Evgenij N. Chernykh

Nomadic Cultures in the Mega-Structure of the Eurasian World

Translated by Irina Savinetskaya and Peter N. Hommel

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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 geoecological 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 geoecological "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 9thDecember 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

My 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 "Yazyki slavianskoy kultury (Slavic Culture Languages)" Press, 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*

IIntroduction

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,