The Türk Empire

The heavenly horse sprang from a Tokharian cave:
Tiger-striped back, bones of dragon wing,
Neighing blue clouds, he shook his green mane.
An orchid-veined courser, he ran off in a flash
Up the Kunlun Mountains, vanishing over the Western horizon.
—Li Po, The Song of the Heavenly Horse

The Second Regional Empire Period in Eurasia

In the mid-sixth century the Persian and Eastern Roman empires were at war, while both East Asia and Western Europe were divided among feuding kingdoms. In the Eastern Steppe, following the dynamics of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex myth, the Türk people overthrew their overlords, the Avars, and chased their remnants to the ends of Eurasia. In so doing, they linked up all the peripheral civilizations of Eurasia via its urbanized core, Central Asia, which quickly became the commercial-cultural heart not only of Central Eurasia but of the Eurasian world as a whole. Because of the Turks' eagerness to trade, their military power that helped encourage other peoples to trade with them, and their rule over most of Central Asia, the Central Eurasian economy—the Silk Road—flourished as never before.

By the end of the sixth century, China was reunited by the short-lived Sui Dynasty and attempted to expand into Central Eurasia again. The collapse of the dynasty, and the collapse of the Persian and Eastern Roman empires shortly thereafter, was followed by the establishment of new imperial realms both there and in other previously marginal regions: the Franks in Western Europe; the Arabs in the Near East, eventually including northwestern India, western Central Asia, Iran, North Africa, and Spain as well as Arabia; the Tibetan Empire in southeastern Central Eurasia; the T'ang Dynasty in China, which rapidly expanded into eastern Central Eurasia and other neighboring regions; the Khazar Kingdom and several other states founded by Turks in Central Eurasia, in addition to the still existing Türk Empire in the Eastern Steppe; and the old Eastern Roman Empire, which recreated itself as a new, more compact empire that was officially Greek in language. Central Eurasia and its flourishing economy became the focus of all major Eurasian states during the Second Regional Empire Period in Eurasia, which is generally known as the Early Middle Ages.

All of these states were focused on Central Eurasia, and all tried to conquer at least the parts of it nearest to their borders. The cultural flourishing of the Early Middle Ages (ca. AD 620–840) was thus accompanied by almost constant war in the region. Some new features of the warfare directly reflected the fact that the major empires of Eurasia had ended up bordering on each other: great inter-empire alliances were formed in opposition to other imperial alliances. The constant warfare escalated toward the middle of the eighth century during the Türkic and Pamir wars in Central Asia, ending in victory for the Arab-Chinese alliance against the Central Eurasians. The recession that followed across much of Eurasia shows that the world had already become economically interconnected and dependent on the flourishing of the Central Eurasian economy, the Silk Road.

The Avar Empire in the Eastern Steppe

In the late fourth to early fifth century, the empire of the Avars or Jou-jan, a people of unknown origin who had been subjects of the Hsien-pe, ruled the northern steppe from the northeast Tarim Basin to Korea. At the same time, the Hsien-pe Mongolic *Taghba ruled a great empire that included most of North China and the southern edge of the steppe zone. The two peoples were usually at war with each other until the early sixth century, when the *Taghba, who were by then largely Sinicized, made peace with the kaghan or emperor of the Avars, Anagai. In 545, after the Wei Dynasty of the

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1 See endnote 18 for discussion of the equation of Avar and Jou-jan.
2 See Beckwith (2005b) for this name.
*Taghbač divided into eastern and western halves, the Eastern Wei remained allied with Avars, but the Western Wei made an alliance with *Tumín,² the yabghu or 'subordinate king' of the Türk, a vassal people of the Avars.

Around 546 *Tumín heard that the T'ieh-le, a confederation living north of Mongolia, planned to attack the Avar realm. He led a preemptive attack against the T'ieh-le and defeated them. *Tumín then asked the Avar kaghan Anagai for a royal princess in marriage. But Anagai insulted the Türk, calling them his "blacksmith slaves." *Tumín angrily turned to China. In that year he asked for and received a royal marriage from the Western Wei. In 552 *Tumín attacked the Avars and defeated them. Anagai committed suicide.² The Türk pursued the remnants of the Avars across the length and breadth of Eurasia, conquering as they went, until they had united under Türkic rule the entire Central Eurasian steppe and had come into direct contact with the Chinese, Persian, and Eastern Roman empires.⁵

The Avars were given refuge by the Eastern Roman Empire. Partly through clever alliances with other peoples they made their way into the Pannonian Plain, where they settled and continued to call their ruler the kaghan, to the great annoyance of the Türk.

The Türk Conquest

The center of Türkic power, at least in theory, was the Ötükân Yish, or 'Wooded Mountain of Ötükân', which was located somewhere in the Altai Mountains.⁶ The Türkic ancestral cavern was located there, and every year a ritual or ceremony was carried out in the cave.² Whoever controlled the Ötükân held the dignity of supreme authority among all the Turks. In practice, it meant only that the ruler of the Eastern Steppe had the title of kaghan and theoretical primacy over the other Türkic peoples. The actual home encampment of the Türk was in the Orkhon River region (in what is now north-central Mongolia), the center of Eastern Steppe empires before and after them.

Classical Latin sources, which contain the first historical references to a Türk people, have them living in the forests north of the Sea of Azov.⁸ The first reference to Türkic peoples is thought to be to members of the Hun confederation, based on their Türkic-sounding names. By the mid-sixth century at the latest, when they are recorded in Chinese sources, they had become pastoral nomads and had learned the skills of steppe warfare. They also became skilled blacksmiths and continued to practice these skills. Their Avar titulature reveals that they must have learned how to establish and maintain a steppe empire from the Avars.

The religious beliefs of the Türk focused on a sky god, Tängri, and an earth goddess, Umay.⁹ Some of the Turks—notably the Western Turks in Tokharistan—converted very early to Buddhism, and it played an important role among them. Other religions were also influential, particularly Christianity and Manichaeism, which were popular among the Sogdians, close allies of the Türk who were skilled in international trade. Although the Sogdians were a settled, urban people, they were like the Türk in that they also had a Central Eurasian warrior ethos with a pervasive comitatus tradition, and both peoples were intensely interested in trade.

*Tumín took the title kaghan and ruled over the eastern part of the realm, but died in the same year. He was succeeded by his son K'uo-lo, who ruled for a few months before he too died. Bukhan¹⁰ (Mu-han, r. 553–572), another son of *Tumín, then succeeded. *Tumín's brother Ištemi (r. 552–576), ruled over the western part of the realm as subordinate kaghan—yabghu or yabghu

³ On the name *Tumín, written T’u-men ¹⁴,¹ and the Old Türkic inscriptive form Bumín, see endnotes 10 and 17.
⁴ GS: 909.
⁵ For discussion of apparently mythological elements that are presented as historical fact in the sources, see the Türk national foundation story in the prologue and the notes to it.
⁷ It has been thought that this tradition, and the fact that the Türk really were skilled iron metallurgists—confirmed by both Chinese and Greek historical sources—indicate that the cave was actually an iron mine; cf. Sinor (1990c: 290). In view of the close mythological parallel with the Koguryo, in which the cave (also in the mountains in the eastern part of the realm) is the abode of the grain god, this might be questioned.

⁸ In the mid-first century AD, Turcae 'Turks' are mentioned there by Pomponius Mela. They are also mentioned in the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder (Sinor 1990c: 285), spelled Tyrcae 'Türks'. However, from the sixth century on there is a steady movement of Turks from east to west. See Czegledy (1983); cf. Golden (1992).
⁹ Their beliefs are similar to those of the Scythians and other early steppe peoples, as well as other later peoples. They seem to be important elements of the Central Eurasian Culture Complex and deserve the attention of historians of religion.
¹⁰ Clearly the same name as the Türkic leader Böyük-Bükhan, for Old Türkic Buqan, mentioned in Menander (Blockley 1985: 178–179, 277 n. 235). In standard "Middle Chinese," pace Pulleyblank (1991), m- before a vowel was regularly pronounced "b-" (Beckwith 2003a, 2006b; cf. Pulleyblank 1984); there are many examples of this syllable onset used to transcribe Old Türkic words beginning with b.
kaghan—with a winter camp somewhere near Karashahr (Agni).\(^{12}\) This gradually became the de facto independent realm of the Western Turks, while *Tamin’s successors reigned over the Türk, or Eastern Turks, and retained the full imperial dignity.\(^{12}\)

In pursuing the Avars, Ištemi’s forces reached the Aral Sea region by 555 and soon after the lower Volga. In 558 the first Turkic embassy reached Constantinople, seeking the remaining Avars who had not submitted, as well as a trade alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire.

In their expansion, the Turks encountered the Hephthalites, who by the early sixth century had conquered Sogdiana, eastward into the Tarim Basin, and up to the borders of the Avars and the *Taγhbaç (Wei Dynasty) in North China. The Hephthalites were thus major Central Asian rivals of the early Turks.

Soon after the Turks under Ištemi Kaghan arrived on the northern borders of the Persian Empire, Khosraw I (Anushirvan the Just, r. 531–579) made an alliance with them against the Hephthalites. Between 557 and 561, the Persians and Turks attacked the Hephthalites, destroyed their kingdom, and partitioned it between the two victors, setting the Oxus River as the border between them.\(^{13}\)

At some time before 568, the Turks sent a trading mission of Sogdian merchants led by the Sogdian Maniakh to the Persian Empire to request permission to sell their silks in Persia. The Persians bought the silk but burned it publicly in front of the merchants. The offensive answer prompted the Persians to send another mission, consisting of Turks, but this time the unification was achieved by a single family or dynasty.\(^{15}\) They were the political successors of the Avars, and before them the Hsiung-nu, but they far surpassed their predecessors.

The two halves of the empire became increasingly separate over time. In the Eastern Turk realm, based in the Eastern Steppe and western Manchuria, Bukhan Kaghan was succeeded by his younger brother Tatpar Kaghan\(^{16}\) (r. 572–581). In the Western Turkic realm, Ištemi was succeeded by his son Tardu (r. ca. 576–603). By 583 Tardu was known as the Yabghu Kaghan of the Western Turks. His empire comprised the northern Tarim Basin, Jungharia,\(^{17}\) Transoxiana, and Tokhāristān.\(^{18}\)

The Western Turkic realm itself gradually became further divided: an eastern part consisting of the On Oq or ‘Ten Arrows’ of the Western Turks, based in Jungharia, the northern Tarim Basin, and eastern Transoxiana; the realm of the Yabghu of Tokhāristān in southern Central Asia; the Khazar Kaganate, which developed by about 630, centering on the region from the lower Volga and North Caucasus Steppe to the Don; the Danubian Bulgar khanate west of the Khazars in the lower Danube region and lands to the west, founded in about 680 by Asparukh; and the kingdom of the

\(^{11}\) The title yabghu (i.e., yabynu) goes back to the title of the governors-general of the five constituent parts of the Tokharian realm in Bactria, one of whom eventually rose to power and founded the Kushan Empire (Enoki et al. 1994: 171).

\(^{12}\) The ethnonym Türk is actually the same as the Anglicized Turc; the name was pronounced [tyʁk], that is, Türk, and still is so pronounced in modern Turkish and most other Turkic languages today. The traditional scholarly convention of using the spelling Türk only for the people of the first two Turkic empires based in the Eastern Steppe is followed here. On the Chinese and other foreign transcriptions of the name, see Beckwith (2005, forthcoming-a).

\(^{13}\) Frye (1983: 156), Sinor (1990c: 399–301).

\(^{14}\) Sinor (1990c: 301–302).

\(^{15}\) The Scythians, or Northern Iranians, who were culturally and ethnolinguistically a single group at the beginning of their expansion, had earlier controlled the entire steppe zone. Like the later Turks, they gradually diverged over time.

\(^{16}\) His name was formerly read Taspar. See Yoshida and Moriyasu (1999) and Beckwith (2005b).

\(^{17}\) The name is anachronism, but there is no other well-established geographical name for the region. It is also spelled Dzungaria, after the Khalkha dialect pronunciation. See the discussion of the name Junghar and its variants in Beckwith (forthcoming-b).

\(^{18}\) Tokhāristān at this time was roughly equivalent to the territory of present-day Afghanistan and some adjacent areas.
Volga Bulgars, who moved north of the Khazars into the Volga-Kama area in the late seventh century.

There were only a few minor dialect differences among the different Turkic groups stemming from the imperial foundation in the Eastern Steppe, and it is generally believed that there were no major linguistic divisions in the early Old Turkic period. Nevertheless, the Bulgar and Khazar Turks soon spoke a Turkic dialect or language so distinct from the other Turkic dialects that it was difficult or impossible for other Turks to understand.

The Roman-Persian Wars and the Arab Conquest

By the end of the sixth century, the Sasanid Persians, who had been at war on and off with the Eastern Roman Empire for about three centuries, had gradually extended their power into the southern Arabian Peninsula. In around 598 they defeated the local ruler of the Himyarite Kingdom, making the conquered territory a province of the Sasanid Empire. They thus controlled all international trade to and from India and further east by sea and dominated the trade routes by land as well.

In 602 the Eastern Roman emperor Maurice (582–602) was overthrown and killed along with his family. The leader of the insurrection, Phocas (r. 602–610), was proclaimed the new emperor. However, not only some Romans but also the Persian emperor Khusraw II considered Phocas to have usurped the throne. Khusraw's own throne had been recovered with Maurice's help, and he had made peace with the Romans partly at the cost of some Sasanid territory. The Persians lost no time in attacking the Romans, at first with only minor success, but in 607 they invaded Roman Mesopotamia and Armenia and captured most of the Armenian territory they had earlier lost to the Romans. In 608, while a plague ravaged Constantinople, the Persians marched deeper into Roman Mesopotamia and Armenia. In 609 they raided across Anatolia all the way to Chalcedon, across the Bosphorus from Constantinople itself. The Roman exarch, or governor, of North Africa rebelled in Carthage against Phocas, and his forces succeeded in taking Egypt, which with the rest of North Africa constituted the main source of grain for the capital. Heraclius (r. 610–641), the son of the exarch, then sailed to Constantinople with a fleet and troops from the provinces of Africa and Egypt. He executed Phocas and was crowned emperor in 610.

The Persians' advance continued, though, and before Heraclius could restore central authority, they had captured much of the empire outside the capital district, including Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and part of Anatolia; in 614 they took Jerusalem and carried off the True Cross to Ctesiphon. At the same time, the Avars and Slavs marched on the empire from the north and captured most of Thrace and much other imperial territory there. By 615 the Eastern Roman Empire retained only the capital district, part of Anatolia, Egypt, and Africa. In 617 the Avars, evidently in alliance with the Persians, attacked the city from the north and put it under siege. In 618 the Persians invaded Egypt, taking Alexandria in 619 and cutting off the main grain supply to Constantinople. The Roman Empire was at its lowest point in history and seemed doomed to fall.

Yet Heraclius did not give up. In 622 he made a truce with the Avars and reorganized the military forces still available to him, developing an earlier system of local support and stationing of soldiers into what became the "feudal" theme system. He personally led the army east into Armenia, where he attacked and defeated the forces of the Persians. When news arrived that the Avars had broken the truce and invaded southern Thrace, he hurried back. Making another agreement with the Avars, he turned around and marched east again in 624. He took Armenia and pursued the Persians further east, defeating the main Persian forces sent against him in 625. Rather than returning home, he wintered with his army near Lake Van.

To counter the Roman advance, Khusraw made an alliance with the Avars to attack Constantinople. Nevertheless, with the help of superior intelligence agents, Heraclius foiled the attacks of the Persians and defeated them, and though the Avars did lay siege to the capital city, they too were

22 According to Treadgold (1997: 315 et seq.), the explicit reorganization of the empire into themes, or military governorships wherein the soldiers were settled on the land they defended, was the accomplishment of his grandson Constans II (r. 641–668), but the essentials of this reform seem to have been laid by Heraclius himself, on still earlier foundations; see the discussion by Ostrogorsky (1968: 96 et seq.). This "feudal" system had already spread far and wide across Eurasia and was also found among the Germanic, Arab, and Turkic peoples around the Byzantine Empire, including the Germanic Vandals who had settled in North Africa.
As the peninsula had practically come to a standstill. In 633 the army of the most brilliant Muslim general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, who was largely responsible for the successful suppression of the rebellions, ended up on the borders of the Sasanid realm in the northeast, where the local Muslims were already raiding the Sasanids. Khalid simply joined in, providing a solution to the economic crisis and also a means of rewarding the loyal Arabs in his army.30

In the following year, Abū Bakr sent an expedition against the Byzantines in southern Palestine. But the latter were relatively well organized and only suffered a minor defeat. The caliph then ordered Khalid to join the expedition. He crossed the Syrian desert in five days, took command, and defeated the Byzantines in a major battle at Ajnādāyın, in Syria.

28 On the controversy over the role of trade in the early Islamic expansion, see endnote 62.
30 On dubious views about Islam and the early Muslims in connection with the conquests, see endnote 63.
CHAPTER 5

Under the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb (r. 634–644), the former rebels in Arabia were allowed to join the campaigns in the north. But the Sasanids crushed the Arabs with elephants in 634 at the Battle of the Bridge, while the Byzantines also strengthened their borders. The Arabs made an all-out effort, sending all their forces to the attack. In 637 they defeated the Persians decisively at the Battle of Qādisiyya (near Kufa on the Euphrates), and the Arabs occupied Ctesiphon, capturing the Sasanid imperial regalia and other Persian treasures. The crown of Khusrav II was sent to the Kaaba (Ka’ba).

In the same year, the Arabs also defeated a major counterattack by the Byzantines at the Battle of the Yarmūk, in Southern Syria, forcing them to withdraw from Syria. The Arabs followed their stunning first successes with victory after victory in the Near East. They captured Egypt in 640 and went on to conquer North Africa.32 Within ten years of Muḥammad’s death virtually all of the provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire except southeastern Europe, Anatolia, and Armenia had fallen to the Arabs.

Heraclius had reorganized the Eastern Roman Empire a few short years earlier in order to save it from the Persians and their allies and had increased the people’s support for the government. Now he saw the empire’s most productive territories once again taken away from him. Yet while the Persian Empire fell entirely to the Arabs,33 his reorganization of his empire into themes, and his alliance with the Turkic kingdom of the Khazars, formed the basis for the long-term survival of the Byzantine Empire—the new nation-state he and his grandson Constans II (r. 641–668) created out of the remnants of the Eastern Roman Empire.34

Upon the decisive defeat and collapse of the Persian Empire in 637, Yazdgard III fled northeast into Khurasan with his remaining forces. In 642 the

Arabs destroyed the last Sasanid army at the Battle of Nihāvand. In Central Asia Yazdgerd attempted to gather the support of the local nobility from his base in Marw, but as the Arabs approached, the marzbrān of Marw and the Hephthalite prince of Bāgdhs attacked him and defeated his forces in 651. Though the emperor himself escaped, he was killed shortly thereafter in the vicinity of Marw.35 The Arabs attacked and took Marw in the same year, followed by Nishapur.

In 652 the Arabs captured the cities of northern Tokhāristān, including Balkh, a great commercial city and the northwesternmost center of Buddhism, with its famous circular-plan monastery, Nawbāhār “the New Vihāra,”36 where the Chinese traveler monk Hsüan Tsang (ca. 600–664) had stayed and studied for a month with the master Prajñākara in 628 or 630.37 The city dwellers of former Sasanid Khurāsān and the former Hephthalite principalities were forced to pay tribute, to accept Arab garrisons, and to make room for the Arabs in their houses. At about the same time, other Arab forces moved through Kirman into Sistān (Sijistān, in what is now southwestern Afghanistan), capturing the westernmost part.38 Marw, which was a great commercial city, became the Arabs’ major base for military operations in Central Asia. Although they suffered a temporary setback during the civil war between the fourth caliph, ‘Ali (r. 661–661), and Mu’āwiya, the governor of Syria, which ended with the death of ‘Ali and establishment of Mu’āwiya as caliph and founder of the Umayyad Dynasty in 661,39 the Arabs very quickly reestablished their authority and continued their expansion deep into Central Asia.

30 Shaban (1970: 18–19). His son Pērêz eventually fled to China. A marzbrān was a ‘warden of the march, markgrave, usually a district governor or military governor in the late Sasanid Empire and early Arab Caliphate (Kramers and Morony 1991). Yazdgerd is said to have been killed by the marzbrān Māhūl Sūrī in 31 AH/AD 634 (Yakubovskii and Bosworth 1991).
31 It was known at the time that the complex had originally been built as a Sasanid provincial capital. For the design, and the plan of the City of Peace, the Abbasid capital at Baghdad, which was based on the underlying plan of both Nawbāhār and Ctesiphon, see Beckwith (1984b), where Ctesiphon is incorrectly ruled out.
32 The usual date is 650; according to Ch’en (1992: 42–53), he was there in 628. On his studies there, see endnote 66.
33 A general uprising broke out there in 653; though an army sent to subdue the rebellion was successful, the region again broke away immediately afterward. Upon Mu’āwiya’s succession as caliph, he sent a great expedition to Sistān. The Arabs recaptured Zarang and took Kabul. However, most of the conquered areas long remained de facto independent.
34 Shaban (1971: 70–78). On the civil war, see endnote 67.
Chinese Reunification and Imperial Expansion

In 589 the period known variously as the Sixteen Dynasties or the Northern and Southern Dynasties came to an end with reunification by the Sui (581–617). Much like the Ch’in Dynasty 700 years earlier, the Sui reunification was a bloody affair accompanied by prodigious public works, in this case by the building of the Grand Canal, which for the first time provided a reliable means of transportation between southern and northern China and also tied the provinces along the eastern coast together. China was never to stay divided for long again.

Like the Ch’in, the Sui was also a short-lived dynasty. It was brought down by a number of factors, the most important of which were the disastrous campaigns of the second ruler Yang-ti (r. 604–617) against the Koguryo Kingdom, which stretched from the Liao River east to the Sea of Japan and southward halfway down the Korean Peninsula. But again like the Ch’in, the Sui laid firm foundations for the stable, strong, long-lasting dynasty that followed.

The T’ang Dynasty (618–906) was founded in 618 by Kao-tsu (Li Yuan, r. 618–626), the Duke of T’ang, who was the Sui garrison commander of T’ai-yüan (in the northern part of what is now Shansi Province), six months after he led anti-Sui rebel forces into the Sui capital in 617. The Li family was from the north and was related to the royal families of both the Northern Chou Dynasty (557–581) and the Sui Dynasty and had intermarried with members of the *Taghbaq aristocracy of the Northern Wei Dynasty. They were acquainted with and intensely interested in things Central Eurasian. The very foundation of the T’ang Dynasty owed part of its success to an alliance Kao-tsu had made with the ruler of the Eastern Türk, Shih-pi Kaghan (r. 609–619), who provided horses and five hundred Türk warriors to assist the T’ang forces in defeating the Sui.

The myth that the Türk were a threat to China at this time is based on their involvement with one or another rebel in the civil war that ended the Sui Dynasty; in support of their allies, Türk forces entered the Sui frontier on several occasions. The idea that there was a “threat of an attack by the Eastern Turks and their allies” and that their ruler *Hellig (Hsiieh-li) Kaghan (r. 620–630) made himself a thorough nuisance and a menace,” necessitating the destruction of the Eastern Türk Empire, is not correct. It is true that the Türk still supported various rebels against the barely established dynasty throughout its first years, but again, they were invited in—they did not invade China. It took most of the reign of the first emperor to eliminate rebels throughout the Chinese domain in general, including areas very far from the northern frontier. The carefully crafted stories about supposed Türk invasions are ultimately disinformation intended to justify the subsequent massive aggression by the T’ang against the Türk and everyone else on the existing frontiers of China. The sources tell us little about the Türk except that they “raided the frontier” in such and such a place and time; no actual historical reasons are given other than the standard stereotypes that the Türk were greedy or violent. When more historical information is available, it is clear that they were not raids, and there was usually a good reason for the Türk actions.

The T’ang, like earlier Chinese dynasties, intended to build the biggest empire in history. The Türk were no different in their desire to enlarge their empire, but the “Chinese” areas they tried to expand into were parts of the Central Eurasian steppe zone that had been occupied, garrisoned, fortified, and walled off by the Chinese, whose declared intention was to continue expanding in all directions to conquer “the peoples of the four directions” until they ruled all of Central Eurasia as well as China. In short, the idea that the T’ang experience with the Türk in their early years made the Chinese realize the danger of allowing a strong foreign nation to exist so close to their power base is almost the opposite of the truth. The T’ang were also keenly aware of the history of the great Classical period dynasty, the Han, and openly expressed their desire to emulate the Chinese conquests of the Classical period. According to the official histories, the Han Dynasty had succeeded in defeating the Hsiung-nu, conquering the cities of the Tarim Basin, and capturing Korea as well. Although none of this was completely true, the T’ang rulers saw themselves as the heirs of the Han and wanted not only to restore the Classical age but even to outdo the Han Dynasty.

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40 Wechsler (1979a: 120).  
41 Wechsler (1979a: 150).  
42 Wechsler (1979a: 150).  
43 See the epilogue for further discussion.
T'ai-tsung (Li Shih-min, r. 626–649), Kao-tsu's son, took power in a dynastic coup d'état. In the process, two of his brothers were killed—he personally decapitated the crown prince—and Kao-tsu was forced to hand over power. T'ai-tsung immediately turned his attention to the Türk.

The traditional Chinese policy toward foreign peoples outside their territory was “divide, dominate, and destroy.” To this end, the T'ang actively fomented unrest and internal division in both the Eastern and Western Türk empires. T'ai-tsung was given his casus belli by the attack of Liang Shih-tu, the last remaining rebel from the period of the fall of the Sui, whose base was in the northern Ordos. Liang called a large Türk force in to attack the fledgling T'ang Dynasty on his behalf. The Türk reached the Wei River only ten miles west of the capital, Ch'ang-an, in 626. T'ai-tsung had no choice but to pay *Hellig Kaghan to withdraw.

Fate was not kind to *Hellig after this, however. In 627 several Central Eurasian peoples subject to the Eastern Türk, including the Uighurs, Bayar-yu, and Hsiieh-yen-t'o, revolted, and late in the year the weather turned bad too—unusually deep snowfall caused the death of so many animals that there was a famine on the steppe. Deprived of Türk assistance, Liang Shih-tu was vulnerable, and T'ai-tsung jumped at the opportunity. Early in 628 the T'ang forces attacked his camp and Liang was killed by one of his own men. The T'ang also strongly supported a new kaghan chosen by the peoples who had revolted against the Türk. In 629 *Hellig Kaghan requested permission to submit to China. T'ai-tsung refused and instead sent an enormous army against him. They attacked his camp on the south side of the Gobi Desert and slaughtered great numbers of the Türk. *Hellig was taken alive in 630 and brought to Ch'ang-an. He died in captivity there in 634.

The Chinese Empire grew in all directions in the early T'ang, with few setbacks, reaching its greatest extent during the rule of Emperor Hsüan-tsung (685–756 [r. 713–756]). In the first half of the eighth century, China—especially the western capital, Ch'ang-an—enjoyed the most cosmopolitan period in its entire history before the late twentieth century. The city was the largest, most populous, and wealthiest anywhere in the world at the time, with perhaps a million residents, including a large population of foreigners either residing permanently or visiting in various capacities. Hsüan-tsung patronized Western music and the poetry influenced by it, as well as the new Western-influenced painting style that had been introduced from Khotan in the early T'ang period. This was the greatest age of Chinese poetry, when many major poets lived, including the two most brilliant Chinese poets, Li Po and Tu Fu, who were famous in their own lifetimes. Li Po was born in Central Asia and may have been only partly Chinese. He was an outsider socially and "remained, in a profound way, a solitary and unique figure," probably due to his "foreign" behavior and to some extent to the rather un-Chinese image of himself he projected in his poetry, which is characterized by a love of the exotic in general.

Yet the T'ang hunger for territorial expansion at all costs, especially under Hsüan-tsung, was such that the great Chinese historian Ssu-ma Kuang later accused the T'ang house of trying to "swallow the peoples of the four directions." The internal devastation of northern China by unending conscription and ruthless taxation, remarked on by poets and historians, would have to be paid for.

The Tibetan Empire

The economic, cultural, diplomatic, and other motivations behind the appearance of a great new power, which are known in other historical cases, have not been identified in the case of the rise of the Tibetan Empire. The only known motivations are the sociopolitical features of a culture with the Central Eurasian Culture Complex.

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48 They were not, however, supported by Hsüan-tsung. Considering his actions with respect to An Lu-shan even before his rebellion, as well as many similar examples, it can only be concluded that Hsüan-tsung was a poor judge of character in general.
49 Owen (1981: 143). Li Po (701–ca. 765) was born in Central Asia and lived in Suyab (near what is now Tokmak in Kirghizistan). At some point in his youth his family moved to Szechuan, where he grew up. They may have been merchants, and it is suspected that he was only part Chinese. See Eide (1973: 388–389); cf. Owen (1981: 112). Though Li Po influenced other important poets of his day—most famously Tu Fu—he was ignored by most other poets during his lifetime.
50 TCTC 216: 6889.
51 In the Tibetan case, these elements include the ruler and his heroic companions, the comitatus, as the pinnacle of society; the burial of the ruler together with his comitatus, horses, and personal wealth in a great tumulus; and a strong interest in trade.
In the early seventh century a group of clan chiefs in southern Tibet swore an oath of fealty to the leading power among them, calling him btsanpo 'emperor'. Together they plotted to overthrow Zingporje, their oppressive alien overlord, who was apparently a vassal of the shadowy Zhangzhung realm that ruled much of the Tibetan Plateau at the time. The conspirators carried out their plan successfully and were rewarded by the emperor, whom they also refer to as Spurgyal.\(^5\) The emperor rewarded them with fiefs, and young noblemen from each of the clans joined his co-mitatus to cement the clans’ relationship to him. After having established themselves in their home territory, the new people defeated the lord of Rtsang and Bod, the areas—now Central Tibet—that lay directly to their north. They adopted the ancient name Bod for their country, but to the outside world it became known by the foreign name Tibet.\(^5\)

The circumstances in which the Tibetans first\(^5\) came into conflict with the Chinese are known. In 634 the T’ang sent a huge expeditionary force against the T’u-yu-hun Kingdom in the Kokonor region. The T’u-yu-hun, a Hsien-pei Mongolic people, had occupied the pasturelands around the Kokonor in the third century\(^5\) and expanded via Kansu into the eastern part of East Turkistan so as to control the southern trade routes between China and Central Asia. The T’ang campaign was successful, but it brought the Chinese into conflict with the Tibetans, who considered the T’u-yu-hun to be their vassals. After being rebuffed politically by the Chinese, Khri Srong Rtsan ('Srongs Btsan Sgampo', r. ca. 618–649), the first historically well-known Tibetan emperor, defeated a T’ang force sent against him in 638. When the T’ang inflicted a minor defeat on them in turn, the Tibetans requested a marriage treaty with the T’ang. T’ai-tsung agreed and made peace with the Tibetans with the marriage of a T’ang princess to the son or younger brother of the Tibetan emperor.\(^5\) The T’ang did not succeed in gaining firm control over the T’u-yu-hun and effectively accepted the Tibetans’ claims to their territory except for the Kansu corridor, which the T’ang needed in order for Chinese forces to be able to attack the cities of the Tarim Basin.

After thus securing his left flank, T’ai-tsung expanded westward into the Tarim Basin, conquering the city-states there one by one: Qocho or Kao-ch’ang (640), the chief city of the East Tokharians,\(^5\) in the Turfan oasis; and Agni or Karashahr (648) and Kucha (648), the chief cities of the West Tokharians and centers both of commerce and of Sarvāstivādin Buddhism. Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan,\(^5\) the chief cities of the Sakas or Eastern Iranians in the western Tarim Basin, voluntarily submitted to Chinese overlordship between 632 and 635. Against the advice of his leading ministers, T’ai-tsung then established a colonial government over the region, the Protectorate General of the Pacified West,\(^5\) known for short as An-hsi ‘the Pacified West’ and also as ‘the Four Garrisons of An-hsi’. Its seat was moved from Qocho west to Kucha in 649. The T’ang now controlled most of eastern Central Eurasia.

The death of both Khri Srong Rtsan and T’ai-tsung in 649 was followed by a gradual chilling of relations between their empires.

In 657 the armies of T’ai-tsung’s son and successor, Kao-tsung (r. 649–683), broke the power of the Western Turks. Ho-lu Kaghan was captured alive and taken to the Chinese capital. With the Chinese defeat of the Western Turks in the Tarim Basin and Jungharia, the area—which was already called Turkistan by other Central Eurasian peoples—technically then came under T’ang rule. But the Western Turks as a whole did not come under actual Chinese control.\(^4\) Instead, with the removal of the ruling clan, a great power struggle ensued.

At the same time, the Tibetans expanded into the territory of the former Zhangzhung Kingdom in the western Tibetan Plateau and on into the Pamir region, which straddled the trade routes from the Tarim Basin in Eastern Central Asia to Tokhārstān in Western Central Asia. By 661 to 663 they had subdued the Pamir kingdoms of Balûr (or Bruţa) and Wakhân, and an area

\(^{56}\) Beckwith (1993: 23). On the continuing misunderstanding of this marriage, see endnote 69.

\(^{55}\) On the title Spurgyal and current ahistorical use of it by some scholars, see endnote 68.

\(^{53}\) ‘Tibet’ is an exonym—a foreign name for the country. The name is related to the name of the Mongolic To-pa, or ‘Taghbać, and has nothing at all to do with the native name of the country, Bod. See the detailed discussion in Beckwith (2005b).

\(^{54}\) Actually, the Tibetans had earlier met the Sui Dynasty Chinese in exactly the same unpleasant circumstances; their realm was then known to the Chinese as Fu kuo ‘the kingdom of Fu’ (Beckwith 1993: 17–19). The transcription Fu might reflect Spu or Bod, as many have suggested, but it would in either case be highly irregular.

\(^{55}\) Molé (1970: xii).

\(^{56}\) Beckwith (1993: 23). On the continuing misunderstanding of this marriage, see endnote 69.

\(^{57}\) However, they seem to have spoken West Tokharian by about this time. The precise periodization (and localization) of the Tokharian languages of East Turkistan remains to be established.

\(^{58}\) Khotan, unlike the northern cities, was a strong center of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

\(^{59}\) Or Pacify-the-West Protectorate.

\(^{60}\) The claim that they really did is repeated in virtually everything written on the subject, but it is based on taking the grand statements in the Chinese dynastic histories at face value.
around Kashgar. In 663 also, Mgar Stong Rtsan the Conqueror decisively defeated the Tu-yu-hun and incorporated their land and people into the Tibetan Empire. The Tu-yu-hun kaghan, his Chinese princess, and several thousand families of Tu-yu-hun fled to China. The Tibetans subdued Khotan as early as 665, and two years later, after fighting off constant Chinese attacks, the Western Turks nominally accepted Tibetan overlordship. This relationship developed into the Tibetan-Western Turk alliance, which lasted for almost a century, through several changes of regime on both sides.

In 668 the Tibetans constructed defensive fortifications on the Jima Khol (Ta fei ch’uan), a river in the former Tu-yu-hun realm, in anticipation of a Chinese attack. In the early spring of 670, with Khotanese troops, the Tibetans attacked and took Aksu. That left two of the Four Garrisons, Kucha and Karashahr, in Chinese hands. Instead of fighting back, the Tang withdrew and apparently left East Turkistan to the Tibetans. Later that same spring, though, they responded. The Tang sent a huge army to attack the Tibetans in the former Tu-yu-hun realm. In a great battle at the Jima Khol, the Chinese were defeated by Mgar Stong Rtsan’s son Mgar Khri ‘Bring. The Tang moved their Protectorate General of the Pacified West back to Qocho. For the next twenty-two years East Turkistan was theoretically under Tibetan rule. In fact, though Khotan and the region to the west of it do seem to have been under direct Tibetan control, most of the Tarim Basin countries were at least semi-independent during this period.

The 680s were marked by unsettled internal conditions in the home territories of the Arab, Tibetan, and Chinese empires. The Central Asian areas remained much as they were, nominally under the rule of one or the other of these three states. A change began in the later part of the decade, when the Tibetans attacked Kucha and other areas to the north. Tibetan control increased, despite Tang resistance, until the young Tibetan emperor Khri ‘Dus Srong focused all his attention on an internal problem: wresting personal control of his government from the leaders of the Mgar clan, who had held the actual power while he was a child. At the same time, the Tang—from 690 actually called the Chou Dynasty, under the usurping female ruler Emperor Wu Chao (r. 690–705)—planned to retake the Four Garrisons. In 694 the

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**Establishment of the Second Turk Empire**

In the Eastern Steppe, the Turk were unhappy under Chinese overlordship. They rebelled unsuccessfully several times until Elteriš Kaghan (r. 682–691), a distant descendant of *Hellig Kaghan, working tirelessly out in the steppes, united the scattered, weakened peoples under his banner. In 682 the Türk again revolted, this time successfully. Elteriš reestablished an independent Türk Empire on the Eastern Steppe. His brother Kapghan Kaghan ‘Buk Chor’ (r. 691–716) succeeded him and further strengthened and expanded the realm. In the very beginning of the eighth century the lands of the Western Turks based in Jungharia and eastern Transoxiana had come under the control of a new confederation of peoples, known as the Türgiş. In 712 the Eastern Turks, under Köl Tigin (Kül Tigin), son of Elteriš, defeated the Türgiş kaghan, *Saqal. They reestablished the long-lost Eastern Türk dominion over the Western Turks, becoming by extension the overlords of Ferghana, Tashkent, and probably most of Sogdiana, in place of the Türgiş.

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61 Despite Wu Chao’s de facto replacement of the Tang and her ascension to the throne **at China’s first and last female emperor (the practice of calling her Empress Wu is inaccurate) she did not eliminate the Tang rulers she supplanted, namely Chung-tsung (r. 684, and again 705–710) and Jui-tsung (nominal reign 684–690, and again 710–712). Like Wang Mang, she has thus been categorized as a usurper. Both ruled China effectively, but neither their achieved legitimacy, and when, in each case, the supplanted imperial house was restored, some escaped to China, where they served in the Tang military.
Arab Conquest of Western Central Asia

The rebels of Khurasan—Central Asia—were subdued by the Arabs in 671–673. In 673 Mu‘awiya made Khurasan a separate governorship and appointed ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād its first governor. The latter crossed the Oxus River in 674 and raided Baykand (Paykand), the commercial city of the Bukharan Kingdom, forcing Bukhara to pay tribute. When Mu‘awiya died in 681, the succession was troubled and turned into a civil war (684–692), during which most of Khurasan became de facto independent again. After revolts and other internal troubles, ’Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) became caliph, and control over the nearer parts of Khurasan was eventually restored. In 695 he appointed a new governor over Iraq and the East, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, still retaining Khurasan, along with Sistān, as a separate governorship. Due to disastrous rebellions and weak governors, though, ’Abd al-Malik added Sistān and Khurasan to al-Ḥajjāj’s governorship in 697. This gave al-Ḥajjāj control over half of the Arab Empire for the rest of ’Abd al-Malik’s reign and all that of his son al-Walid 1 (r. 705–715).

By the late seventh century, not only were the Arabs living in the cities of Khurasan; some of them had acquired land and were becoming assimilated to the local people. Some became so assimilated that they lost their status as tax-exempt Arabs. The relationship with the local people was stronger in Marw than elsewhere. The Arab government even borrowed money from the Sogdians in Marw for an expedition against Sogdiana itself in 696. Two of the leaders of the merchant community in Marw at the turn of the century were Thābit and Hurayth ibn Quba, each of whom had acquired his own comitatus of chākars. Eventually they joined the Arab rebel Mūsā ibn ’Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim in Tirmidh and rallied the princes of Transoxiana, Tokhāristān, and the Hephthalites of Bāghdis in a rebellion against the Umayyads. The alliance broke up, both brothers were killed, and al-Ḥajjāj appointed another governor, al-Mufādqal ibn al-Muḥallab, who finally crushed Mūsā’s rebellion in Tirmidh in 704. Al-Ḥajjāj then appointed Qutayba ibn Muslim al-Bāhili governor of Khurasan (705–715).

Qutayba was trained by al-Ḥajjāj himself, and reorganized Arab administration of the province when he arrived in Marw. He also resecured Arab control over Tokhāristān and in the next years captured Paykand, a center of the Chinese trade, and Bukhara, which was finally conquered in 709. In 709–710 he took Kišš and Nasaf and also crushed the revolt of Tokhāristān and the Hephthalites, capturing the Yabghu of Tokhāristān, who was sent to the Arab capital of the time, Damascus. In 712 Qutayba seized Khwārizm by trickery and settled an Arab colony there. In that year, he also besieged Samarkand. Its king appealed to Tashkent for help, so as overlords of Tashkent the Eastern Türk sent an army led by Köl Tigin into Sogdiana in his support. But Qutayba prevailed. The Türk were forced to withdraw, and the Arabs established a garrison in Samarkand.

In 714 Qutayba invaded deep into Transoxiana, as far as Ferghana. By this time he had acquired a personal comitatus known as the Archers. Qutayba heard about his patron al-Ḥajjāj’s death (in 714) when he was coming back from a campaign against Shāsh (Tashkent), but he was confirmed by al-Walid as governor. In 715 Qutayba invaded the Jaxartes provinces again. This time he made an alliance with the Tibetans and a faction of the Ferghana royal family. Together they overthrew the rulers of Ferghana, Bāsāk, and replaced him with Alutār, a member of another royal family.

The same year, while Qutayba was still in Ferghana, al-Walid died and Sulaymān (r. 715–717) succeeded as caliph. Knowing he would be recalled, Qutayba rebelled. But his army turned against him. Only his comitatus, the Archers, stood by him to the end. All were killed.

Meanwhile, Bāsāk had fled to the Chinese in Kucha. The T’ang military governor there organized an expedition and, together with Bāsāk, invaded Ferghana in December of the same year, deposed Alutār, and restored Bāsāk to the throne—now as a Chinesedependent.

Kapghan Kaghan was killed on campaign in 716 shortly after withdrawing from the Türkīš territory. He was succeeded by his nephew, Eльтirī’s son Bīlgā Kaghan, who was greatly aided by his brother Köl Tigin. *Suluk, the head of the Black Bone clan68 of the Türkīš, became kaghan in the Western

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64 Shaban (1970: 66).
68 The previous rulers had belonged to the Yellow Bone clan.
Türk domains. He promptly restored Türgiş power and rapidly expanded their territory further than had his predecessors. The Türgiş asserted their claim to the former Western Türkic hegemony over the lands of Transoxiana and Tokhāristān. They thus became the supporters of the local peoples against the Arabs and Islam and also the close allies of the Tibetans.

The Chinese saw the Türgiş alliance with the Tibetans as the realization of a connection between north and south, feared from Han times, that would cut China off from the West. As conscious imitators of the Han, the T'ang were bound to attempt to break the alliance. They and the Arabs made a secret alliance of their own and planned the downfall of the Türgiş and Tibetans.

The T'ang-Silla Conquest of Koguryo

The monumental Sui and early T'ang attempts to reestablish the Han Dynasty dominion over southern Manchuria and northern Korea had failed one after the other, defeated by the redoubtable forces of the Kingdom of Koguryo. But in 642 internal troubles struck Koguryo when the usurper *Ur Ghap Somun (Yôn Kaesomun) seized power. He murdered the king and some hundred aristocrats and put a son of the dead king on the throne as his puppet. Nevertheless, under his regency Koguryo was able to repulse yet another massive Chinese invasion—this time led by the T'ang emperor T'ai-tsung himself—in 645.

Under Kao-tsung (r. 649–683), the T'ang made an alliance with Silla, a kingdom in southeastern Korea that had been expanding in the southern

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The Franks

After the Great Wandering of Peoples finally ended in Western Europe, the people who dominated northern Gaul and western Germany were the Franks. They owed their success to the skill of several great leaders, most famously Clovis I (Hludovicus, r. 481–511), the son of Childeric I (d. 481) and grandson of Merovech (d. 456 or 457). Clovis established the capital of Francia in Paris in 508. He unified the Franks—mainly by killing the leaders of the other Frankish peoples—and established them as uncontested rulers of northern Gaul and environs. His sons completed the conquest of most of

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70 The first two syllables of his full Old Koguryo name are *Ur and *Ghap (*ñaip ~ *yap); see Beckwith (2007a: 46, 62–63). The second syllable is not *kaj (Pul. 102), the Middle Chinese ancestor of the later reading Kai, Sino-Korean Ka; the reading seems to be a medieval error. His unknown personal name is conventionally transcribed in Sino-Korean form as Somun. Old Koguryo *ñaip ‘great mountain’, from Archaic Koguryo *ñapga ‘great mountain’, is cognate to Old Japanese *yama ‘mountain’ (Beckwith 2007a: 46, 121).

71 These men were probably the king's comitatus, but the sources are extremely laconic and do not give enough information to allow more to be said about them.


74 On the Koguryo (or Puyo-Koguryo) language and its relationship to the Japanese-Ryukyuan languages, see Beckwith (2005a, 2006b, 2007a).
Gaul, Belgium, western Germany, and part of what is now Switzerland. Their control often slipped due to the perennial internecine succession struggles that plagued the Merovingian Dynasty, but Dagobert I (r. 629–639) inherited from his father, Chlothar II (Lothair, r. 584–629), a united kingdom. He and his successors were under the strong influence of the family of Pippin, Mayor of the Palace, whose members, from one branch or another, increasingly controlled the actual government of the Merovingian realm. After Dagobert’s death, the Merovingian rulers were puppets of the “pre-Carolingian” mayoral dynasty of the Pippinids and Arnulfings. By the early seventh century, the government had come completely under the family’s control. Mayor of the Palace Carl (Charles Martel, r. 714–741) subdued rebels throughout the kingdom, including Eudo of Aquitaine, whom he defeated in 725. But the Arabs had invaded Spain in 711 from North Africa and conquered it, and Eudo (who was of Gascon or Basque origin) made an alliance with the neighboring Berber leader, Munnuza, whose stronghold was in the Pyrenees. Under ‘Abd al-Rahman (r. 731–733/734), the new governor of Spain, the Arabs attacked Munnuza in the Pyrenees, defeated him, and continued on into southern Gaul, where they defeated Eudo north of the Garonne River. They plundered Bordeaux and Poitiers and then attacked Tours, where they were defeated by Carl in 733 or 734. Carl and his brother Hildebrand (father of Nibelung) also subdued Narbonne and Provence, which had similarly allied with the Arabs. On his death, Carl was peacefully succeeded as Mayor of the Palace by his son, Pippin III (Pippin the Short, or Pepin, r. 741–768), who pursued his father’s policies and extended the Frankish realm as far as Spain, the Mediterranean, and Italy in the south, Saxony in the north, and the Avars of Pannonia in the east.

The Silk Road and Early Medieval Political Ideology

One of the most remarkable and least appreciated facts about the historical sources on the Early Middle Ages in Eurasia as a whole is their overwhelming emphasis on Central Eurasia, especially Central Asia. The Chinese, Old Tibetan, and Arabic historical sources, in particular, are full of detail on

Central Asia, while even the more parochial Greek and Latin sources emphasize the significance of Central Eurasia for their realms. The reason for all this attention is clearly not modern historians’ imaginary threat of a nomad warrior invasion, which is virtually unmentioned in the sources. The reason for the attention seems rather to be the prosperous Silk Road economy and the existence of a shared political ideology across Eurasia that ensured nearly constant warfare.

This common ideology was one of the driving political-ideological forces behind all of the early medieval Eurasian state expansions, beginning with the Türk conquest. Every empire had a distinctive term for its own ruler and never referred to any foreign ruler by that term in official documents. Each nation believed its own emperor to be the sole rightful ruler of “all under Heaven,” and everyone else should be his subjects, whether submitted and dutiful ones or not-yet-subjugated, rebellious “slaves.” The punishment for rebelling or refusing to submit was war, but war was inevitable anyway throughout early medieval Eurasia as a whole, both because of the shared imperialistic political ideology of the time and because regular warfare had been a normal part of life since prehistoric times. Each emperor thus proclaimed and attempted to actually establish his rule over the four directions, each of which was theoretically assigned to one of his subordinates. The clearest examples of the ideal Central Eurasian political structure, sometimes referred to aptly as the “khan and four bey system,” are attested in the Puyo and Koguryo kingdoms; the Türk Empire, about which the Byzantine ambassador Maniakh told the Roman emperor that they had four “military governorships” plus the ruler, who

\footnotesize

79 The ideology was maintained as late as the Mongols and is very clearly expressed in the Mongol rulers’ letters to other rulers demanding their submission.


77 See Schamiloglu (1984a), whose description largely refers to the Mongol Empire and post-Mongol period. This was an “ideal” political organization system in most of Central Eurasia, much noted in the sources from the earliest times. The extent to which it was put into actual practice in all regions “on the ground” should be examined carefully.

76 The Chinese accounts of the early Puyo Kingdom list a sovereign plus four subdivisions; for Koguryo they name five directions or subdivisions, of which the center or Yellow subdivision was that of the royal clan (SKC 30: 843; HHS 85: 2813; Beckwith 2007: 14–42). This is similar to the later-attested Khitan (Liao Dynasty) system.

75 This would seem to be the intended meaning of Menander’s term ἥγεμον ἡγεμονία, translated as “principalities” by Blockley (1985: 114–115).

74 This is the traditional Battle of Poitiers, qv. Wood (1994: 283).

belonged to the *Aršilas clan; the Tibetan Empire (the highly theoretical four-horn structure seems to be best explained in this way); the T'ang Empire, which established not only a Protectorate of the Pacified West but one over each of the other three directions as well; the Khitan Empire; and later in the Mongol Empire and its successor states.

Partly because of this ideology, all early medieval empires attempted to expand in all directions. This was not unlike empires in other periods and places, but during the Early Middle Ages, for the first time in history, the great empires came into direct contact with each other and knew they were not alone. Each empire was forced to face the fact that it was actually one among equals. At first, none could accept this fact, so a diplomatic protocol developed in order to handle the practical necessity of dealing with foreign empires: the envoys of one empire to the other paid obeisance to the foreign ruler at his home court; the envoy's obeisance was recorded locally in terminology that expressed his home empire's subservience to the local empire; and when the envoy returned home, usually in the company of an envoy from the people visited, the latter similarly paid obeisance to the foreign envoy's emperor.

When the cultures and nation-states of Eurasia collided in the early eighth century, each knew that the others coveted control of Central Eurasia as much as it did. Each eagerly sought products, knowledge, and people from the other empires. They all made political alliances and coordinated military action, down to details, and even modified their own practices and beliefs to agree with or differ from the others. Despite the constant, unabashed warfare all across Eurasia in this period, the Silk Road economy prospered and grew mightily at least until the middle of the eighth century. The Eurasian world was connected together ever more closely politically, culturally, and especially economically, due mainly to the efforts of the Central Eurasians.

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84 For discussion of proposed etymologies of the name *Aršilas, see endnote 72.
85 See Uray (1960).
86 Manz (1989: 4) notes, "Chinggis divided his steppe empire into four great territories, later known as the four üsües, which he assigned to his sons along with sections of his army." The Chinggisids are well known for their quadripartite state structure (Schamiloglu 1984a).
87 One of them, An-nan 'the Pacified South', survives in name to modern times as Annam, an old name for Vietnam. The capital Ch'ang-an 'Eternal Peace' would appear to have been conceptually in the middle, but it is an ancient name and seems not to be mentioned in connection with the four geographical units. The usual Chinese name of China itself, Chung-kuo, is thought to have meant, originally, 'the Central States' rather than 'the Middle Kingdom', which is a later reinterpretation of the name.
88 The pretense was maintained at all official levels until the early ninth century, when the first true bilateral treaty in eastern Eurasia was signed between the Chinese and Tibetan empires (Beckwith 1993). However, the imperial ideology did not disappear entirely from Eurasia. The Mongols under Chinggis Khan still followed it in the thirteenth century, and the Chinese have continued to follow it down to modern times.
EMPIRES OF THE SILK ROAD

A History of Central Eurasia
from the Bronze Age
to the Present

CHRISTOPHER I. BECKWITH

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