

Evgenij N. Chernykh



Nomadic Cultures in the Mega-Structure of the Eurasian World

Translated by Irina Savinetskaya and Peter N. Hommel

Translated by Irina Savinetskaya and Peter N. Hommel



Nomadic Cultures in the Mega-Structure of the Eurasian World

Evgenij N.Chernykh



LRC Publishing House



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
A catalog record for this book as available from the Library of Congress.

Copyright © 2017 Academic Studies Press, LRC Publishing House
All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-61811-552-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-1-61811-553-9 (electronic)

Book design by Irina Bogatyreva
On the cover: sculptures by Dashi Namdakov (see pp. 692–693 for details).

Published by Academic Studies Press and LRC Publishing House in 2017

Academic Studies Press
28 Montfern Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135, USA
press@academicstudiespress.com
www.academicstudiespress.com

LRC Publishing House
13/16 B. Lubyanka
Moscow, 107031, Russia
mail@lrc-press.ru
<http://www.lrc-press.ru>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Preface to the English Edition	15
Translator's Preface to the English Edition	17
Acknowledgements.....	18

Introduction

A Tragic Century.....	20
“Every Earth Zone...”	20
“Earth...the Progenitor of all Things”	21

Part I.

The Steppe Belt in the Mega-Structure of the Eurasian World

Chapter 1. The Formation of the Eurasian World.....	27
Structure and Mega-Structure in Eurasian Geocology.....	27
Culture and Subsistence Strategy.....	27
The Long Road to a Continental Mega-Structure	29
Four Continental “Enclaves”	30

Chapter 2. Transitions from North to South: Geocology, Subsistence and the Eurasian Steppe Belt	32
North—South, East—West	32
The Geocological “Cake” of Eurasia	33
Differences between the Domains	35
The Geocology of the Eurasian Steppe Belt.....	36
The West Eurasian Steppe and its Borders.....	37
The Dzungarian Gate and Mongolian Mountain Steppe.....	39
Arabian Desert Plateaus.....	45
The Domain of Nomadic Culture	46

Chapter 3. Transitions from East to West: Across the Layers of the Eurasian Geocology	49
The East in Eurocentric Perspective.....	49
Dividing Lines and Defining Borders:	
The Mountains between East and West	50
The Line between Asia and Europe.....	51
West and East Beyond the Geocological Framework.....	55
Anthropology	55
Linguistics	56
Ideological Systems.....	58

Part II.
The Archaeology of Nomadic Cultures

Chapter 4. Archaeology and History: Sources of Difference	67
Archaeology and History: Pre-Literate and Literate.....	67
Understanding Differences in Method and Approach	68
Interpreting Archaeological Sources	70
The Complexity of Burial Structures	72
Archaeologists as the Denizens of the Afterworld.....	75
The “Mongolian Syndrome” of Nomadic Cultures	77
Chapter 5. “Gifts” from the Nomads: Pastoral Contributions to World History	79
Self-Perception and the Perception of Others: Archetype of Narcissism.....	79
Perception of the Steppe Nomads.....	80
Horse Riding.....	82
Monotheism.....	84
Mounds and Mausoleums	85
The “Bridge” between East and West.....	88
The Tides of Cultural Influence.....	88
Chapter 6. Nomadic Cultures in the Early Metal Age: Archaeological Time, Technology and Territory	90
The Duration of Archaeological Time	90
Riders and Metal	91
Metal and the “Ages” of Prehistory	91
At the Origins of Metallurgy	92
Other Innovations of the Early Metal Age	94
Accepted Norms and Acceptable Industries	95
Early Metal Age as a Eurasian Phenomenon	96
Territorial “Leaps” of Early Metal Age Cultures.....	96
The Problem of Spatial Stagnation	98
Chapter 7. The “Proto-Metal” Age in Eurasia	100
The Roots of the Early Metal Age	100
Eastern Anatolia (Çayönü Tepesi, Tell Halula, Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe, Körtik Tepe.....	101
Central Anatolia (Aşikli Höyük, Çatal-Höyük)	108
The Levant (Jericho and Tell Aswad).....	110
The End of the “Proto-Metal” Age	112
Chapter 8. Metallurgical Revolution in the Carpatho-Balkan Region	114
Beginning of the Metal Age: Chalcolithic/Eneolithic.....	114
The Balkan Neolithic.....	114
The Structure of the Carpatho-Balkan Metallurgical Province	116
The Central Block	117
The Varna Necropolis	118

The Ai Bunar Copper Mine.....	121
The Second Block: The Tripolye Community.....	124
The Third Block: Herders in the Steppe	126
Cultural Continuity in the Steppe.....	129
Driving Change.....	130
Chapter 9. The Origins of the Circumpontic Metallurgical Province.....	132
The Emergence of a New Province and the Start of the Early Bronze Age	132
The Mounds of the “Maykop”	134
“Maykop” Settlements and Economy.....	142
The Mysteries of the “Maykop”	143
Chapter 10. The Circumpontic Metallurgical Province and Caucasian “Corridor”	148
The Turn of the Middle Bronze Age in the Southern Domain.....	148
The “Occupation” of the Carpatho-Balkan Zone	148
Arslantepe: The “Hall of Weapons” and the “Royal Tomb”.....	152
The Metal in Arslantepe and Its Parallels	154
Traces of the South in the “Maykop” North.....	155
From the Proto-Circumpontic to the Circumpontic Metallurgical Province	157
The Drift of Gold around the Black Sea.....	161
Northern Axes in the South	165
Chapter 11. The Circumpontic Province and the Nomads of the Steppe Belt.....	167
The Middle Bronze Age in the Northern Domain	167
Three Groups of North-Caucasian Cultures.....	167
An Impulse to the North: The Steppe Kurgan Cultures	170
The “Yamna” Archaeological Community	171
The “Pioneers” of Mining-Metallurgical Industries in the Steppe	173
The First Wave of Nomadic Migration from West to East	175
The Catacomb Archaeological Community	177
The Radiocarbon Chronology of Steppe Cultures and its paradoxes.....	178
Montelius’s Morphological Paradigm and the Steppe Communities.....	183
Chapter 12. Great Leap and Great Stagnation.....	185
The Late Bronze Age	185
A Genie, Bursting out of the Furnace.....	185
Defining the Great Stagnation	187
The Cultural Core of Eurasia	188
Chapter 13. The Second Millennium: Revolutionary Changes in the Eurasian Steppe	190
From the Ruins of the Circumpontic Province	190
The West-Asian Metallurgical Province: Change in the Character of Cultures	191
The “Democratic” Character of the Steppe Cultures	192

The Dawn of the West-Asian Province.....	193
The West-Asian Province: The Period of Stabilization	196
The Kargaly Mining-Metallurgical Center Phenomenon.....	199
The Disintegration of the West-Asian Province.....	204
The Second and Third Waves from the West to the East.....	209
The Peculiarities of the West-Asian Province and a Number of Unanswerable Questions.....	210
Chapter 14. The Neighbours of the West-Asian Metallurgical Province	
The Formation of New Systems.....	211
The European Metallurgical Province	212
The Caucasian Metallurgical Province	218
The West-Asian, European, and Caucasian Provinces: The Differences in Focus.....	223
The Iranian-Anatolian Metallurgical Province.....	225
The Hyksos—Manetho—Josephus Flavius.....	230
Chapter 15. From the Centre of Asia to the West: the Forerunners of Genghis Khan?.....	
The Seima-Turbino Transcultural Phenomenon	234
Cemeteries or Memorial Sanctuaries?.....	235
The Metal of “Seima-Turbino”.....	238
Chemical-Metallurgical Groups	241
Animal Images on the “Seima-Turbino” Metalwork.....	242
The Cultures of Central Asia and the “Mongolian Syndrome”	244
A Caravan of Animals: The “Hallmarks” of Strangers from the East.....	245
Foreign Warriors.....	247
The End of the Seima-Turbino Phenomenon	249
Chapter 16. East Asian Steppe and Ancient Chinese Metallurgical Provinces	
In Search of “Seima-Turbino” Heritage.....	250
The Karasuk Culture and the East Asian Steppe Metallurgical Province.....	251
The Ancient Chinese (Shang-Zhou) Metallurgical Province.....	255
Chapter 17. At the Roots of the Age of Iron	
The Fifth Age of Metal.....	264
The Spatial and Chronological Framework of the Iron Age.....	267
The Periodization of Technological and Social Development: The Problem of Coordination.....	267
Chapter 18. The Scythian World through the Eyes of Herodotus	
The Scythians: Who Are They?.....	271
The Origins of the Scythians According to Herodotus	272
On the Funerals of Kings.....	274
The Scythians and the Hellenes: Inter-Perceptions	278

Chapter 19. The Scythian World through the eyes of Archaeologists	281
The Scythians: Who Are They (Archaeologically)?.....	281
Two Thousand Years On: The Heirs of the “Maykop” Culture	282
The Greatness of Scythian Burial Mounds	283
The Royal Kurgans and their Geography	288
Scythian Metals and Their Sources	290
Scythian Gold	293
The Rejection of the Old World	298
The Irrational Aspect of Culture	301
The Sarmatians Replace the Scythians	303

Part III.

Nomadic Culture in Historical Context

Chapter 20. The Transformation of the Pastoralists of Arabia	309
On the Sources of Revelation	309
The Battle of Badr and the Beginning of the Muslim Conquests.....	311
First Wave of Conquests.....	313
Second Wave of Conquests: Iberian Peninsula.....	314
Battle of Talas and Dzungarian Gate.....	317
Chapter 21. A Collision of Worlds: Islam and Catholicism	315
Intellectual Rise in Arab Caliphates	321
Geographical Lore in Europe.....	322
Europe Aims at Palestine	325
The People’s Crusade	326
The Capture of Jerusalem	327
The Further Adventures of the Cross	330
Chapter 22. The first Wave from the East: the Huns	333
Collapse of the Pillars of Stability	333
The Huns in the West	334
Attila the Hun.....	337
After Attila.....	341
Chapter 23. The “Huns” in the East	344
Where are their Roots?.....	344
The Xiongnu and the Han: the Reliability of Chinese Texts	345
A Pendulum of Victory and Defeat.....	347
Weak Han, Strong “Huns”	349
A Telling Exchange between Chanyu and Emperor.....	350
Enticing the Xiongnu—the advice of Jia Yi.....	351
The Importance of Military Organization—the Advice of Chao Cuo	354
Strong Han, Weak “Huns”	357
The Tombs of the Eastern “Huns”	360

Chapter 24. A Second Wave from the East: the Turks	367
Chaos in Peoples, Chaos in Chronicles	367
The Successors of the Xiongnu: Rouran and Xianbei.....	368
Turkic Khanates.....	370
Rhythms of Victory and Defeat	374
The Turkic World	375
In Search of Correspondance between Written and Archaeological Records	377
Chapter 25. The heirs of the Western Turkic khanate	380
Who are the Bulgars?	380
Khazars and their Khanate.....	383
The Oghuz.....	387
Catholic crusaders and the Cumans, a Turkic nomadic people.....	388
Chapter 26. The Third Wave from the East: China and the Mongols	392
The “Secret History” of the Mongols.....	392
Mengda beilu.....	394
Dynastic Histories and Chronicles.....	395
Childhood and Adolescence of Temujin	398
The First Steps of Genghis Khan	401
The Year of the Tiger.....	403
The conquest of Tangut: the Western Xia Dynasty and the Death of Genghis Khan	405
The Defeat of the Jurchen Jin	406
The Demise of the Song Dynasty.....	407
The Mongols in Tibet.....	408
Centaur with Ballistae.....	410
The Great Wall of China.....	411
Chapter 27. Third Wave from the East: the Mongols and world of Islam	415
Beginning: the First Mongol Campaign to the West.....	415
The fall of Khwarezm.....	417
From Samarkand to Kalka and back to Mongolia.....	421
From Hatred to Flattery	423
Chapter 28. A Third Wave from the East: the Mongols and the Christian World	429
Unexpected strangers	429
The second Expedition to the West: A Decision to conquer the World	431
Endangered Rus’	432
The Catholic World alerted	433
Attempts to organize Collective Resistance.....	436
Catholics take a more rationalized Approach.....	437
William of Rubruck and Marco Polo	443

Chapter 29. The Fall of the Great Mongol Empire	448
The Apogee of an Empire.....	448
Microscopic Polygon.....	449
Three Generations of Conquerors	451
Defeats without Battles	451
Antaeus and Odysseus Syndrome.....	452
The Softening of Brutal Souls.....	453
Chapter 30. An Eastern Millennium	457
Three Eastern Waves: Similarities and Differences	457
Written Sources and their Advantages and Disadvantages	459
Historical Realities and the “Mongolian Syndrome”	460
Great Silk Way and archeology.....	462
The fate of Mongolian cities.....	465
Part IV.	
Rus', Russia and the Nomadic World	
Chapter 31. Why only Rus'?	471
History and Archaeology Revisited.....	472
The Historians of the Kievan Rus'	473
“Bad Environment, bad Neighbours”	475
Chapter 32. From the Avars to the Time of Troubles	478
Avars, Khazars and Pechenegs	479
The Cumans	482
The Mongols — the Kalka River	486
Four Years and Four Waves of Batu Khan's Conquests.....	487
The Mongol Yoke and the Russian Princes.....	488
The Kulikovo Battle	490
The Weakening of the Horde.....	492
From the Great Standoff on Ugra River to Ivan the Terrible	494
From Ivan the Terrible to the Time of Troubles.....	496
Chapter 33. The Early Modern Period: Rupturing of the borders of the Eurasian Nucleus	498
Climatic Centuries in the Transition to the Early Modern Period.....	498
A rupture in the West.....	499
The Iberian Wave and the Dream of the Indies.....	500
Amerigo Vespucci and America	504
The gold of South America.....	507
The British wave and the Global Dream.....	509
Captain Hudson and New Amsterdam	511
Thirteen British colonies and the origins of the independence of America.....	512
The British Empire	512

Chapter 34. Sarmatia Asiatica and Sarmatia Europeana	514
Evaluation of the Events of Two Centuries Ago	516
The “Barrier” of Kazan.....	517
From the Urals to Cape Dezhnyov.....	521
Encounters on the Amur: the Manchus	522
Peaceful assimilation?.....	523
Furs instead of Gold	525
The Steppe Belt and China	527
The Colonization of Northern Eurasia and the Blockade of the Steppe Belt.....	530
Chapter 35. Breaking Borders: colonization in Principle and Practice	532
The Burden of “Civilization”	532
New Worlds, New Opportunities.....	533
Sources of Pleasure	534
The Modes of Russian Colonization	535
Crossing Continents: Russian America.....	536
The Fate of the Colonized	538
Chapter 36. An Assault on the Steppe.....	540
The Crimean Thorn: the “Fortress” of the Southwestern Steppe.....	540
The Prince of Tauris	544
A Ural foothold.....	545
Kirilov’s Window.....	547
Rychkov—Ethnographer, Historian, and Accountant.....	549
Into the Kazakh Steppes.....	551
The Last Days of the Kazakh Khanate	554
At the Gates of Bukhara	555
“Zheltorossii”: The Manchurian Project.....	558
The End of the Insuperable Steppe World?	559
Chapter 37. The Soviet Steppe	562
A short road to the Soviet Empire.....	562
“Unbreakable Union of Freeborn Republics...”	563
The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government.....	563
Successes and achievements.....	565
Setbacks and Failures	566
“Bulwark of Peoples in Brotherhood Strong...”	567
Central Asia: a Century later	568
Impressions of Mongolia: 60 years later.....	571
The field and the Harvest of Sorrow	577

Part V.

In place of an Epilogue: Difficult questions and complex problems

Chapter 38. Reflections on life among complex problems	585
Thirty Five Years on.....	585

On the Periodization of the Early Metal Age	585
Radiocarbon-based Chronology and the Paradigm of the Contemporary Archaeology.....	589
Models of Development: Transformation.....	590
Blows to Montelius' Ideas.....	591
Models of Development: Leaps, Surges, and Explosions.....	593
In Search of the Origins of Technological Innovations and the Issue of Migration	595
Chapter 39. Ideology and Culture	598
The Normative Factor	598
The Normative Factor and the Religious Principles of the East and the West....	600
The Normative factor and Funerary Rites	605
Chapter 40. Self-sufficiency and Historical Development.....	608
Metallurgy as a Marker of Transformation.....	608
Self-sufficiency	609
Eurasia and Africa: the Fate of the Ancestral Homeland of Humankind	611
The Colonization and Re-Colonization of Australia	612
Appendix 1. Radiocarbon Chronology of the Early Metal Age Cultures in Western Eurasia	619
Appendix 2. In Thirst of Immortality: Genghis Khan and the Mission of Chang Chun the Monk	633
Genghis Khan and His Longing for Immortality	633
Chang Chun writes to Genghis Khan.....	634
To the West	636
Passing across the Tian Shan Mountains.....	638
In Other, More Common World	640
Across Tian Shan to the Sayram Lake 800 Years Later	643
Appendix 3. Mariott Hotel and Batu Khan.....	646
Appendix 4. The Last Descendant of Genghis Khan?	649
Appendix 5. The Great Silk Road and the Secret Mission of Chokan Valikhanov	650
Historical Sources	657
Bibliography.....	661
Index	677

Author's Preface to the English Edition

Over many thousands of years, the most important stages in the historical development of Eurasia appear to define two lines across the continent. Both are, of course, symbolic, but in other respects they remain entirely dissimilar. The first line, running from north to south, dissects the continent vertically, separating the *West* and the *East*. Its presence is clearly apparent in major cultural differences and biological divisions in human physical anthropology, and while I would hesitate to attach any inherent significance to the latter, these differences serve to emphasise the temporal depth of this divide. This line begins to manifest itself after the initial Early Palaeolithic settlement of Eurasia, around one and a half million years ago, and is continually redrawn in the subsequent millennia, affecting the pattern of human socio-cultural development even today.

The second of our lines runs perpendicular to the first and highlights a growing demarcation between the *North* and the *South*. This division appears much later, about 12 000 years ago, with the end of the Ice Age and the onset of the Holocene (as it is referred to by geologists). The retreating glaciers released the land of the continental mainland, and gradually, the geocological zones of Eurasia, with which we are familiar today, began to take shape. In human terms, this division between North and South defines clear socio-technological differences among the peoples of the continent.

Overlaying these two lines, the latter “horizontal” line virtually bisects the more ancient, “vertical”, resulting in a cruciform division of the body of Eurasia that reflects a more complex picture of its historical development.

From North to South the layers of the geocological “cake” of continental Eurasia, became, step-by-step, the domain of various different of socio-economic forms of society. In the far North of the continent—in its forest and forest-tundra zones—societies continued the traditions of Palaeolithic subsistence, based on hunting, fishing and gathering. The South, populated by societies that were increasingly reliant on sedentary agriculture and intensive animal husbandry, was characterised by scale and became very advanced in terms of their technology. Separating these two worlds, across eight thousand kilometres from the mouth of the Danube to Manchuria, was the steppe zone of Eurasia. This was the domain of mobile herders, pastoralists and nomads, whose societies and modes of subsistence were drastically different from both their northern and southern neighbours.

Over the last seven thousand years, through many dramatic twists and turns, the ups and downs of the history of the Eurasia was determined by interactions between the nomadic cultures of the steppe and the peoples of the southern agricultural world. Technologically and culturally, the latter have always had (or claimed) a superiority—sometimes very significant—over the former. Yet, the peoples of the nomadic world were frequently victorious in conquest.

When these equestrian hordes could so easily overwhelm the foundations of settled cultures and their seemingly insurmountable States, it should come as no surprise to find that from the Atlantic coast to the shores of the Pacific we find the same indelible myth: the nomad as a malign symbol of misery, destruction and barbarism. Yet, reality is always more complex than myth, and this is certainly true in this case. Over the course of this book, the role of nomadic cultures in the history of Eurasia will be considered in detail, beginning with what I consider to be the most significant historical benchmark in Eurasian prehistory: the emergence of metallurgy.

Throughout my career, nomads and metals have been the ever present foci of my research, and it is significant that this publication comes exactly 50 years after my first monograph on this subject, the *History of ancient metallurgy in Eastern Europe*, in which I set out to consider the nature of early relationships between the settled farming cultures of Caucasus and the pastoralists of the eastern European steppe. Since then, in almost all of my significant publications—books and articles—I have attempted to address these complex issues (some of the most important of these works are included in the bibliography). In 2013, I completed an extended popular presentation of all these ideas in Russian, entitled *Nomadic Cultures in the Megastructure of Eurasian World*. The current volume, published under the same title, is a translation of this book adapted for an English-speaking audience.

Evgenij N. Chernykh

Translator's Preface to the English Edition

For me, the translation of this text began on the 9th December 2012 during a period of rather intense correspondence with the author as we prepared for his visit to the University of Oxford in March 2013. I received a draft translation of three chapters along with a request for my comments. Three months later, and somewhat to my surprise, I found myself agreeing to undertake the translation of this forty-chapter excursion around the Eurasian steppe. Such is the effect of Evgenij Chernykh.

This task would have been immeasurably more difficult without an initial draft produced by my co-translator Irina Savinetskaya. Although we have never met, I remain extremely grateful to her for her efforts. From this basis, my aim was to work towards a text that reflected the intent and spirit of the original, without being constrained by the inevitable stylistic dissonance between Russian and English prose.

Rather than present a perfect translation of the Russian edition, published in 2013, I have worked with the author to edit and adapt both the text and its narrative flow for English readers. Anyone familiar with Russian and wishing to undertake a direct comparison of the two would certainly be frustrated by structural changes in many of the chapters. These are particularly apparent in the chapters dealing with prehistory, which overlap most closely with my own research interests. In the latter half of the book, as the discussion moves onto matters historical, the chapters remain structurally closer to the original. For me, the greater challenge in these sections was the differential coverage of translated sources in Russian and English. Wherever possible, Russian language translations in the original volume were replaced with English language translations of the same texts. However, in the case of Iakinf Bichurin (the authors preferred source for many of the translations from Chinese) and a number of sources for which suitable English translations could not be located in time, we made the decision to translate from Russian into English. In these cases, every effort was made to capture the nuances of the original text.

Throughout this process, as much for myself as for the author, I made extensive comments on the text, some of which Evgenij has graciously adopted in his final edition of the text. In my view, this work is particularly remarkable, since it represents a clear distillation of ideas from a man who has spent his entire career in the grasslands and deserts of Eurasia. Working on this book has left me with a far deeper understanding of this remarkable region and a far wider range of questions about its past. I am in no doubt that his conclusions will stimulate much discussion. I can only hope that in adapting this work for an English audience, we have been able to retain the same sense of fascination that prompted its author to produce it.

Peter N. Hommel
University of Oxford

Acknowledgements

This book would never have seen the light of day without the help and support of my friends and colleagues. Above all, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation for the input of my wife, Elena Yu. Lebedeva, and our dear friend and colleague Lyubov B. Orlovskaya. Their careful proofreading of this immense manuscript; their constructive advice about problematic passages, which did not read smoothly or appear entirely logical; their help in assembling the bibliography and reconciling citations and figure references was invaluable.

Throughout this book—on its cover and across the first pages of every major section—I have been able to include a number of photos illustrating the uniquely expressive art of the talented Buryat sculptor Dashi Namdakov. His work has always appeared to me to be remarkably in tune with the main themes of the book, and I am both gratified by and grateful for his kindness in giving permission for them to become part of this publication. This thematic and artistic “consonance” was first noticed and introduced to me by Natalia I. Shishlina—she has since put a great deal of effort into the selection of the most fitting and “consonant” of his sculptures and drawings to include in my work. I bow to them both for their willing consent and supportive participation.

I would like to address my heartfelt thanks to Irina Savinetskaya—she was a student of Central European University—and Peter Hommel who laboured over many months to bring text from Russian into English. For Irina, many of the themes covered were often unfamiliar, but she managed to overcome this difficulty successfully. For Peter, as an archaeologist, the greater challenge lay in resolving the many linguistic and stylistic complexities of Russian academic prose. It was the first time either of them had been asked to undertake such work on such a scale, and I am delighted with the result. I am also particularly grateful to Peter for the valuable comments and advice, which he shared with me during his work on the final translation—some of which I was able to take advantage of.

I would like to address special thanks to the managers and employees of the LRC Publishing House, in particular its head Alexey D. Koshelev, Mikhail I. Kozlov, and Sergei A. Zhigalkin with whom we have established an enduring collegiate relationship and from whom I received many positive impulses and encouraging suggestions on the desirability of extending my research along its previously established path. I also want to sincerely express my big gratitude to Irina V. Bogatyriova for the friendly and attentive participation in the final preparation of the book for publication.

And finally, my special thanks to Kira Nemirovsky, Production Editor at Academic Studies Press for her kind attention and active assistance in preparation of the book to publication.

Sculptor Dashi Namdakov

Shaman



Introduction

A TRAGIC CENTURY

The tragic and bloody events of the thirteenth century CE cast a long shadow across the history and perceptions of many Eurasian societies, as nomadic riders descended from the northern grasslands and swept across vast areas of the continent. Over the course of just a few decades, their conquests grew to an almost unimaginable extent. The devastating scale of the onslaught not only surprised but also stupefied the peoples of the settled world. The will of seemingly adamant states was crushed. Their physical and cultural defenses seemed paralyzed, as if by some powerful magic; some even seemed unable to actively resist these horsemen from the steppe; they were defeated even before their attackers appeared on the horizon.

The long historical memory of the societies, who are habitually given the high rank of “civilized” in academic texts and popular fiction alike, is full of scenes from the past, richly coloured with blood and the gloom of total devastation. Not only the written sources, but also the oral tales and epic stories are saturated with such visceral memories.

Who were these fiends? Where did these monsters come from? From the heart of which deserts, from the depths of which awful Hell or Goddamned country of Tartarus did they arise? What grave sins have we committed for the Lord to send such devilish, carrion-eating creatures upon us? Such questions rang through the halls of baffled rulers in Christian Europe, and similar cries and curses were heard across the Asian world.

How could simple farmers and city-dwellers understand the ruthless warriors who never left their horses’ saddles? What reason could there be for the stark differences in their appearance, style, and behavior from the familiar routine life of the towns, villages, fishermen’s’ hamlets, and even the hunters’ forests? These cohorts of mounted “monsters,” galloping across the continent, seemed elusive and invincible, emerging from and sometimes disappearing again into grasslands and deserts of the Eurasian Steppe. These apparently boundless and empty lands were frightening in their immensity to anyone unaccustomed to such latitudes, yet these wastes were the riders’ homes.

“Every Earth Zone ...”

Maybe it was the emergence and strengthening of the great Mongol Empire of the Chingisids that shaped the thinking of the most educated people of the time. For instance,