

**Eurasian Nomads
in the Ancient and Medieval World**

Christian Raffensperger

Hist 301-1W

Spring 2008

MWF 12:40–1:40 P.M.

HH 313

Eurasian nomads are part of a variety of histories and historiographies in China, Russia, India, the Middle East, and Europe. But in every one of those cases they primarily exist as an “other,” the “outsider” who raids the settled empire, the “barbarian” who ravages civilization. This class will attempt to change that perspective and focus on the nomads themselves as the actors. Over the course of the semester the class will acquire an understanding of nomadic society and traditions, as well as the various cultures involved in the regions and periods under consideration. They will do in-depth research on one particular steppe culture or people and present that material to the class, with the goal of helping to understand who these Eurasian nomads are, why they acted the way they did, and why history and historians traditionally portray them negatively.

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Assignments and Deadlines

The format of this class will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Because the subject matter is largely unfamiliar, it will have to be presented in a series of lectures, but interwoven with those lectures will be discussion of the reading, and especially of primary sources related to our subject matter. For these reasons, your attendance and participation are vital on a daily basis.

In addition, there will be four tests, one for each of the major units that we will be covering. These will not be extensive, but will be designed to test your knowledge of the subject matter discussed in class, as well as the presentation by your classmates.

There will also be a group project dealing with one specific group relevant to our course. Because the time and space covered in this class are both enormous, I will deal with basically four groups, and the group projects will deal with five more. The groups will be formed the second week of class and will choose topics. Each group will then meet to research, discuss, and plan out both an oral and written presentation on their subject. The oral presentation will cover approximately 30 minutes of class time, followed by discussion. The written presentation will need to be 10-12 pages long to deal with the subject adequately, and will be due at the time of the presentation. The class will write a brief (one paragraph) review of the oral presentation and submit it for use in grading and evaluation.

Finally, there will be a research paper of 15-17 pages. This paper will be on a topic of your own choosing, though it must be approved by me. We will also discuss all

topics in class, allowing the class to share its knowledge on our subject. As part of the research paper there will be 3 separate assignments leading up to the paper (a topic and bibliography, an outline, and a first draft). Additionally, the first drafts of all papers will be read by the class and discussed in class providing feedback for the final draft. You are required to read all paper topics and all first drafts in order to be informed in our discussion of them. This will count as a major portion of your participation grade, as well as being a courtesy to your classmates.

If there are any questions about this material, please feel free to meet with me during office hours, or schedule an appointment.

The grades will be weighted as follows:

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Tests (4): 32%

Group Presentation: 23%

Oral Presentation – 10%

Write-up – 10%

Class Grade – 3%

Paper: 35%

Topic and Bibliography – 5%

Outline – 5%

First Draft – 5%

Final Paper - 20%

Required Books

All required readings are on Moodle.

We will be using Christopher Beckwith. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia*, as a textbook with a wide variety of supplementary readings. The Beckwith readings are inclusive of a wide variety of groups and time periods, and as such, are designed to provide a wider context to the specifics we will be dealing with each week.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Week 1 (January 7, 9, 11): Introduction to the Eurasian world

(Beckwith, Prologue, Introduction, and chapter 1)

Introduction to the course; What is the steppe?; Eurasia as a regional/climatic/cultural/linguistic/other designation; Scythians as archetype

Week 2 (January 14, 16, 18): The Scythians and the Hsiung-nu

(Beckwith, chapter 2; David Christian. *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia*, 123-62)

The Scythians and their world; Archeological evidence; The birth of the Hsiung-nu

Week 3 (January 23, 25 – No class on 1/21): The Hsiung-nu: The first steppe empire

(Beckwith, chapter 3; *The Grand Scribe's Records* re: the Hsiung-nu)

Internal Structure of the Hsiung-nu; Their relations with the Han Chinese and with their neighbors

Week 4 (January 28, 30, February 1): The fall of the Hsiung-nu
(“Han Foreign Relations” [from *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1])
The Hsiung-nu power wanes; Expansion of Chinese power; Successor states arise;
Group Presentation 1 – 2/1

Week 5 (February 4, 6, 8): The Huns
(Beckwith, chapter 4; David Christian. *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, 226-32)
Test 1 – 2/4; The arrival of the Huns; Hun organization and culture

Week 6 (February 11, 13, 15): The Huns invade Europe
(Reading from E. A. Thompson. *The Huns*, 69-103, 137-76; “Priscus at the Court of Attila”)
Huns and Hsiung-nu – the debate; Attila and the invasion of the Roman Empire; **Group Presentation 2 – 2/15**

Week 7 (February 18, 20, 22): Test and Topics (Paper Topic and Bibliography due – submit on Moodle by 5:00 P.M. 2/18)
(All topic and bibliography statements must be read by start of class on Wednesday.)
Test 2 – 2/18; Discussion of topic and bibliography statements

Week 8 (February 25, 27, 29): The Turks
(Beckwith, chapter 5; Thomas J. Barfield. *The Perilous Frontier*, 131-50, 160-63)
Arrival of the Turks; The migration of the Turkic peoples throughout Eurasia; Turkic religion and culture

Week 9 (March 10, 12, 14): The Turkic Peoples
(Luc Kwanten, *Imperial Nomads*, 27-48 [This reading is designed to contrast with the previous week’s readings for discussion]; “The Khazars” [from *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*])
Formation of Turkic states; Turkic peoples confront Islam; The Khazars as an example of a Turkic state

Week 10 (March 17, 19 – No Class 3/21): The Turkic impact on Eurasia
(Beckwith, chapter 6; Richard N. Frye. *The Heritage of Central Asia*, 199-232)
The Turkic expand to dominate Eurasia; Is there a “Turkic world order”?

Week 11 (March 24, 26, 28): The Mongol World (Paper Outline due in class 3/24)
(David Morgan. *The Mongols*, 30-48 [this book is on reserve as background for the Mongols])
Group Presentation 3 – 3/24; Test 3 – 3/26; Introduction to the world of the Mongols

Week 12 (March 31, April 2, 4): Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Expansion (Paper first draft due – submit on Moodle by midnight 4/4)
(Beckwith, chapter 8; “Ch’ang-Ch’un goes to visit Chinghiz Khan”)

Rise of Chinggis Khan; Reorganization of the Mongols; Beginnings of Eurasian conquest

Week 13 (April 7, 9, 11): Presentation and Paper

(All first drafts must be read by start of class on Wednesday.)

Group Presentation 4 – 4/7; Discussion of paper drafts

Week 14 (April 14, 16, 18): The Mongol World Empire

(Michal Biran. “The Mongol Transformation: From the Steppe to Eurasian Empire”; David Morgan. *The Mongols*, 120-51)

Batu and the “Golden Horde”; The Ilkhanate; Khubilai and China; The Chagataids

Week 15 (April 21, 23, 25): Presentation, Test, and Eurasian Wrap-up

(Beckwith, chapter 9)

Group Presentation 5 – 4/21; Test 4 – 4/23; The early modern Eurasian world

Week 16 (April 28, 30):

These class periods will be used to get through any material that may have been left out, and to give you time to work on your final paper.

For More Information:

Eurasian nomads are dealt with in a wide variety of different scholarship, Russian, European, Persian, Indian, Chinese and many others. You may have to consider those variables when looking for information. A great series of sources are the Cambridge History volumes (for instance, Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia, has an amazing amount of material on the Xiongnu). Apropos of the Xiongnu, Xiong-nu, Hsiung-nu, etc. is the issue of transliteration. Be careful to search by a variety of spellings when doing electronic searches. A basic place to start is the textbook. Beckwith has provided copious footnotes and a very complete bibliography on the subject. I have also created a brief reserve list with a few important works that you might need for presentations and/or papers.

Missed Examinations, Papers, and Class Sessions

A good rule of thumb is do not miss anything. However, if you are ill or have a conflict and cannot make a class, notify me in advance or as soon after the class as is possible. *Do not miss examinations!* If you have a conflict, notify me a minimum of one week in advance and we can schedule an exam as close to the normal time as possible. If you miss an examination for reasons that are not discussed with me ahead of time or are not catastrophic you will receive a zero, which is much worse than an F in your overall grade. Late papers are accepted, but the grade will drop one grade for each day (weekend day or weekday) that it is late. For example—an A paper handed in one day late will be an A-, two days late a B+, etc.

Special Needs

Wittenberg University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for eligible students with disabilities. In keeping with this policy, if you are eligible for course

accommodation due to a disability, please provide me with your self-identification letter from the academic services office, 208 Recitation Hall, during the first few weeks of the semester so that we may discuss appropriate arrangements.

If you have significant responsibilities outside of class that will impact your performance, e.g., an infant or young child, care for an aging parent, or a job that requires you to be on-call, please speak to the instructor as soon as possible, and we can discuss arrangements to make your classroom experience the same as everyone else's.

Weather-Related Concerns

Whenever weather becomes a problem, I shall do my best to adhere to the university guidelines. If the university cancels classes, there will be no class. If the university has not cancelled class, but I am unable or unwilling to risk traveling, I will do my best to post a notice to this effect on Moodle as early as possible. I will do my best not to cancel class if at all possible.

If there is an exam scheduled or a deadline for a written assignment on a day when class is cancelled, you may assume that the exam or assignment will be due on the following class session.

Academic Honesty

Students in this course are expected to uphold the standards of Wittenberg's Code of Academic Integrity. At its most basic level, this means that you will not turn in someone else's writing as your own, quote from a source without proper acknowledgment, or provide a classmate with inappropriate help. You will be asked to submit papers and exams with the following statement followed by your signature: "I affirm that my work upholds the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity at Wittenberg, and that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance." Sanctions for violating these rules range from receiving no credit for a particular assignment to failing the course for a significant act of academic dishonesty. If you are in doubt about any of these rules, please talk to me before submitting your work.