of the Scythians, gave way to their Iranian relatives, the Alans. In Western Central Asia, the migrating Tokharian confederation conquered the Greek state in Bactria, from which the Kushan Empire emerged and extended from Central Asia into northern India. Meanwhile, the new Persian Empire of the Parthians spread westward as far as the Greek city-states and contested the Near East with the Romans. The Tokharians' old enemies, the Hsiung-nu, continued to dominate the Eastern Steppe until they divided into northern and southern halves. With Chinese help, the southern half destroyed the north and left the Eastern Steppe open to the Mongolic confederation of the Hsien-pei, who moved in from the mountains of western Manchuria and replaced the Hsiung-nu.

The volume of trade with Central Eurasia—the Silk Road—grew to such an extent that Roman and Chinese writers, who normally disdain to mention commerce, actually discuss it. But despite the trade, and a few long-distance diplomatic contacts, the Romans and Chinese remained far apart both geographically and culturally. They knew extremely little about each other or about the rest of the world beyond their immediate neighbors, in whom they were not very much interested either. Late in the period the movement of ideas along the trade routes, particularly the Buddhist and Christian faiths, had a great effect on both center and periphery.

The Roman Empire and Central Eurasia

The Roman realm had actually expanded to imperial extent well over a century before it is generally considered to have become an empire under the successors of Julius Caesar (d. 44 BC). By 100 BC the Romans already ruled Italy, southern Gaul, Greece, Anatolia, and much of North Africa and were expanding into Spain as well. With the conquest of both Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, which were Celtic-speaking territories, Rome had already begun successfully expanding into Central Eurasia long before Caesar's conquest of the rest of Gaul (by 56 BC). Caesar even raided Britain in 55 and 54 BC and attacked the Germans in Germania.¹ His conquests were unprovoked, purely imperialistic expansion, in which resistance—for example, that of the Veneti in northwestern Gaul—was “crushed ferociously, their leaders executed and the population sold into slavery.”²

After Julius Caesar, the Romans continued their attempts to subjugate the Germanic peoples on their northern and eastern borders. The nearer parts of Germania were subjugated, rebelled against the Romans, and were resubjugated repeatedly over the remaining centuries of the Western Roman Empire. However, some of the Germanic peoples living along the border were taken in as *foederati* ‘federates’ and served as auxiliaries on Roman campaigns against other Germanic peoples. In the process they were partly assimilated to Roman culture and eventually became more dedicated to the

¹ James (2001: 18–22). Britain was later largely conquered by his nominal great-grandson Claudius in AD 43.

² James (2001: 18).

survival of the Roman Empire than the increasingly decadent Romans themselves.

The first-century AD *Germania* by the Roman historian Tacitus gives the earliest detailed description of the Germanic peoples. In his account of their culture, he pays special attention to the *comitatus* and notes the existence of all of its essential elements: a large group of warriors permanently attached to a lord, who were supposed to die with him, so that leaving a battle alive after their chief had fallen resulted in permanent loss of honor and the status of, essentially, an outcast. Tacitus also notes the existence of “grades of rank” in the *comitatus* and the fact that maintaining one was extremely expensive: the members were “always making demands of their chief, asking for a coveted war-horse or a spear stained with the blood of a defeated enemy.”³

The long-lasting importance of the *comitatus* among the Germanic peoples is notable. In addition to its presence in early Francia, it still existed in Visigothic Spain as late as the eighth century and continued to be practiced in Scandinavia for several centuries more. One reason that some early medieval chronicle writers believed that the Franks were related to the Turks, and give historical and etymological explanations for this belief,⁴ is very likely that Franks had met Turks and the two peoples understood that their cultures were similar in some respects.

The Frankish king Childeric I (d. 481–482), the father of Clovis, was the son of Merovech (d. 456/457), the posthumously designated founder of the Merovingian Dynasty who fought with the Roman general Aetius against Attila the Hun in the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields.⁵ His tomb is similar to those of the eastern Germanic kings of the Danube region. He was buried with sumptuous, golden grave goods in a barrow chamber under a tumulus

³ Mattingly (1970: 113); cf. Hutton (1970: 152–153). See the discussion above in the prologue.

⁴ See Beckwith (forthcoming-a).

⁵ Scherman (1987: 102–103) notes that when most Franks had adopted the Roman fashion of short hair, members of the Merovingian royal family kept the old tradition of wearing their hair long and loose, and they took good care of it. The Turks and other Central Eurasians further to the east also wore their hair long, but (if later tradition reflects the earlier period correctly) in many braids. The earliest remark on the Turks in a Greek text is an uncomplimentary remark of Agathias (Keydell 1967: 13) on their hair—“unkempt, dry and dirty and tied up in an unsightly knot” (Frendo 1975: 11)—in comparison with the beautiful hair of the Frankish kings, which the Greek writer greatly admired. It seems French stylistic elegance has a long tradition.

measuring twenty by forty meters.⁶ At the perimeter of the tumulus are several burials of horses and men. Yet it is fairly certain that the Franks had been living along the northern border of the Roman Empire, serving as *foederati*, for a long time, and Childeric himself was buried with the symbol of a Roman governor of Belgium. The basic features of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex, including the *comitatus*, were thus found among the early Franks, but they were obviously not adopted from the Romans. So where did they come from?

The account of Tacitus and other early records reveal very clearly that the early Germanic peoples, including the ancestors of the Franks, belonged to the Central Eurasian Culture Complex, which they had maintained from Proto-Indo-European times, just as the Alans and other Central Asian Iranians of the time had done. This signifies in turn that ancient Germania was culturally a part of Central Eurasia and had been so ever since the Germanic migration there more than a millennium earlier.⁷

The Western Steppe

By the early first century AD, the Alans,⁸ an Iranian-speaking people related to the Sarmatians and Scythians, had occupied the crucial steppe lands along the Don to the northeast of the Sea of Azov and, according to Josephus (AD 37–100), attacked and plundered Media from there. By the second century AD the Alans dominated the Pontic and North Caucasus regions and were the dominant people on the Western Steppe zone up to the southeastern Roman frontier.⁹

The Romans attacked the remnant Sarmatians and the Alans from Dacia (approximately modern Romania), which the emperor Trajan (r. AD 98–117) conquered with much brutality in AD 107, garrisoned, and settled with

⁶ The cloisonné pieces are believed to be Byzantine in style. The tomb was discovered at Tournai, Belgium, in 1643 and has recently been reexcavated (Kazanski 2000). A photograph of one of the horse burials is available at http://www.ru.nl/ahc/vg/html/vg_000153.htm. Cf. Brulet (1997).

⁷ The problem of the date of the pre-Germanic migration into Europe has so far defied all attempts at solution, despite frequent declarations to the contrary. See chapter 1, and cf. the careful, balanced treatment by Adams (*EIEC* 218–223).

⁸ On their names and early history, see Golden (2006).

⁹ Melyukova (1990: 113).

Roman colonists. Of the Dacians, “Many were forced into slavery, some committed suicide, and the Romans killed many to set an example for the rest of the provinces to fall in line. Trajan killed 10,000 men just in his gladiatorial games.”¹⁰

Captive Alans were moved deep into the imperial domains in Roman Gaul, as far as Brittany, where they served in the Roman armies. They remained ethnically distinct for centuries, their descendants maintaining some steppe-Iranian traditions well after their linguistic assimilation, and they are thought to have had a significant influence on medieval European folklore.¹¹ Even fairly late into the Middle Ages, companies of mounted Alan archers are repeatedly noted for their exceptional effectiveness against all enemy forces.

In the second and third centuries AD, the Goths (Gothones), an East Germanic nation that in the time of Tacitus occupied the Baltic Sea around the Vistula River, expanded southward and eastward to the Black Sea. They thenceforth dominated at least the western part of the Pontic Steppe, though not as organized states but as independent groups, until the rise of Ermanaric, who created the Greutungi confederacy of Goths, who later came to be known as the Ostrogoths, the ‘Goths of the Rising Sun’ or ‘East Goths’. He did this in the time-honored state-building method, conquering and subjugating the neighboring peoples. His realm had become a powerful kingdom by AD 370—before any attack by the Huns.

The Huns are first noted by Ptolemy in the second century. They lived in the eastern Pontic Steppe in Sarmatia, that is, east of the Sea of Azov and beyond the Don River. The next significant information about them concerns a war between the Huns and the Alans, which the Huns, under their leader Balamber, won. The Huns and the Alans then attacked the Ostrogoths, who occupied the steppe west of the Don River, and defeated them in turn.¹² In view of the earlier history of the Goths there, it seems probable that the Huns’ march against the Goths, and their invasion of the Roman

¹⁰ Lehmann (2006). On Dacia and the Roman conquest there, see endnote 54.

¹¹ Bachrach (1973). The name *Lancelot* and the story of the sword in the stone, among other elements of the story, are widely thought to be Alan in origin and to have modern reflexes in the language and folklore of the Ossetians, the Alans’ modern descendants in the Caucasus region (Anderson 2004: 13 et seq.; Colarusso 2002; cf. Littleton and Malcor 1994).

¹² Ammianus says that Ermanaric, the king of the Ostrogoths, then committed suicide in or about 375 “rather than lead his own people into bondage to the Huns” (Burns 1980: 35).

Empire—evidently in pursuit of Goths and others who had not submitted to the Huns—was actually a direct consequence of Gothic attacks against the Huns by Ermanaric. Sarmatian, Alan, and Gothic power in the Western Steppe was broken by the Huns by 375. Large groups of Central Eurasians, mainly Goths, then approached the frontiers of the Eastern Roman Empire seeking asylum. Many of those defeated, along with numerous other peoples, submitted to the Hun leadership and joined them on their campaigns.¹³

The Parthian Empire

Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) had no heir¹⁴ and left his vast conquests to his army. The generals divided the empire among themselves and established their own dynasties. In Persia, Seleucus I (r. 312–281 BC), who under Alexander’s bidding had married Apame, the daughter of a Sogdian satrap, in 324 BC, established the Seleucid Dynasty, which essentially restored the realm of the Persian Empire from Syria to the Jaxartes. In 238 BC Parthia (present-day northeastern Iran and southern Turkmenistan) was invaded by the Parni, a people speaking a Northern Iranian dialect, led by Arsaces (r. ca. 247–ca. 217/214 BC), who established the independent Arsacid Dynasty in Parthia.¹⁵ Seleucid rule in Persia ended in 129 BC when the Parthians defeated the Seleucids and killed Antiochus VII in battle. Just at that point in time the Parthians were suffering from an invasion of Sakas who may have been fleeing from the Tokharians (Τόχαροι, Yüeh-chih).¹⁶ The latter killed Ardawân (Artabanus II or I, ca. 128–124/123 BC) in battle and conquered

¹³ Sinor (1990c).

¹⁴ His Central Asian wife Roxana (Roxane) gave birth to a son in August 323 BC—too late for the succession struggle, because Alexander had died on June 10, 323.

¹⁵ Bivar (1983a: 28–29, 98).

¹⁶ According to Chinese sources, the Yüeh-chih (*Tokʷar) attacked the Saka (*Śaka* in Indian sources) living near the Issyk Kul in 160 BC. In 128, when Chang Ch’ien was in the area, the Tokharians were based between Samarkand and the Oxus River, having already subdued Bactria. The Parthians are known in Chinese sources as An-hsi 安息 NMan *ānxi*, from MChi *ansik (Pul. 24, 330), from OChi *ansək or *arsək according to the usual reconstruction (Sta. 577, 552), but probably rather from OChi *arsək, that is, *arsäk, a perfect transcription of the Parthian form of the dynastic name Aršak (written *ʾršk*).

Bactria. The Parthians recovered, however, and their empire was firmly established under Mithridates II (the Great, r. ca. 124/123–87 BC).

The Parthians established an energetic though rather decentralized dynasty. They maintained many Central Eurasian Iranian customs, including military dependence on mounted archers—they are famous for the Parthian shot¹⁷—and oral epic poetry, which unfortunately has not survived. Despite occasional reverses in the perennial struggle with the Romans for control of the Near East, the Parthians generally succeeded in maintaining traditional Iranian control over most of Iraq as well as Iran during the four centuries of their existence until the reign of Ardawân (Artabanus V or IV, r. ca. AD 213–224), who was killed by Ardashêr, founder of the Sasanid Dynasty.

The Tokharians and the Kushan Empire

In Central Asia, a remarkable sequence of events recorded in both Western and Eastern historical sources led to the creation of the Kushan Empire. Its beginnings lie ultimately in the first wave of the Indo-European migration, around 2000 BC, when the Group A dialect speakers who became Proto-Tokharians arrived in the area of Kansu and dwelled west of Tun-huang in an area that included Lop Nor and the later Kroraina Kingdom. Eighteen centuries passed. In the third century BC, the Tokharian people—called Yüeh-chih,¹⁸ that is, *Tok^war—still lived in the area.

When the Hsiung-nu were in their early, expansive phase in the early second century BC, the *Tok^war were the great power to their west and south. The Hsiung-nu defeated them conclusively in 176 or 175 BC, drove them from their ancestral lands, and also subjugated the *Ašvin (Wu-sun)¹⁹ and others in the vicinity.²⁰ Some of the *Tok^war, known as the Lesser Yüeh-chih, fled

south and took refuge among the Ch'iang people in the Nan Shan, but the main body of survivors, the Great Yüeh-chih, migrated to the west into Jungharia. It is not known if the ancestors of the speakers of the attested East Tokharian and West Tokharian languages had previously settled in the areas of Qocho and of Kucha and Karashahr, respectively (their later attested early medieval locations) or if they settled there at this time, during the Great Yüeh-chih migration. The *Tok^war drove the resident people, the Sakas, out of Jungharia,²¹ but only a few years later they were themselves attacked and defeated by the *Ašvin. The *Tok^war then migrated west and south into Sogdiana, from which they attacked the Parthians and subjugated Bactria in 124 or 123 BC. They gradually crossed the Oxus and settled in Bactria proper, where they established a strong kingdom later known as Tokhâristân,²² 'land of the Tokhar (*Tok^war)'.

In about 50 BC Kujula Kadphises, chief of the Kushan (Kušâna), subjugated the other four constituent chiefdoms of Tokhâristân and founded the Kushan Empire. He extended his realm southward into India as far as the mouth of the Indus, taking control of a maritime trade route that directly connected India with the Roman ports in Egypt, thus bypassing the Parthians and their taxes. The Kushans greatly profited from this trade. Their sway extended eastward into the Tarim region as well, where they left their mark in the name Kūsân,²³ the local form of the name of the capital of the later Tokharian-speaking kingdom of Kucha. Records from their rule in the characteristic Kharoṣṭî script they used have been found as far east as Kroraina (Lou-lan). The Kushans were the most important single people responsible for the spread of Buddhism into Parthia, Central Asia, and China. The empire reached its height under the fifth ruler, Kanishka (Kaniška, fl. ca. AD 150), who patronized Buddhism, among other religions.

The Kushan Empire is unfortunately little known except for its coinage and other material remains; to a great extent it remains a mystery. Ardashêr I, founder of the Sasanid Dynasty, attacked the Kushans and forced their submission to him in about AD 225.

¹⁷ The Central Eurasian practice of shooting backward at one's pursuers while in flight on horseback.

¹⁸ This is the modern Mandarin Chinese pronunciation of the characters used to transcribe the foreign people's name; for the reconstruction *Tok^war, see appendix B.

¹⁹ See appendix B.

²⁰ The *Ašvin, according to all accounts, invaded Jungharia to attack the *Tok^war living in the former territory of the Sakas (cf. Bivar 1983b: 192). After their victory, the *Ašvin settled there themselves. That means they arrived in Jungharia after the *Tok^war, *pace* Christian (1998: 210) and many others.

²¹ The Saka, or Śaka, people then began their long migration that ended with their conquest of northern India, where they are also known as the Indo-Scythians.

²² The name is recorded in early Arabic accounts as *Tukhâristân*, representing a foreign Tukhâristân or Tokhâristân, in which the earlier syllable [k^war] ~ [χ^war] has become [χar].

²³ This is the Old Uighur form of the name; in Old Tibetan it is written *Guzan*, pronounced [kūsân] or [kūsân]. There is still a town between Kucha and Kashgar named Kūsen.

The Chinese Empire and Central Eurasia

The collapse of the Ch'in Dynasty in 210–206 BC led to the formation of a new, long-lasting dynasty, the Western Han (210 BC–AD 6). Under Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC), the Chinese once again set their sights on a vastly expanded empire. After several failed expeditions, between 127 and 119 BC they won several major victories over the Hsiung-nu, capturing the Ordos region in the north—thus once again forcing the Hsiung-nu to flee from their ancestral homeland and move northward far beyond the great bend of the Yellow River—and also striking west, taking the strategic Ch'i-lien Mountains in Lung-hsi (the area of modern Kansu). The frontier walls built by the three northern kingdoms of the late Warring States period, Ch'in, Chao, and Yen, which had been linked up by Ch'in to run from Tun-huang to Liao-tung to hold conquered Hsiung-nu territory, were repaired, and the fortresses reoccupied. Emperor Wu also sent out expeditions into the Western Regions in an attempt to take control of the Silk Road cities from the Hsiung-nu. The reports of Chinese envoys and generals supplied the Chinese geographers and historians with much firsthand information on Central Eurasia from the Eastern Steppe and Tarim Basin west as far as Iran, and some much less precise second-hand information on regions beyond, including the Parthian and Roman empires.

The most important and vivid accounts are those of Chang Ch'ien (d. 113 BC), who in 139 BC left on a mission to entice the *Tok*ar to return to their previous homeland in the region between Tun-huang and the Ch'i-lien Mountains. Chang was captured by the Hsiung-nu, among whom he lived for ten years before escaping and continuing his journey to the west. He was in Bactria in about 128 and returned home in 122 BC after another, shorter stay among the Hsiung-nu.²⁴ After being sent out again in 115, he returned and died two years later.²⁵

The Han Dynasty histories' description of the Hsiung-nu—"pure" pastoral nomads who herd their flocks, following the pastures and water, and grow up riding and hunting, so that they are "natural warriors"²⁶—is strikingly

ingly similar to the description of the Scythian pastoral nomads by Herodotus. The two peoples shared the same mode of life, down to details, as archaeology and many studies have confirmed.

They live on the northern frontier, wandering from place to place following the grass to herd their animals. The majority of their animals are horses, cattle, and sheep. . . . They have no walled cities where they stay and cultivate the fields, but each does have his own land. . . . The young boys can ride sheep and shoot birds and mice with bow and arrow; when they are somewhat grown they then shoot foxes and rabbits, which they eat. When they are strong and can pull a warrior's bow, they all become armored cavalymen.²⁷

Nevertheless, as with Herodotus, the most valuable information about the Hsiung-nu is to be found in other parts of the histories. A Chinese eunuch who had gone over to the Hsiung-nu and was treated with great favor by the Hsiung-nu emperor criticized the Central Eurasians' liking for Chinese silks and Chinese food.

All the multitudes of the Hsiung-nu nation would not amount to [the population of] one province in the Han empire. The strength of the Hsiung-nu lies in the very fact that their food and clothing are different from those of the Chinese, and they are therefore not dependent upon the Han for anything.²⁸

The Han armies and diplomats were eventually successful in reducing the power of the Hsiung-nu considerably and spreading Chinese culture into the steppe zone.

In the territory beyond the Yellow River . . . the Han established irrigation works and set up garrison farms here and there, sending fifty or

archival material, so that the *Han shu* does not always simply copy the *Shih chi*. The fame of the *Shih chi* among Chinese is due not so much to the fact that it was the first "modern" history written in what had just become standard Classical Chinese, but rather to its literary style.

²⁷ *HS* (94a: 3743); cf. Watson (1961, II: 155). Note the explicit reference to armor.

²⁸ Watson (1961, II: 170). The eunuch goes on to urge the Hsiung-nu to spurn the foreign imports in favor of homely but sturdy, healthy local Hsiung-nu products and thus to stay independent of the Chinese. This dialogue would seem to betray Chinese prejudices about trade, as well as ignorance of its central importance to Central Eurasians such as the Hsiung-nu. In view of the similar statements in the Old Turkic inscription of Toñukuk, however, they may represent a traditional conservative current of thought within Central Eurasian states.

²⁴ Yü (1986: 458 n. 260).

²⁵ Loewe (1986: 164), Yü (1967: 135–136).

²⁶ For a translation of the *Shih chi* version, see Watson (1961, II: 155 et seq.). The *Shih chi* is dated earlier than the *Han shu*, but it has been demonstrated that both histories draw on the same

sixty thousand officials and soldiers to man them. Gradually the farms ate up more and more territory until they bordered the lands of the Hsiung-nu to the north.²⁹

But the Hsiung-nu's experience with the Chinese had hardened them and they fought back, always attempting to regain their southern homeland and to retain their control of the Central Asian cities. In fact, despite major Han successes in both regions, the Hsiung-nu continued to exercise effective control over the Tarim Basin cities. Chinese policies could be peaceful and fair:

When the present emperor [Wu] came to the throne he reaffirmed the peace alliance and treated the Hsiung-nu with generosity, allowing them to trade in the markets of the border stations and sending them lavish gifts. From the *Shan-yü*³⁰ on down, all the Hsiung-nu grew friendly with the Han, coming and going along the Great Wall.

The Chinese could also be treacherous and violent if they thought they could lure the Hsiung-nu into a trap so they could be massacred. Following just such a failed attempt to capture the Hsiung-nu ruler at the city of Ma-i, near the northeast bend of the Yellow River, in 124 BC, open war broke out:

After this the Hsiung-nu . . . began to attack the border defenses wherever they happened to be. Time and again they crossed the frontier and carried out innumerable plundering raids. At the same time they continued to be as greedy as ever, delighting in the border markets and longing for Han goods, and the Han for its part continued to allow them to trade in the markets in order to sap their resources.

Five years after the Ma-i campaign, in the autumn [129 BC], the Han government dispatched four generals, each with a force of ten thousand cavalry, to make a surprise attack on the barbarians at the border markets.³¹

²⁹ Watson (1961, II: 183).

³⁰ The reconstruction of the Hsiung-nu title for their ruler, *Ch'an-yü*, traditionally read *Shan-yü*, is uncertain; see endnote 7.

³¹ Watson (1961, II: 177–178). On the mistranslation of Chinese words for foreigners as “barbarians,” see the epilogue.

Despite their eventual division into two kingdoms in AD 49, the Northern Hsiung-nu, the stronger of the two, continued to dominate much of Central Asia. Their influence extended as far as Sogdiana, where they were still considered the nominal suzerains of the region.

The Chinese dynastic histories complain about the distance between China and Central Asia as a major factor in establishing and maintaining military control over the region. However, the main reason China did not achieve more than nominal control over the cities of Eastern Central Asia is certainly economic. The economies of the Central Asian cities were founded on the trade relationship between the urban and rural peoples that had developed over centuries. The Hsiung-nu pastoral economy was not distinct from the agricultural and urban economies of Central Eurasia, and the active presence of the nomads was vital for the economic and political health of both the Hsiung-nu and the peoples of the Tarim cities.

The Hsiung-nu insistence on being allowed to trade freely at the Han frontier towns was opposed by some of the Chinese court officials, but the Han usually saw the comparative benefit to be obtained. When they agreed to allow the Hsiung-nu to trade, that meant peace, and the Hsiung-nu then rarely “raided” the frontier. In this connection it cannot be forgotten that the frontier established by the Chinese extended deep into Central Eurasian territory, so that the “Chinese” market towns were in regions where many—perhaps the majority—of the people were not ethnic Chinese. Even at the height of their power, the Hsiung-nu conducted raids (as contrasted with attacks during full-scale war with China)³² that penetrated only into the outer limits of former Hsiung-nu territory, places located in former Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, northern Shansi, Shensi, Kansu, and so on.³³

The Hsien-pei in the Eastern Steppe

When Hsiung-nu power in the steppe declined, due partly to natural internal change and partly to Chinese attacks and political machinations, among

³² Also, during Chinese civil wars, Central Eurasians living near the northern frontier of China often fought as mercenaries or allies of one or another Chinese faction.

³³ Yü (1986: 389).

other factors,³⁴ the steppe peoples who had been subjugated by the Hsiung-nu increasingly took the opportunity to establish themselves as rulers in their own right. By far the most important of these revolutions was that of the Hsien-pei, a Proto-Mongolic-speaking people who had lived in the eastern part of the Hsiung-nu realm, in what is now western Manchuria, and had been subjugated already by Mo-tun (r. 209–174 BC), the second great ruler of the Hsiung-nu.

The Northern Hsiung-nu Empire effectively collapsed between AD 83 and 87. In the latter year, the Hsien-pei crushed the Hsiung-nu in battle and killed their ruler. When the remainder of the Northern Hsiung-nu moved west into the Ili Valley region in 91, the Hsien-pei moved into their former lands, replaced the Hsiung-nu as rulers of the Eastern Steppe, and expanded as far as the *Aśvin in the west.³⁵

The Japanese-Koguryoic Conquests

Some time before the early second century BC, the Proto-Japanese-Koguryoic people moved into the area of Liao-hsi (what is now western Liaoning and Inner Mongolia) from further south, where they seem to have been rice farmers and fishermen. The Wa, a remnant of the Proto-Japanese branch of the Japanese-Koguryoic-speaking people who were still living in the Liao-hsi area in the second century AD, were fishermen, and undoubtedly farmers too, not animal-herding steppe warriors. By contrast, their Koguryo relatives had become a mounted-warrior nation familiar with steppe warfare by AD 12, when they are first mentioned in historical sources as living in the Liao-hsi area.³⁶ The Koguryo, the Puyo, and other Puyo-Koguryo peoples had adopted all the major attributes of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex, including the origin myth (see the prologue), the comitatus, the burial

³⁴ Yü (1986: 404–405).

³⁵ Yü (1990: 148–149).

³⁶ According to the account (*HS* 99: 4130), the Chinese had wanted to force the Koguryo to attack the Hsiung-nu, but they refused. When the governor of Liao-hsi murdered the Koguryo ruler, the people “rebelled” against the Chinese and escaped from the governor by riding out into the steppe. From that point on, they began moving into Liao-tung and southern Manchuria. This account is the earliest historical notice of the Koguryo. The putatively earlier geographical evidence placing them near Korea is part of a later textual addition dating to the first century AD (Beckwith 2007a: 33–34 n. 12), which was perhaps intended to glorify the conquests of Emperor Wu.

of their rulers in large tumuli, and the theoretical division of their kingdoms into four constituent geographically oriented parts.³⁷

Partly as a result of the Hsien-pei expansion, and partly due to Chinese pressure under the rule of Wang Mang (r. AD 9–23), some of the Puyo-Koguryo began migrating into Liao-tung, where their Hui-Mo (or Hui and Mo) or Yemaek relatives had already moved by about 100 BC, at which time they are mentioned in the *Shih chi* as living in the region of Liao-tung and Ch’ao-hsien (then southeastern Manchuria).³⁸ They formed three kingdoms, the Koguryo Kingdom in southern Manchuria from the Liao River to the Yalu River, the Puyo Kingdom³⁹ in south-central Manchuria north of the Koguryo, and the Hui-Mo or Yemaek Kingdom⁴⁰ along the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula, extending southward as far as the Korean-speaking realm of Chin Han in the southeastern corner of the peninsula. Although the Puyo-Koguryo dynasties were repeatedly disrupted, particularly by the Chinese and the Hsien-pei, their peoples remained firmly established in these locations.

Classical Central Eurasia

The golden age of Classical Antiquity in the West and the East had already passed before the Roman Empire conquered most of the Mediterranean littoral and began moving into the hinterland, and before the Chinese Empire similarly conquered the area to a great distance outward in all directions from the capital. The Classical tradition remained strong in the two empires, and in both of them that meant expansion to the greatest extent possible. Yet, although they did succeed in attaining their main goal—significantly

³⁷ The Koguryo elite warriors referred to in the sources were probably the king’s comitatus; unfortunately, the sources are unclear on this point. However, the Japanese warriors who fought in the wars of the Three Kingdoms period on the Korean Peninsula acquired the full Central Eurasian Culture Complex, including the comitatus, and brought it with them when they returned to Japan, so the Puyo-Koguryo peoples from whom it is agreed they learned it must have had the comitatus themselves.

³⁸ They are mentioned in the chapter on the Hsiung-nu as well as in the “neutral” context of the chapter on commerce, “the Money-makers” (Watson 1961, II: 163, 185, 487).

³⁹ See Byington (2003).

⁴⁰ See Beckwith (2007a, 2006e, 2005a). ‘Yemaek’ is the Sino-Korean reading of the same characters.

greater expanse of territory—their infrastructure was physically unable to hold it beyond a certain point.

At first, the Classical empires' relentless one-track-mind approach to Central Eurasian polities—divide, invade, and destroy—was successful. The Romans conquered deep into largely Germanic western Central Eurasia along a line running through the middle of Western Europe from the North Sea to the Black Sea. They sowed division and created weakness very effectively among those peoples they could not directly control. The Chinese were even more successful. Not only did they acquire and maintain fairly secure access halfway across Central Asia, despite their failure to completely eliminate Hsiung-nu suzerainty there (fortunately for the Central Eurasian economy), they also succeeded in dividing the Hsiung-nu into two hostile states: a southern realm, which was almost completely beholden to China, and a northern realm, which lasted only a few decades after the split. The long-lasting Southern Hsiung-nu state, though increasingly controlled by the Chinese over time, effectively kept northern China away from the Mongolic Hsien-pei, who replaced the Northern Hsiung-nu as rulers of the Eastern Steppe.

The aggressive foreign policy successes of the Chinese and Roman empires ultimately had disastrous consequences. The partial closing of the frontier to trade by both empires, and their destabilization of Central Eurasia by their incessant attacks, resulted in internecine war in the region. The serious decline in Silk Road commerce that followed—observable in the shrinkage of the areal extent of Central Asian cities—may have been one of the causes of the long-lasting recession that eventually brought about the collapse of both the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Han Empire (and its eventual successor the Chin Dynasty), and with them the end of Classical civilization.⁴¹

⁴¹ The following Central Eurasian migration covered not only the colonized Central Eurasian areas but even the peripheral states' homeland regions. In the Roman Empire, that meant not only Gaul, much of Germania, and Dacia, but virtually all of Western Europe south of Scandinavia, and even across the Mediterranean to North Africa. In China, the migration covered the colonized former Central Eurasian territories of the Ordos and Shensi, northern Shansi, and southern Manchuria, as well as some of the traditionally Chinese areas south of the eastern bend of the Yellow River and the dynastic home of the Chou, Ch'in, and Han dynasties in or around Ch'ang-an in the Kuan-chung region of the Wei River valley.

EMPIRES OF THE SILK ROAD

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from the Bronze Age

to the Present



CHRISTOPHER I. BECKWITH

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CONTENTS



PREFACE VII

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS XV

ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA XVII

INTRODUCTION XIX

PROLOGUE: THE HERO AND HIS FRIENDS 1

1 The Chariot Warriors 29

2 The Royal Scythians 58

3 Between Roman and Chinese Legions 78

4 The Age of Attila the Hun 93

5 The Türk Empire 112

6 The Silk Road, Revolution, and Collapse 140

7 The Vikings and Cathay 163

8 Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Conquests 183

9 Central Eurasians Ride to a European Sea 204

10 The Road Is Closed 232

11 Eurasia without a Center 263

12 Central Eurasia Reborn 302

EPILOGUE: The Barbarians 320

APPENDIX A: The Proto-Indo-Europeans and Their Diaspora 363

APPENDIX B: Ancient Central Eurasian Ethnonyms 375

ENDNOTES 385

BIBLIOGRAPHY 427

INDEX 457

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