

## THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF EARLY INNER ASIA

*The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* introduces the geographical setting of the region and follows its history from the paleolithic era to the rise of the Mongol empire in the thirteenth century.

From earliest times Inner Asia has linked and separated the great sedentary civilisations of Europe and Asia. In the pre-modern period it was definable more as a cultural than a geographical entity, its frontiers shifting according to the changing balances of power. Before the advent of efficient firearms, it was their almost irresistible light cavalry which enabled the nomadic people of the steppes to take by force what they could neither produce themselves nor procure through trade. Their sedentary neighbours retaliated with constant attempts to dehumanise this nomad enemy, and created the concept of the 'barbarian' bent on destroying the civilised world. The early history of Inner Asia is, therefore, the history of the barbarian.

Written by distinguished international scholars who have pioneered the exploration of Inner Asia's poorly documented past, this book chronologically traces the varying historical achievements of the disparate population-groups in the region. These include the Scythians and Sarmatians, the Hsiung-nu, the Huns and Avars, the people of the Russian steppes, the Türk empire, the Uighurs and the Tibetan empire. It is the editor's hope that this book will bring Inner Asia more closely into the fabric of world history.

Cambridge University Press  
0521243041 - The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia  
Edited by Denis Sinor  
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# The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia



Edited by  
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[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1990

First published 1990  
 Reprinted 1994

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

The Cambridge history of early Inner Asia.  
 From earliest times to the rise of  
 the Mongols  
 1. Asia. Inner Asia, to 1987  
 1. Sinor, Denis  
 951

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

The Cambridge history of early Inner Asia.  
 Bibliography.  
 Includes index.  
 Contents: v. 1. From earliest times to the rise  
 of the Mongols.  
 1. Asia, Central – History. 1. Sinor, Denis.  
 D5329.4.C35 1988 958 88-18887

ISBN 0 521 24304 1

Transferred to digital printing 2004

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## Preface

Inner Asia as presented in this volume is a cultural rather than a geographical concept: to some extent it is coterminous with the area called “the geographical pivot of history” by the late Sir George Mackinder. Therefore it should come as no surprise to the reader that the histories of some, strictly speaking “European” nations (such as the Huns, the Avars, or the Khazars) have found their proper place in this work. The first chapter of this book should give more ample detail on the definition of the area.

Contributors to this volume are distinguished scholars from many parts of the world who often pioneered in exploring early Inner Asia’s poorly documented past. While presenting the specialist not only with new insights but, in many instances, also with hitherto unknown facts, they have attempted to open up for the benefit of the interested general reader a little-known chapter of human history. Because of the scarcity and variety of written sources, and with archeological explorations only recently begun, Inner Asian historiography is in its infancy. We could do no better than attempting to provide a relatively secure framework of political history which, I hope, will mark an important step in the incorporation of Inner Asia into the fabric of world history. No attempt has been made to whip the contributors into line; I do believe that there is value in allowing differences in approach to be noticeable, but great efforts were made to bring uniformity to the spelling of proper names. To justify each and every one of the forms adopted would need a special, lengthy article.

This is not a definitive history of pre-Mongol Inner Asia. It is an honest presentation of what we know at this stage of scholarship. We have tried to eliminate details which throw no light on the main events and to concentrate on the more important facts: those which bore consequences for the future course of history. Anyhow, such was the intention; it is up to the reader to judge to what extent it has been achieved by the individual authors.

I am deeply grateful to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for a



Cambridge University Press  
0521243041 - The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia  
Edited by Denis Sinor  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

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*Preface*

second fellowship which allowed me to concentrate my efforts on this work, and also to the Rockefeller Foundation for one month spent in the haven of its study center in Bellagio for the same purpose.

The competent translation from Russian of chapters of chapters 3 and 4 was the work of Julia Crookenden.

My thanks are due to the staff of Cambridge University Press for their smooth co-operation.

*Denis Sinor*