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ANCIENT LITERARY CONCEPTIONS OF EASTERN SCYTHIAN ETHNOGRAPHY
FROM THE 7TH TO THE 2ND CENTURY B.C.

BY

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This thesis is entirely my own research.

John R. Gardiner-Garden.
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PREFACE.

Transcriptions.

The following transcription system will be used.

From Greek.

α β γ δ ε ζ θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ ϕ χ ψ ω.

a b g d e z th ik lm nx o p r s t u ph kh ps o

From Russian.

а б в г д е ж з е и й к л м н о п р с т у ф х
А б в г д е ж з е и й к л м н о п р с т у ф х

т с ч ш щ ъ ь ы ь э ъ я

ts ch sh shch ' y ' e ju ja

From Chinese the Wade-Giles transcription system will be used.

From Ancient Near Eastern, Indian and Central Asian languages the transcription system used will not be consistent, but mirror that used in the edition or translation of the text being used or discussed at any particular point. Some of the diacritical marks used in transliteraring Indian languages have been dropped.

Exceptions to the above guide to translations are as follows:

1. When a name or word is part of a quotation from another scholar’s translation or discussion.

2. When a name is too well known in one particular form to change, e.g. Aristotle, Alexander, Scythians.
3. Near-Eastern personal names commonly used in their Latinized forms will be given in Hellenized forms.

4. When discussing the use made of a particular tribal-name in a Latin text, the Latin form of the name will be used, even if the earlier Greek form is used elsewhere in the study.

Translations.

Unless otherwise stated, translations from Russian will be my own, from Greek and Latin will be from a Loeb edition of the text, from Chinese will be from Hulsewé and Loewe, *China in Central Asia*, 1979.

Use of previous theses.

Some material presented in the author's Masters Thesis, 'Two conceptions of the tribal-geography of the Royal Scythian Empire in classical literary tradition', 1981 (parts of chapters 2-4, 6-9 &11), has been used in this Doctoral thesis (parts of chapters 3-11). The material has, however, been so thoroughly reworked and supplemented, and used for such different purposes, that the whole of the Doctoral thesis can be considered original work. Where material presented in the present author's Honours thesis, 'Scythians on and south of the Danube from Idanthyrsos to Ateas', 1979, and Masters thesis (above) is of relevance to the Doctoral thesis but does not need major reworking, it has simply been cited.
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INTRODUCTION.

The Scythians were an idea. The ancient Iranian-speaking nomads of Eurasia (from the Carpathian mountains in the west to the T’ien Shan in the east) left no written texts of their own. They left instead a trail through the records of the sedentary societies with which they came into contact. These records are numerous, but scattered. The perspectives they offer range from Urartian, Assyrian and Babylonian, to Ionian, mainland Greek, Persian, Bosporan, Alexandrian, Seleukid, Baktrian, Parthian and Chinese. The forms in which records are extant range from maritime and overland itineraries, military surveys, geographies, histories, and treatises on natural science, medicine, philosophy and politics, to poems, romances, titulary epigrams, historical inscriptions, letters and prayers. It is through these diverse records that the ethnographic history of ancient Eurasia is to be approached. As the ethnography of the Maeotis-Caucasus region and Central Asia are often closely linked by literary tradition and historical circumstances, the primary concern of the present work has been taken to be those records of most relevance to the ethnography of the nomads dwelling between the Don and Crimean Bosporos in the west and the T’ien Shan and Pamir mountains in the east, nomads who might for convenience be called ‘Eastern Scythians’. This work will not concern itself with those sources dealing with the so called ‘Royal Scythians’ of the Ukraine, Dobrudja and Crimea (e.g. most of Herodotos’ Book IV).

Western and Soviet scholars may be characterised as adopting fundamentally different approaches to the study of these nomads’ ethnographic history. The western scholars favour philological investigation, migration theories, and a perspective from the periphery, while the Soviet scholars favour archaeological investigation, theories of indigenous ethnogenesis, and the periodisation of nomad social, economic and cultural change. Western scholars rarely stop to reflect upon either their own methodology or that of the Soviets, while Soviet scholars often reflect upon their own methodology and criticise that of the Western scholars. More significant, however, than these methodological differences are the methodological similarities. Common to nearly all modern scholars writing in the field of Scythian studies, Western and Soviet, archaeologist, philologists and historians, are two tendencies.

The first tendency is one to equate the physical and the literary tribe. The Eurasian nomads whose material remains archaeologists classify into various cultures, and the tribal-names that ancient writers used so freely, are often directly equated. Though inhabiting two very different worlds the tribe of a particular place, time and culture and the tribe of a particular text are invariably identified with each other. This is not, of course, surprising. The name in the text
was meant to conjure in the ancient reader's mind a 'real' tribe, so should it not be the modern scholars task to identify this 'real' tribe's place, time and culture?

The second tendency is one to equate a tribe named in one text with a tribe named in a text from a different pen, period and provenance. The one 'real' tribe may have a different name in different languages, so two apparently different tribal names may be equated through their individual equation with the same certain 'real' tribe.

That such tendencies undermine the usefulness of any study of Eurasian ethnography would seem self-evident, but even the crudest results of such an approach to the subject go unnoticed by modern scholars. Most modern scholars indeed seem to feel obliged to equate a tribal name used in a hundred different ways by a hundred different Greek and Roman writers over a period of hundreds of years with the ancient culture of a particular mountain valley, or the modern-day population of a particular Soviet republic, to equate a tribal-name found in a 7th century B.C. Greek poem with one found in a 2nd century Chinese history, and to build ethnographic maps of Eurasia by taking Persian, Greek, Latin and Chinese names and either arranging them as if neighbours or combining them with hyphens as if single tribes.

Modern scholarship seems obsessed with questions of identification. 'Who were tribe X?'. 'Was tribe X of this text the same as tribe Y of that text?'. Such questions tend to produce equations which are neat and resemble definitions, but which are of dubious value. The ancient nomad was caught in a network of allegiances, and clans were constantly being compelled by the needs of husbandry, migration and war to make and break alliances. The nomad's own idea of what constituted his tribe was probably in constant flux. How accurate then can we expect an outsider's idea of what constituted a tribe, confederation or people to be, and how accurate the ideas penned at the desk of the ancient Greek, Babylonian or Chinese scholar? A nomad tribe can not be meaningfully treated as a discrete, unchanging unit, whose outline can be traced and name recorded.

The question from which the most intellectual satisfaction might be derived is this: 'How are the concepts behind the tribal-names which appear in the literary record related?'. The search for the most satisfying answer involves an investigation of the many ways the ancients used various geographic and ethnographic terms. As when reading a scholar's comments on another people we usually learn far more about the attitudes of the society that produced the scholar than we do about the other people, an investigation of the ways an ancient used various
geographic and ethnographic concepts. This in turn involves an investigation of a whole range of ever changing mythological, philosophical and scientific concepts.

As working out how geographic and ethnographic concepts concerning the north evolved depends chiefly upon interpretation of literary records, and as the literary records are often fragmentary, the task often expands into one of reconstructing lost works and tracing literary traditions. As the period with which this present work is concerned, the 7th to the 2nd century B.C., was a period in which the Greek, Persian and Chinese geographic horizons expanded very rapidly, tracing literary traditions often amounts to investigating the interreaction of preconceptions with information. The task of tracing traditions through such diverse material as that outlined above, of describing the interreaction of preconception and information in a period, when such interreaction was unceasing, and of modelling the relationship between the geographic and ethnographic concepts of ancients who leave but scattered clues as to their concepts, affords few opportunities to write in terms of 'the truth'. It is felt that the constant formulation of possibilities and weighing of probabilities is a more appropriate method of pursing and presenting research on this subject. The extremely fragmentary nature of the source material demands that the research proceed cautiously and conclusions be regarded as tentative, but does not demand a retreat to an imaginary line of 'facts'.

Though the history of Eurasian material culture may be viewed with the naked eye or through a camera, the history of the Scythian tribes can only be viewed through a kaleidoscope. Our image of the history of the tribes mentioned in the literary record takes its form more from that through which we are looking than at which we are looking, new information about the tribes refracting through the tinted fragments of literary and philosophical conception and traditions.

The main thesis advanced by this work is, then, that the ethnographic history of Eurasia which we see when looking at the ancient material remains of the region's nomads and which we see when looking through the ancient literature of the peripheral societies, are not views of the same scene. The simple superimposing of the two views does not produce the most meaningful ethnographic history of Eurasia. The present author does not see the ancient literary record having primacy in any way over the archaeological record, but if we are to use the literary record in our discussion of Eurasian ethnographic history then we need to investigate the above mentioned kaleidoscopic images and interreactions.

1 For a discussion of the problems involved in working chiefly with fragments and epitomes see Brunt, 'On historical fragments and epitomes', 1980, pp. 477-494.
This thesis will be advanced and the task performed at two levels. The first level is that of structure. The work as a whole will be structured more around literary figures and historiographical problems than around cultural changes or historical episodes. The second level is that of argumentation. It will be argued that many ethnographic names and concepts cannot be explained simply in terms of a literary work accurately recording the ethnographic situation of the day and responding to its every change. They are often better explained in terms of new information interreacting with existing literary traditions.