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Introduction

HYUN JIN KIM AND FREDERIK JULIAAN VERVAET

The vast continent of Eurasia with its diverse cultures and civilizations has produced some of the most famous and geographically expansive empires in the history of humanity. In the twentieth century, the remarkable global predominance of contemporary Eurasian political powers inspired geopolitical[1] speculations identifying the continent as the 'world island', asserting that whoever dominated continental Eurasia would rule the world.[2] If the significance of Eurasian powers as geopolitical entities in modern history is widely acknowledged, it may also be pertinent to look into the pre-industrial predecessors of these Eurasian superpowers and their tremendous and lasting political and cultural legacies.

This book seeks to explore from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective the history and archaeology of the Ancient and Early Medieval empires that once dominated the vast landmass of Eurasia. In particular, though not exclusively, three imperial traditions will be compared to facilitate in-depth analysis: the Greco-Roman imperial tradition, the imperial tradition of early China and the imperial tradition of ancient Inner Asia, the legacies of which continue to influence historical realities of today. The book will highlight both the similarities and the differences between these imperial traditions with a thematic focus on the political, socio-institutional and cultural aspects of Eurasian Empires and identify key historical links, connectivity and influences between East and West via the examination of historical, literary and archaeological evidence. We must also note here in the introduction that we define an 'empire' as 'a political formation that extended far beyond its original territorial or ethnic confines and embraced, by direct conquest or by the imposition of its political authority, a variety of peoples and lands that may have had different types of relations with the imperial center, constituted by an imperial clan and by its charismatic leader'.[3]

[1] For a nuanced introduction to geopolitics in world history, see Grygiel 2006: 21–39. For a more controversial assessment of current geopolitical speculations, see Kaplan 2012.
[2] First contrived by Mackinder 1904: 421–39, revisited by Brzezinski 1997: 30–56.
[3] Di Cosmo 2011: 44–5.

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Over the past decade comparative studies of Ancient Greece and Early China and also Imperial Rome and Han China have enjoyed great popularity. The momentum was arguably first started by the great pioneering publications of G.E.R. Lloyd[4] who has written prolifically on Greece and China, focusing specifically on the comparative studies of Greek and Chinese science, medicine and philosophy. Interest in Greece and China then expanded into other fields of inquiry. Hyun Jin Kim published a comparative study of Greek and Chinese ethnography[5] and Alexander Beecroft produced an innovative comparative study of Greek and Chinese authorship and poetry[6] (both scholars are contributing chapters to this current volume). Deserving of mention also is the excellent study by Yiqun Zhou on the role of women and gender in ancient Greece and China.[7] The comparative study of imperial Rome and Han China was pioneered by Walter Scheidel[8] (who is also contributing a chapter to this volume and has developed a very useful paradigm for comparing imperial cultures in antiquity, which partially informs this current volume) and by the excellent publications of Mutschler and Mittag.[9] Scheidel's edited volume on Rome and China has furthermore brought attention to the importance of socio-institutional aspects of comparative inquiry.[10]

These pioneering works of scholarship arguably set the stage for the next phase of comparative research. The one methodological weakness that could potentially undermine the value of comparative research on Greece-Rome and China was its inability to identify sufficiently the points of contact, interactions and mutual influence between the two civilizational spheres. In

[4] The most noteworthy of Lloyd's publications, among many others, are: Lloyd 1996, 2002, 2004, 2005. Also worthy of attention is the publication Lloyd and Sivin 2002.

[5] Kim 2009.

[6] Beecroft 2010.

[7] Zhou 2010. Mention must also be made of the pioneering work of Lisa Raphals 1992; also her more recent publication in 2013; of Hall and Ames 1995; and Mu-chou Poo's superb study on the representation of foreigners in ancient China and the Near East 2005. Other notable works on Greece and China include Lu 1998; Kuriyama 1999; Schaberg 1999; Jullien 2000; Shankman and Durrant 2000, 2002; Reding 2004; Sim 2007; Yu 2007; King and Schilling 2011; Denecke 2014. For a comprehensive review of the publications on Greece and China, see also Tanner 2009: 89–109.

[8] Scheidel 2015 and the groundbreaking Scheidel 2009.

[9] Mutschler and Mittag 2008. See also Mutschler 1997: 213–53; 2003: 33–54; 2006: 115–35; 2007: 127–52; 2008: 123–55. Other published works on Rome and China include Auyang 2014; Lorenz 1990: 9–60; Motomura 1991: 61–9; Dettenhofer 2006: 880–97.

[10] Also deserving of mention are the projects currently being undertaken by Mu-chou Poo on the comparative studies of ancient religions in Greece, Rome and China (under contract with Oxford University Press) and by Han Beck and Griet Vankeerberghen on citizens and commoners in Greece, Rome and China.

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order to remedy this problem it is necessary to look at what lies between the Mediterranean and the Zhongyuan: the steppes of Inner Asia. The fabled 'Silk Road' and Inner Asia have enjoyed a renaissance of scholarly interest in recent decades, and one of the principal proponents of research in this field, Samuel N.C. Lieu (who is also authoring one of the chapters of this volume), has highlighted the points of contact between Rome, Iran, Inner Asia and China via his research on the role of Manichaeism in the transmission of ideas and cultural traits across Eurasia.[11] Another outstanding contributor to this reinvigoration of interest in Inner Asia has been the great Peter Golden whose scholarship on Inner Asia has become the standard of research in this field of inquiry.[12]

All of this prior scholarship has now made it possible for us to conduct this current comparative analysis, which aims to bring together scholarship on every major region of Eurasia (the Mediterranean, Western Europe, the Middle East, Inner Asia, South Asia, Iran and China) and reassess them all from a holistic, truly Eurasian perspective.[13] The studies of Eurasian empires have frequently in the past suffered from narrow departmentalization and compartmentalization. It is a major contention of this book that political, socio-institutional and cultural developments within Eurasian empires during antiquity and the early middle ages can only be fully understood and appreciated, if we adopt this holistic Eurasian perspective mentioned above. In particular, Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (the period which concerns many of the chapters in this volume) was a time when the political, socio-institutional and cultural transformations across the whole of Eurasia were precipitated by the expansion of steppe peoples from Inner Eurasia. The entirety of the Eurasian continent was affected by this geopolitical phenomenon and only a holistic approach that combines the knowledge of the history, philology and archaeology of all Eurasian

[11] Most significantly among his voluminous publications: Lieu 1992.

[12] See in particular Golden 1992. Later publications that have utilized sources (both primary and secondary) in Chinese, Inner Asian and Greco-Roman historiography have been inspired by Golden's seminal works, e.g. Kim 2013. We must also mention here the extraordinary publication of Bemmann and Schmauder 2015, which has highlighted the complexity of interaction in Inner Asia and its steppe zone in the first millennium CE. Also worthy of note is Nicola Di Cosmo's and Michael Maas' upcoming publication with Cambridge University Press, *Eurasian Empires in Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe*, which shares a similar outlook with this current volume, but focuses more specifically on Late Antiquity.

[13] From the outset it is important to stress that references to 'Eurasia' and 'Eurasian' in this volume are purely indicative of the geographical and historical reality, which necessitates treating 'European' history and 'Asian' history together as a single research discipline. The terminology used is therefore devoid of any political ideology and has nothing to do with Russian 'Eurasianism'. See Laruelle 2008.

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sub-regions can accurately assess the impact of such a cataclysmic geopolitical revolution.

This book is arguably the first ever attempt to approach the political, socio-institutional and cultural history of Eurasian empires in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages together with such a holistic perspective, while at the same time combining these observations with new comparative analyses on Greece-Rome and imperial China.[14] Furthermore, this volume seeks to utilize not just historical and philological perspectives, but also archaeological insights. It is only when we combine all three approaches that we can minimize the tendency to both inflate and deflate the importance of the individual imperial states in Eurasia in comparison to the others, while accurately assessing the impact and influence of one on the other or vice versa. This comprehensive approach, we believe, provides a more rigorous methodological paradigm for both assessing and analysing the history, development and legacy of Eurasian empires in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

This book does not have the aim of conducting research on every aspect of the three imperial traditions mentioned above, but rather seeks to focus on several key aspects which illuminate the inter-connectivity and shared characteristics of imperial societies and polities in ancient and medieval Eurasia. The book is thus divided into four separate sections, each focusing on one of these key areas of inquiry.

The first section focuses on the political organization of and interactions between Eurasian empires of Antiquity and early Middle Ages. There are three chapters, which will all address the common theme of interaction between Inner Asian steppe empires/peoples and sedentary empires of Eurasia in Europe, China and the Middle East respectively to allow for a holistic Eurasian approach as our title implies. All three chapters will also discuss to varying degrees the impact of those interactions on the political organization, internal affairs and foreign policy of the empires concerned.

In the first chapter of this section Hyun Jin Kim discusses the impact of the famous Huns and their Eurasian Hunnic Empire on the political organization of the Frankish Merovingian kingdom(s)/empire. In the fourth and fifth centuries CE all the peripheral regions of Eurasia – the Mediterranean, Iran, India and China – collectively experienced the phenomenon of invasions and settlement by Inner Asians, most commonly called the Huns (Xiongnu and Xianbei in the Chinese context). The chapter highlights how

[14] The brilliant work of Canepa 2010 has achieved a similar result on the subjects of Art History and visual cultures.

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the Huns of Europe inherited the Inner Asian brand of 'quasi-feudal' political organization from the Xiongnu and other earlier Inner Asian state entities and then transferred elements of that state model/political model to the Franks of Early Medieval Europe. The eruption of Inner Asians (mainly Huns, but also Alans[15]) into Europe and also other regions of Eurasia marked the end of the 'Ancient World' and the beginning of a 'new world order' in which Inner Asia, the geographical centre of Eurasia, also assumed the mantle of the cultural and political centre of this immense continent during the millennium which we now call the 'Middle Ages'.

The second chapter, by Jonathan Karam Skaff, discusses the impact of Inner Asia–periphery interactions at the other end of Eurasia, in East Asia. It examines the importance of horse power for China during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) and by extension the involvement of Inner Asians (during much of this period mainly the Göktürks, dominant power in Inner Asia between the sixth–eighth centuries CE (the successors of the Huns/Xiongnu[16] and Rouran, the latter formed from the union of the remaining Xiongnu, Xianbei and also possibly the Wuhuan tribes in Mongolia[17]), but involving also other Inner Asians) in China's borderland breeding ranch system. Rather than viewing the steppe peoples and the Chinese Tang Empire as political opposites and irreconcilable antithetical entities locked in a fierce existential struggle for supremacy, Skaff through a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the entangled history of the two regions (Inner Asia and China) demonstrates the points of contact, mutual recognition and influence, and the remarkable integration of steppe peoples in China. The two groups (Inner Asians and the Chinese of the Tang) in effect had a virtual symbiotic relationship and the chapter demonstrates effectively how crucial Inner Asia was to the maintenance of Tang imperial power.

In the third chapter, by Selim Ferruh Adalı, the early impact of Inner Asians on yet another important region of Eurasia, the Middle East, is discussed. Adalı brings to the fore the little-known saga of the Cimmerian and Scythian invasions of northern West Asia and their impact on the political configuration of the Ancient Near East. The military intrusions of the Cimmerians and the Scythians were one of the key factors in the dissolution of the mighty Neo-Assyrian Empire of the Middle East, the first superpower of Antiquity. One could even argue that the Cimmerian-Scythian invasions were a precursor to the later Hunnic invasions which brought

[15] For the entry of the Inner Asian Alans into Europe and their subsequent history, see Bachrach 1973 and also Alemany 2000.

[16] For the Huns-Xiongnu identification, see La Vaissière 2005: 3–26.

[17] See Kim 2013: 39.

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low yet another superpower of the age, imperial Rome. Adalı demonstrates how these early Inner Asians not only caused the dissolution of established states and the reconfiguration of the political map of West Asia but also, just as much as the Assyrians, set the imperial precedent for the unification of West Asia under a single hegemonic power.

The next part of this volume considers some major socio-institutional aspects. The first two chapters offer incisive and novel analyses of the aristocratic concepts of honour, pride and shame in the roughly contemporary ancient societies of republican and early imperial Rome and Han China and constitute a diptych of sorts, laying the foundation for further comparative reflection and inquiry. The behaviour, mores and composition of the elite in both these imperial societies were determined to a large extent by how they defined honour and shame.[18] It will be argued that these definitions and applications of the system of honour and shame had significant political and socio-institutional ramifications in both empires. The third chapter then discusses the exploitation by these elites and also by the two imperial state governments of those who were excluded from the above-mentioned honour system: the peasantry, convicts and slaves.

Frederik Juliaan Vervaet sets the stage with a chapter surveying the workings and impact of honour and shame in the middle and late Roman Republic, the formative period of what would become the Roman Empire from 45 BCE onward.[19] Whilst economic interest and the geopolitical competition for resources mostly determine public policy and political decision-making in contemporary advanced societies, competing incentives of a very different nature often prevailed in the Roman Republic (509–27 BCE). Vervaet's main aim is to demonstrate that honour, pride and shame were strong and pervasive forces in republican Rome: veritable cultural drivers of behaviour that significantly impacted on the functioning of its social, political and military institutions and often even determined the very course of history. Following some introductory remarks on the aristocratic nature of the Roman polity, Vervaet systematically documents the paramount role of honour and shame in the Roman family, the senatorial aristocracy and

[18] Though the Roman Republic combined aristocratic, democratic and plutocratic features and thus was no Empire in the technical sense of the world, the bulk of the evidence discussed here derives from its imperialist and expansionist era, the period that saw the establishment of a sort of imperial Republic, projecting (in)direct hegemonic power across the entire Mediterranean. The subject of Roman republican imperialism generates ongoing scholarly debate but four studies continue to stand out: Harris 1979; Gruen 1984; Ferrary 1988; and Eckstein 2006.

[19] For an argument that measures taken in the spring of 45 BCE mark the beginning of imperial rule in Rome, at least in terms of public law, see Vervaet 2014: 223–39.

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the powerful military, doing so by virtue of a distinctly empirical approach. The result is a refreshing new look at a so far overlooked aspect of Roman republican socio-institutional life.

This is mirrored by Mark Lewis' equally substantial, sweeping and insightful chapter on honour and shame in the age of the Chinese Han Dynasty (206–220 CE). This discussion first endeavours to redefine the honour/shame complex in the formative period of the Warring States era, which inherited a pre-imperial nobility with a predominantly military sense of honour and shame, marked by the extremes of victory and defeat. At the same time, however, emergent philosophical traditions developed their own distinctive code of what was honourable and shameful, adhering to a paradigm very different to that of the martial nobility. The chapter then shifts the focus to honour and violence in the Han. Whilst the strong military dimension of honour/shame largely disappeared, the gangster associations centred around the great nobles continued to define honour through the violence of vengeance and self-sacrifice – suicide as an honourable alternative for mutilating punishments or public executions. Concurrently, from the first century BCE, the rise of economically more independent and locally powerful families led to the last great development in the Han history of the honour/shame complex, creating a field of tension with leading members of the formal bureaucracy, who now cultivated the lofty ideal of dying for the sake of one's moral purity and righteousness as the apex of elite honour. Whereas Lewis' chapter thus highlights important differences with Roman republican and early imperial honour, there also emerge strong similarities and sound angles for further comparative inquiry.

Walter Scheidel then compares the extensive use of forced labour and slaves in imperial Rome and Han China. He demonstrates succinctly how both forms of labour exploitation (slavery and forced labour of 'free' individuals) by the elite and the state existed in both imperial contexts. However, it is noted that in Han China the greater centralization of state power and its dominance over the elite tended to restrict to a certain degree private slave use. Much more common in China was the exploitation by the state of forced labour of non-slaves in the form of either convict or conscript labour and even slave labour was largely used for state purposes rather than for personal use by aristocratic owners. In contrast in imperial Rome, where elite power was more unbridled and the state was basically the common property of the aristocratic elite, private slave use expanded together with the expansion of the Roman state. The extent of elite privilege in both imperial societies relative to the ability of the governing bureaucracy of the imperial state to rein in those privileges thus had significant ramifications

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for the economic development and socio-institutional evolution of both empires.

In the third section we examine the cultural legacies of Eurasian empires. The two chapters in this section touch on the key issue of religious/semi-religious textual traditions within Eurasian empires. The first chapter discusses the semi-religious textual tradition: Homer and the Shi Jing, both of which enjoyed canonical status in Greece-Rome and China respectively. The second chapter focuses on Eurasian Manichaeism, the religious textual tradition which impacted three major Eurasian empires: China, Iran and Rome.

In the first chapter Alexander Beecroft discusses the role of Homer and the Shi Jing as imperial texts in the Hellenistic Greek world and China respectively. He highlights the instability of the textual tradition in both contexts, how these works of literature, both of which attained canonical status in their respective cultures, were reshaped and reinterpreted to suit the needs and agendas of the imperial society they came to represent and inform. By doing so Beecroft sheds an important light on the critical role of empire in the development of these textual traditions and our reception and understanding of these ancient texts. Both texts, which initially had little to do with the ethos of the imperial societies in which they were revered, were artificially (and in many cases very awkwardly) linked with the values and political understanding of the imperial state. They thus forcibly became an intrinsic part of the legacy of Eurasian empires.

In the second chapter Sam Lieu demonstrates the extraordinary scope of the pan-Eurasian religious movement that was Manichaeism. Its religious textual tradition permeated three imperial states. The ease with which this tradition managed to spread in all three empires: Sassanian Persia, Tang China and imperial Rome (and let us not forget the Uyghur Khaganate of Inner Asia also, whose elite actually adopted the religion as their own), speaks volumes about the interconnectivity of Eurasian empires. The persecutions that it periodically encountered in all three empires also bear witness to the existence of imperial competition and conflict which went hand in hand with mutual imitation, remarkable acculturation and vigorous exchange of ideas and cultural capital.

In the last section, on the archaeology of Eurasian empires, all three chapters discuss the theme of the interaction between the steppe world of Inner Asia and the sedentary world of Eurasia, how the archaeological record of so-called 'nomadic', 'barbarian' empires shows evidence of these contacts in material culture and settlement patterns.

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In the first chapter of this section Antonio Sagona, Claudia Sagona and Aleksandra Michalewicz examine the archaeological evidence for the presence of Inner Asians (Alans and also possibly Huns) in Transcaucasia. Excavations in the Caucasus region, which constitute the important landbridge between Europe, the steppes of Inner Asia and West Asia, provide an extraordinarily complex and intriguing set of material evidence for acculturation, cultural inter-mingling and population movements that accompanied the interactions between steppe empires/peoples and 'sedentary' states.

In the second chapter Osmund Bopearachchi discusses the fascinating material evidence for cultural and artistic interactions between the Inner Asian Indo-Scythians, Indo-Parthians and Kushans with the preceding Greco-Bactrian, Greco-Indian and also native Indian cultures of South Asia. The chapter demonstrates the extraordinary heterogeneity of Eurasian empires and their essentially pluralistic outlook. The empires of Inner Asian origin that took root in South Asia combined within their polity the cultural legacy and political traditions of the ancient Mediterranean, Iran, Inner Asia and India. Such diversity, which we do not instinctively identify with early imperial societies, was more the norm rather than the exception amongst ancient and medieval Eurasian empires.

In the last chapter Michelle Negus Cleary presents startling new archaeological evidence from Central Asia from a comparative perspective. She demonstrates the fallacy of the strict dichotomy of 'settled' and 'nomad' in Inner Asian and Iranian contexts. The impressive ancient fortified enclosures in historical Khwarezm (modern western Uzbekistan), an area associated with many historically significant imperial powers, most notably the Kangju, Huns and Achaemenid Persia, are shown to be not 'sedentary' settlements established by a 'settled' population, but rather political and ceremonial administrative facilities of Eurasian 'mobile' states constructed to legitimize the power of the ruling elite. These sites and also even the famous capitals of the Achaemenid Persian kings were not typical 'urban' settlements, but rather carefully designed symbols of royal power and prestige within imperial societies in which the political centre was the itinerant royal court and not a single location. The chapter brilliantly demonstrates via the examination of the most recent archaeological evidence the varied system of imperial governance across Eurasia and how the Inner Asian model of rule affected the role and function of 'capitals' in Ancient and Medieval Eurasia.

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