

## 2. Imagining a Turanic Homeland



# Imagining a Turanic Homeland

Today's class is going to tackle some of the ways Turkey's contemporary vision of its role in the Turkic world relies on contested visions of the history of the cultures across Central Asia.

Who does Central Asia "belong" to? Is the claim made through language origins? DNA origins of groups? Economic ownership? Cultural patterns?

These aren't just academic debates. In this time of rapidly shifting geopolitics they provide legitimacy to claims of many States over the affairs of territory both within and outside of their countries.

For Turkey, reclaiming the idea of a Turanic (Pan-Turkic) homeland that spans Central Asia legitimizes Turkey's increasingly active role in the region.

This week's meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization seems to illustrate the new phrases for the week:  
"Axis of the Excluded"  
(courtesy of Fiona Hill)



Curiously similar to my other new phrase of the week: "Situationship"

# The increasing popularity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Sept. 15-16 2022 the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was meeting in Uzbekistan with the largest attendance yet.

Founded in 1996, the SCO was partly a response to NATO expansion into the Balkans by organizing a “military coordination group” between Russia, China and the Stans.

It expanded after the post-9/11 wars when Western involvement in the East grew. Today it represents about 40% of the world’s population. It is not (or not yet) a NATO of the East, but it is a platform for an alternative to the West-centric world view of NATO.

Also, it is a good opportunity for a photo op if you are a national leader and no one else wants to invite you to their international conferences because of less than stellar human rights records, invasions of neighbors, corruption.... What Fiona Hill calls the “**axis of the excluded.**”

My children taught me another phrase that might work here: “**Situationship.**” For example, you were sort of starting a relationship, but your apartment lease ended and you just moved in with your “friend” but aren’t ready to call it serious. Or, you needed a date for your cousin’s wedding and are just each other’s public partner but not sure it is anything more ... so you are keeping your options open. Or, you go to the Chinese sponsored trade meetings because they are building your port system and you owe them...

## Shanghai Cooperation Organization Membership

- Member States
- Dialogue Partners
- Observer States
- Full Members
- Guest Partners
- Acceding Members



Graphic© Asia Briefing Ltd.

# Shanghai Cooperation Organization 2022 members

## 40% of the World's population here



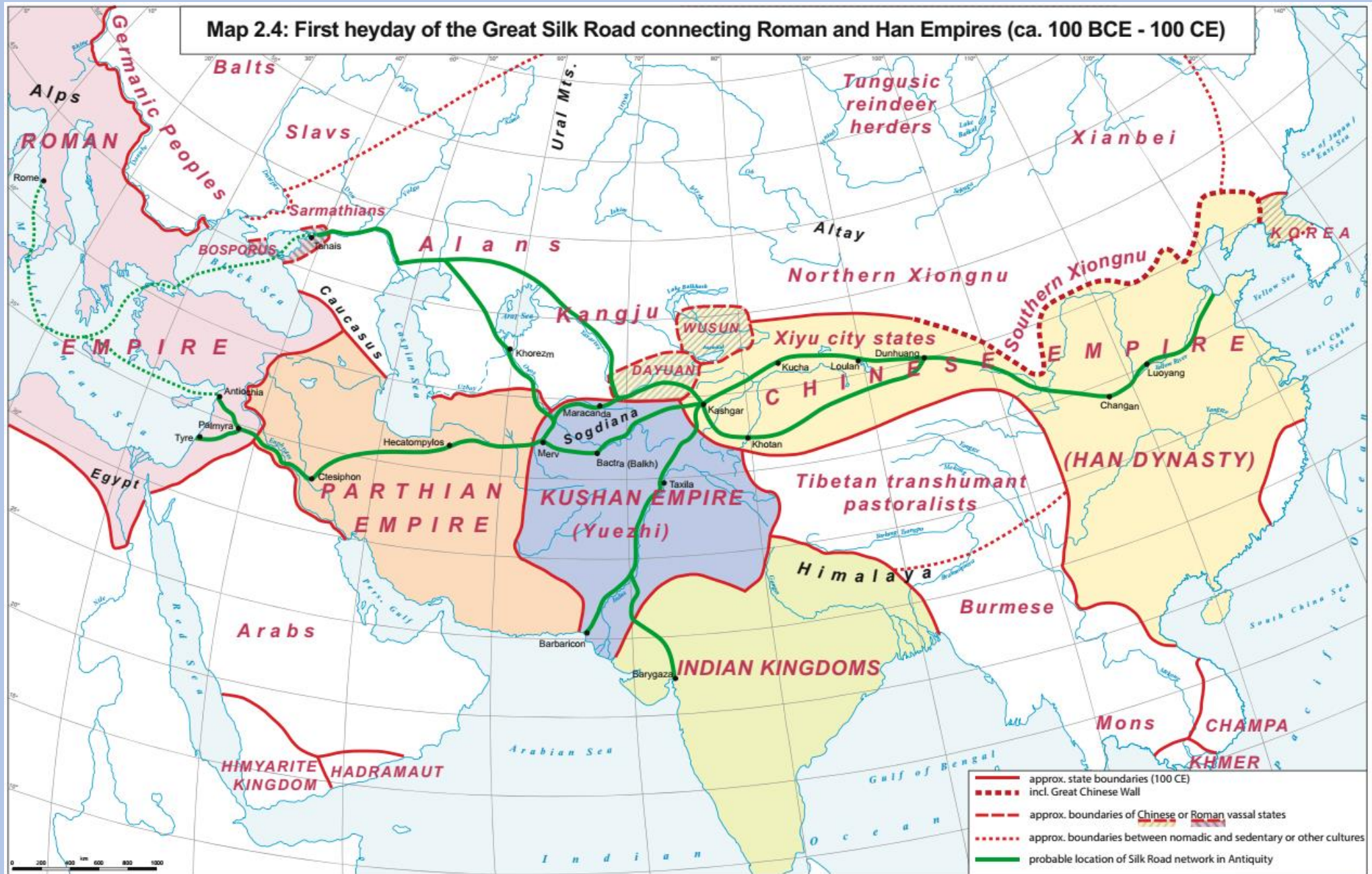
# The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Chinese BRI and the Chinese Ex-Im Bank (founded in 1994 as an alternative to the Western dominated World Bank) is framed as a modern version of a “Chinese” Silk Road.

The map in slide 6 is useful for thinking about distances. For example, it illustrates how close and more economical ports through Pakistan would be for the new industrial zones of Xinjiang in Western China. And how central Xinjiang is to the continent. It is remote to Beijing, but not so remote to Iran or the Black Sea – historic centers of cultural exchange that shaped the region.

The Chinese investment in Xinjiang is part of a reframing of China’s role on the Continent.

China's vision building on trade routes operating for thousands of years. The different Turkish and Chinese vision of that history martialled to support contemporary foreign policies.





# Who really owned the Silk Road?

This is only one map of the trade networks that became famously associated with one product (silk) but also served to exchange ideas, language, genetics, technologies of irrigation, horsemanship, etc.

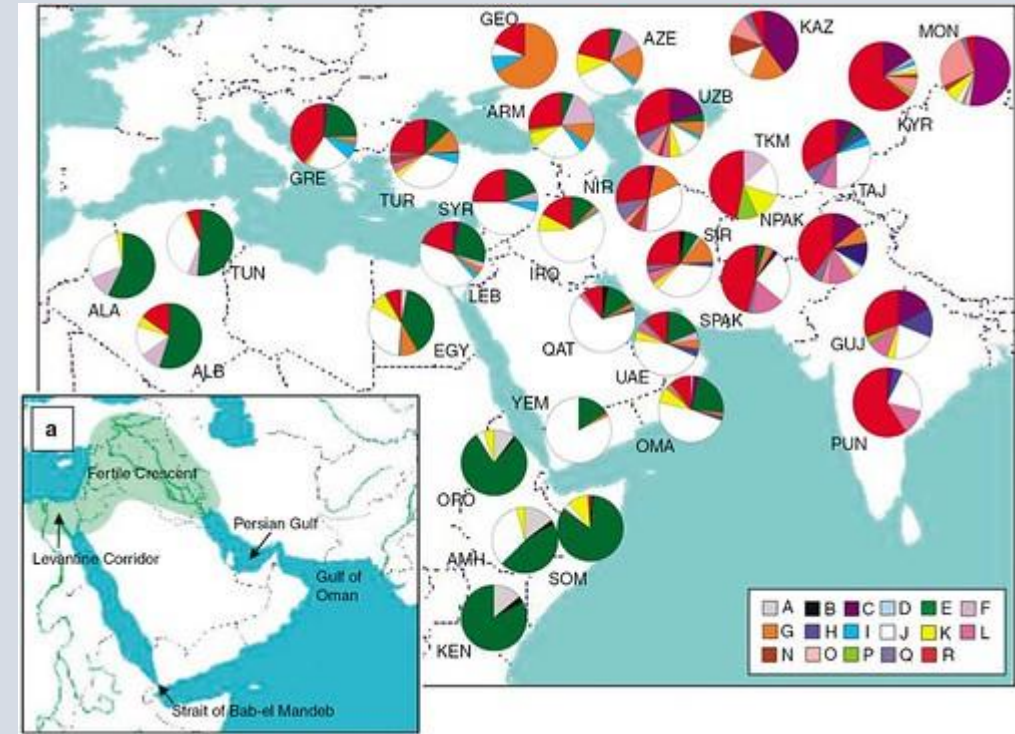
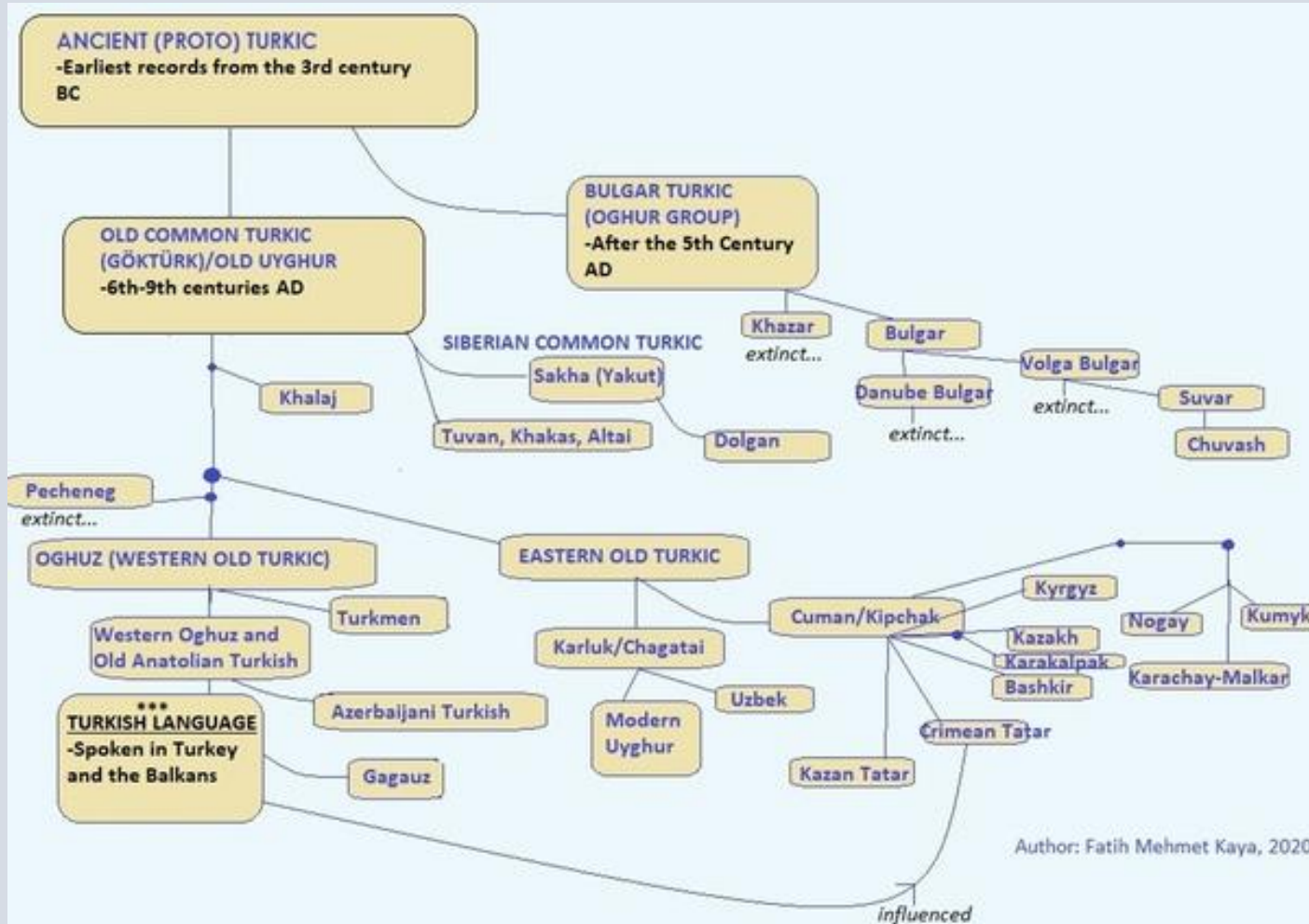
China emphasizes Chinese centrality in the network dating back at least to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. bce, but Iran and Turkey have their own ideas about who authored the Silk Road. Does it matter? Well, it does if you are claiming it as a legitimation of your regional role.

The next slide highlighting the geographic band known as the “Steppes” perhaps the most responsible for the cultural exchange across Eurasia. Techniques and populations spread easily across this band of similar landforms.



Geography also responsible for the trade routes (Steppe Belt)

# Linguists vs Geneticists and the question of “Homelands”



# Linguists vs Geneticists in devising histories of Eurasia

There is a lot of ink devoted to tracing language trees, and, since the 1990s, to tracing genetic groups into the mists of the past.

Either because I hated my linguistics class in grad school or because I hated biology in high school or because, as a historian, I am innately suspicious of any attempts to impose order on the past as self serving to someone, I look at these approaches with a jaundiced eye. The impulse to trace language trees emerged as a branch of European history in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. to support ideas of “national homelands” and original “nations” and we all know where that quest for national purity led in the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

Since the 1990s genetics has offered a new way to trace humans and, in my mind, bears the same risk of justifying who is truly of “X” nation and other dangerous forms of politicization. But the tool of DNA research is there and available to serve these political goals and it is certainly getting a lot of attention.

I am not the only one nervous about the use of genetics to determine nationality.


The New York Times

Opinion  
GRAY MATTER

# How Genetics Is Changing Our Understanding of 'Race'


By David Reich  
March 23, 2018

Give this article



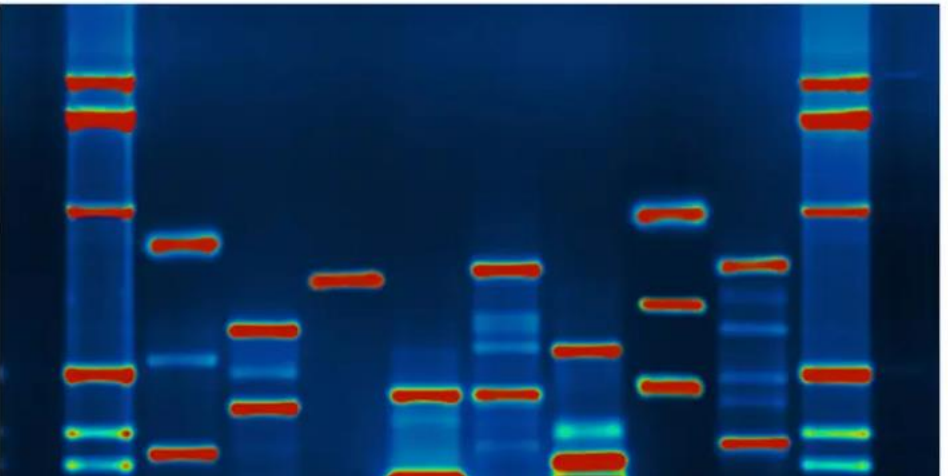
## How Not To Talk About Race And Genetics

Race has long been a potent way of defining differences between human beings. But science and the categories it constructs do not operate in a political vacuum.

 BuzzFeed Opinion  
BuzzFeed Contributor

Posted on March 30, 2018 at 4:29 pm

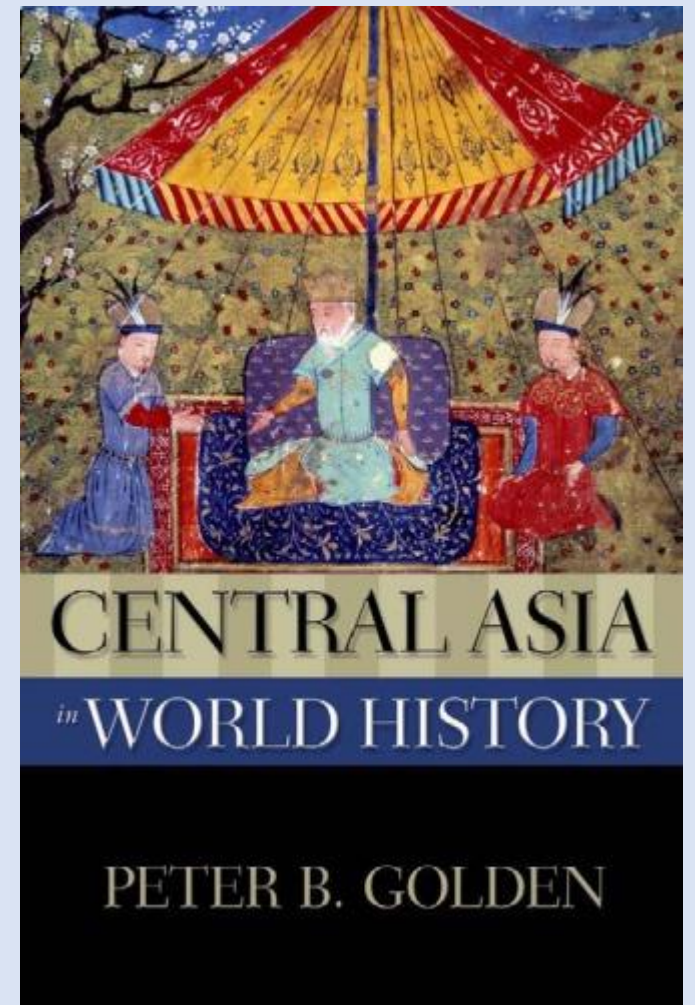
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<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/bfopinion/race-genetics-david-reich#.jqQ6X6057b>

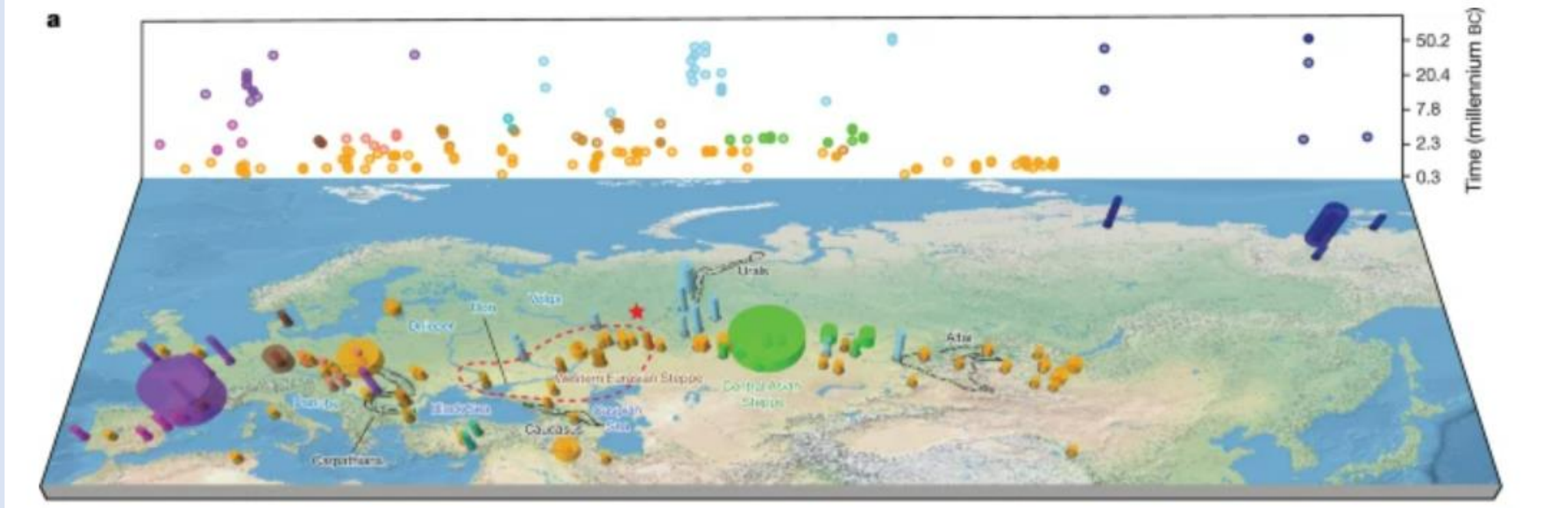
Peter Golden challenges both Linguistic and Geneticist visions of homelands in his works. His argument: Ethnogenesis a particularly bad fit for understanding tribal politics or histories.

- Tribes not really blood/ethnicities – better seen as political unit of choice by heterogeneous people who choose a leader and create a mythological bond.
- Only perceived as a blood unit by their observers. Settled states don't understand tribal politics.
- “Turks” a term used for Khazars, Uyghurs, Hungarians. Term comes to mean all nomads in the steppe from neighbors.
- *Golden: Language and genetics not always linked! They move independently so neither approach is sound.*

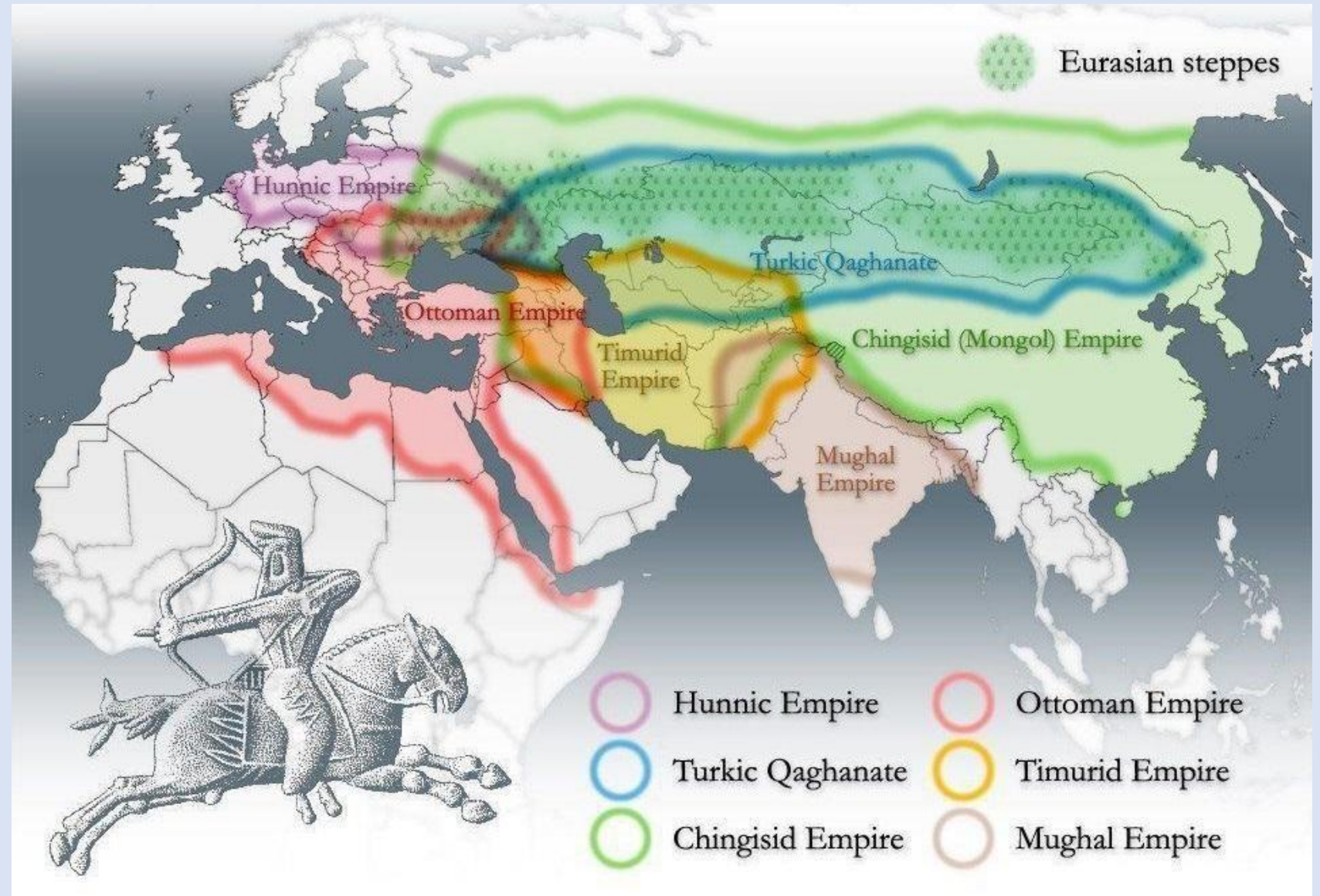


So what do you do with all that expensive DNA equipment now?  
You could do genetic studies on horses....

**Fig. 1: Ancient horse remains and their genomic affinities.**

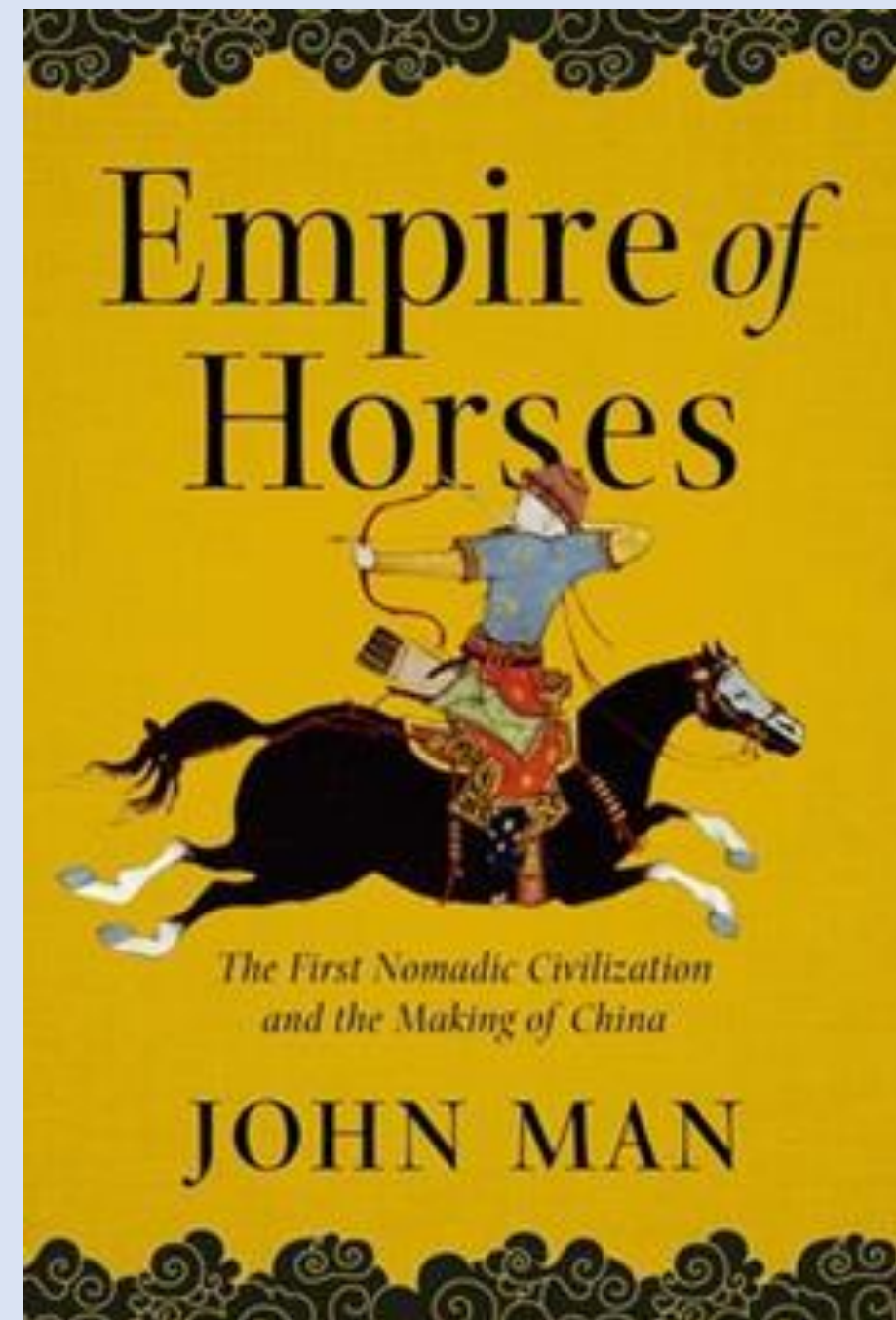
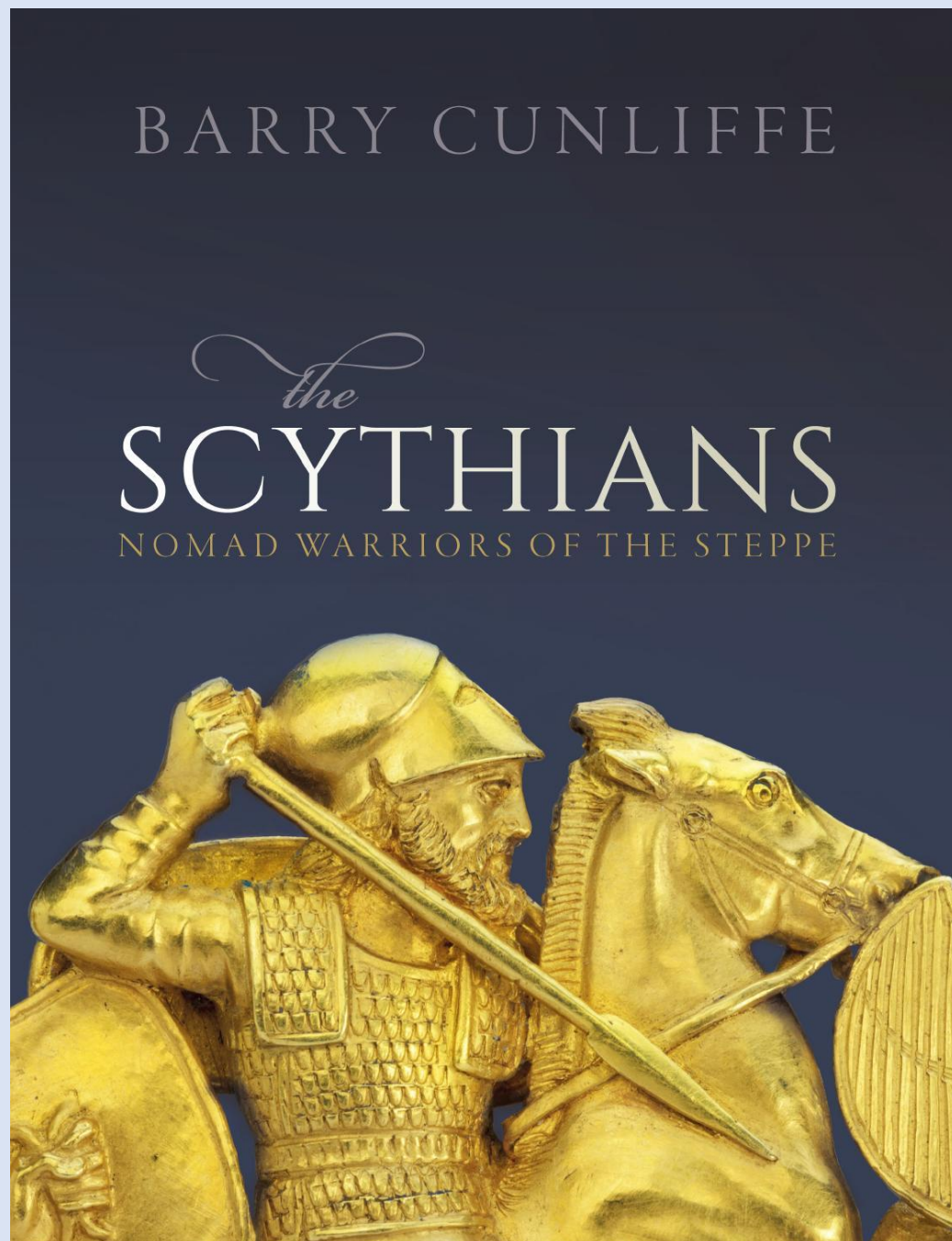


The Steppes present a problem for Nationalist histories. There is constant movement of humans, constant re-combinations of polities, overlapping spheres- it is confusing! But mostly it is confusing because we think of human history in terms of “culture hearths” and want a nice linear development from the homeland to the modern nation. So, if it feels overwhelming it is not just you, it is the entire way we think about human history that makes this tough.





Some fun books.



THE  
HORSE  
THE  
WHEEL  
AND  
LANGUAGE

HOW  
BRONZE-AGE RIDERS

FROM THE  
EURASIAN STEPPES

SHAPED THE  
MODERN WORLD

DAVID W. ANTHONY

These are not quite so much fun but are part of the rethinking of the technology of the horse and the mobility of culture.

Anthony, 2007;  
Frachetti, 2008

PASTORALIST LANDSCAPES  
AND SOCIAL INTERACTION  
IN BRONZE AGE EURASIA

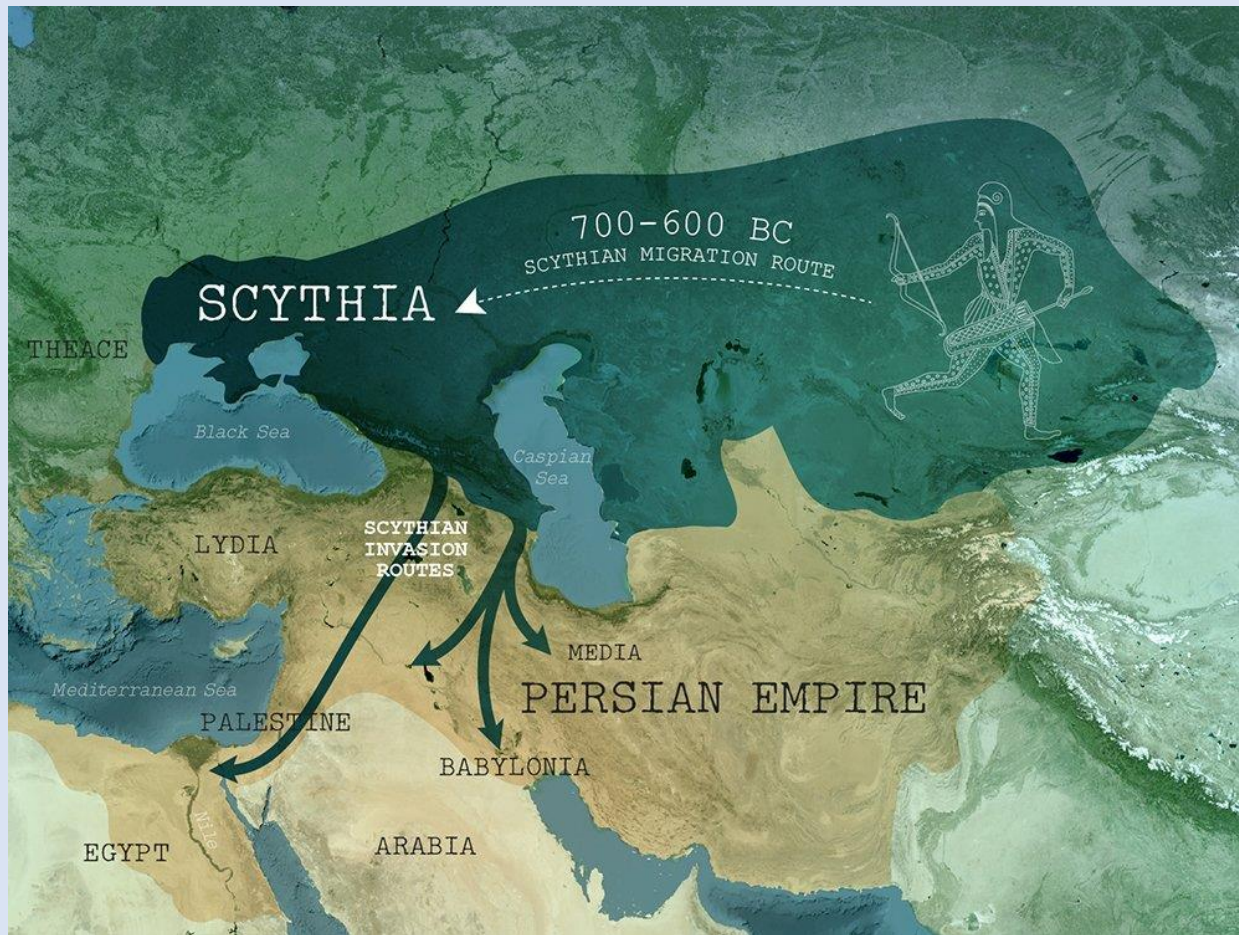


MICHAEL D. FRACHETTI

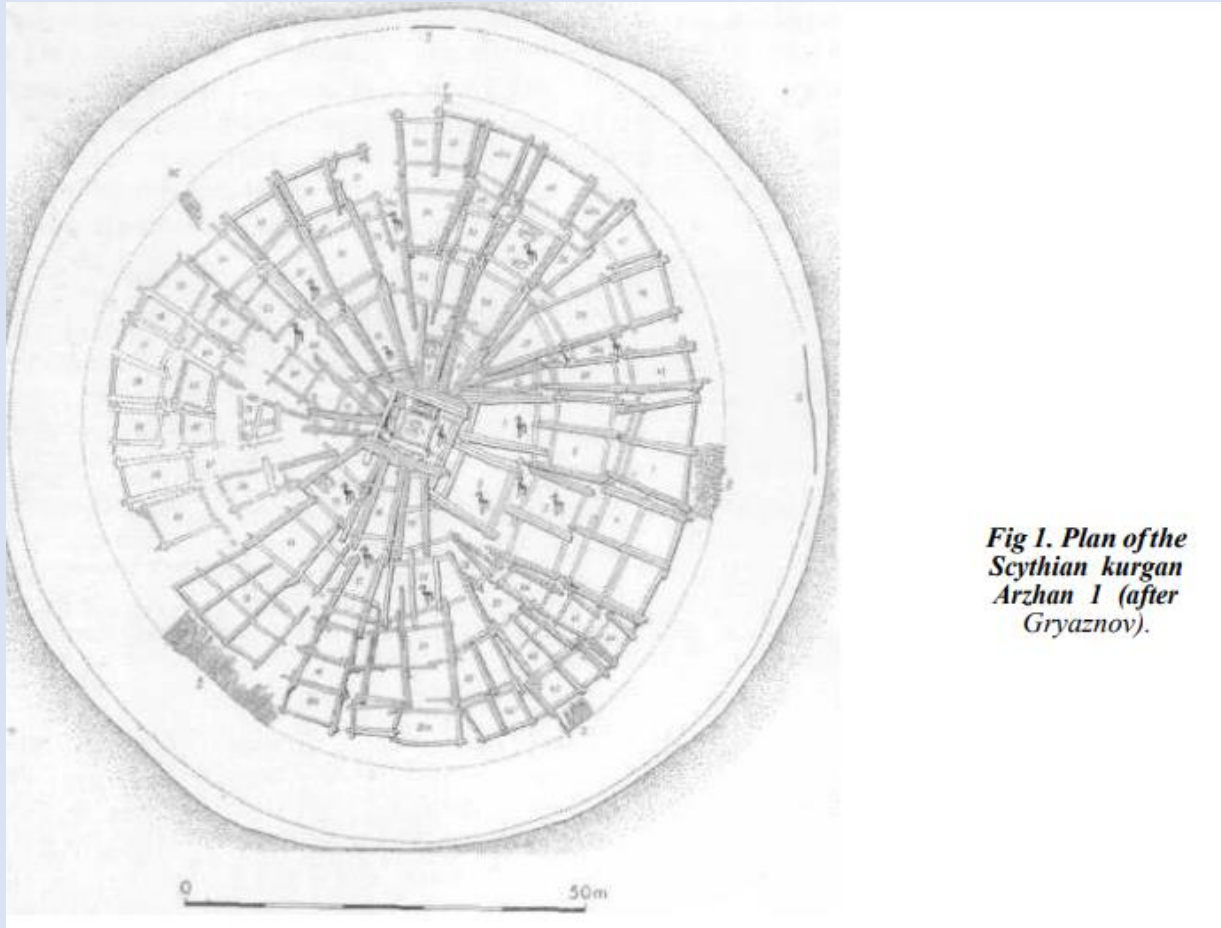
Kurgans (grave monuments) are found from Anatolia through Germany through Mongolia. They illustrate shared culture.



Arzhan Archaeological find illustrates the challenge of nationalist origin timelines. Who does it belong to? Who gets to claim the Scythians? Their language says one thing (Indo-European) their culture, another (Turkic).



# Arzhan burial mound excavations, 1990s



*Fig 1. Plan of the Scythian kurgan Arzhan I (after Gryaznov).*



## Examples of 'Scythian' Grave Goods





But whose “history” is it?

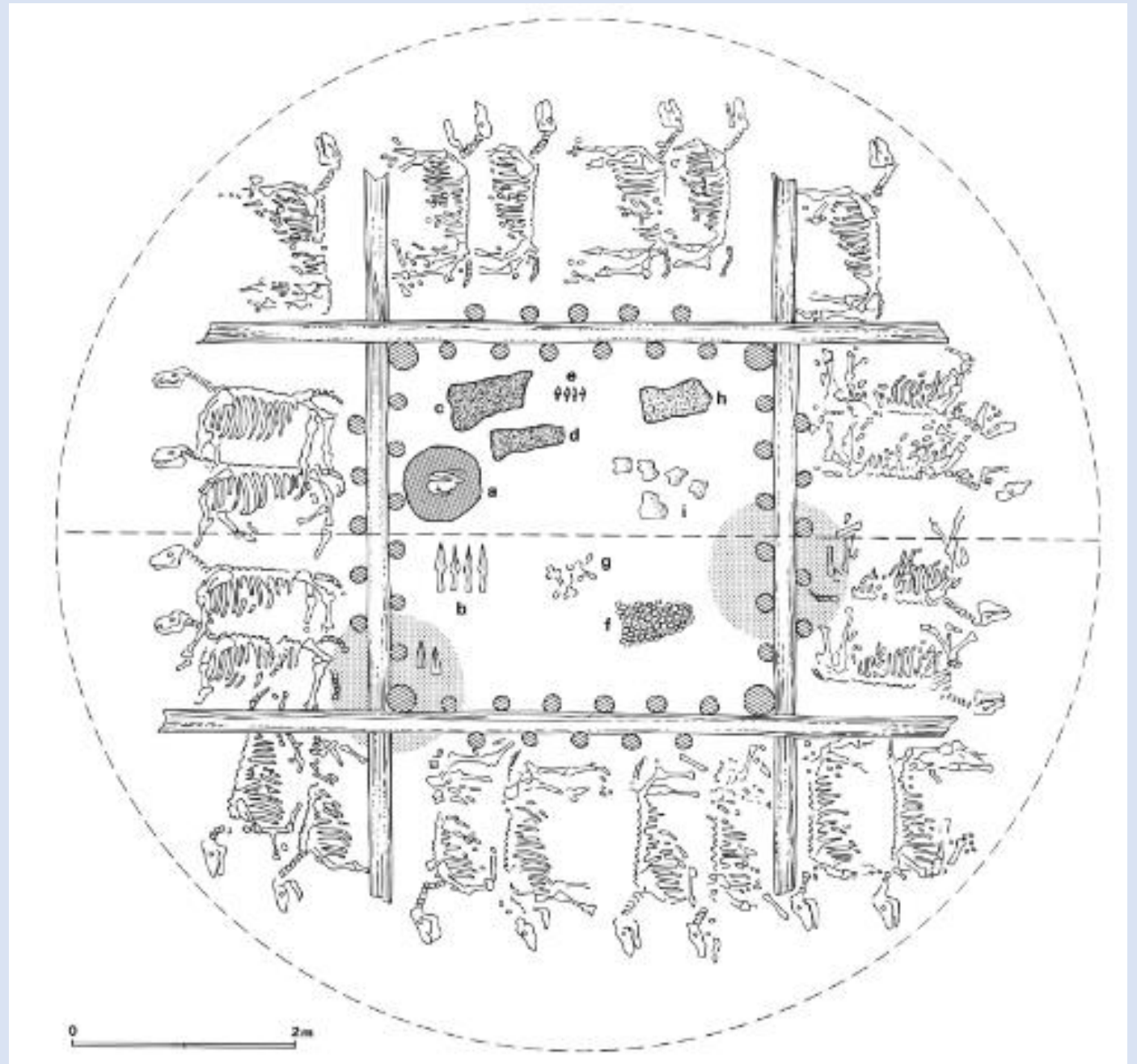


Another controversy: The Golden Man of Issyk (near Almaty), circa 6<sup>th</sup> c. ce





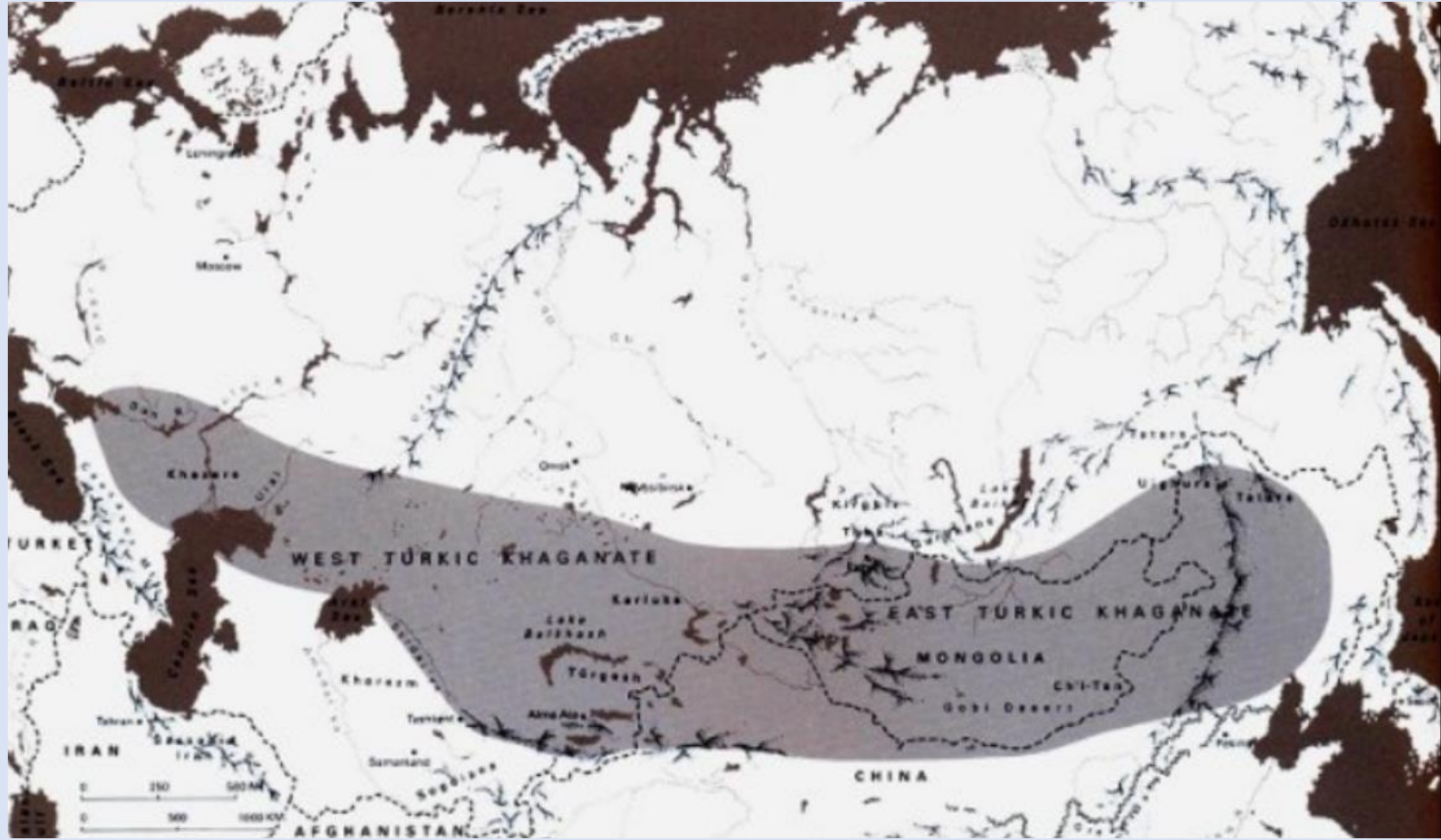
Kelermes  
Kurgan  
grave with  
up to 24  
horses.



Eurasia, c. 323 bce. Nomadic peoples usually viewed from Greek and later Roman historians who prefer cities.



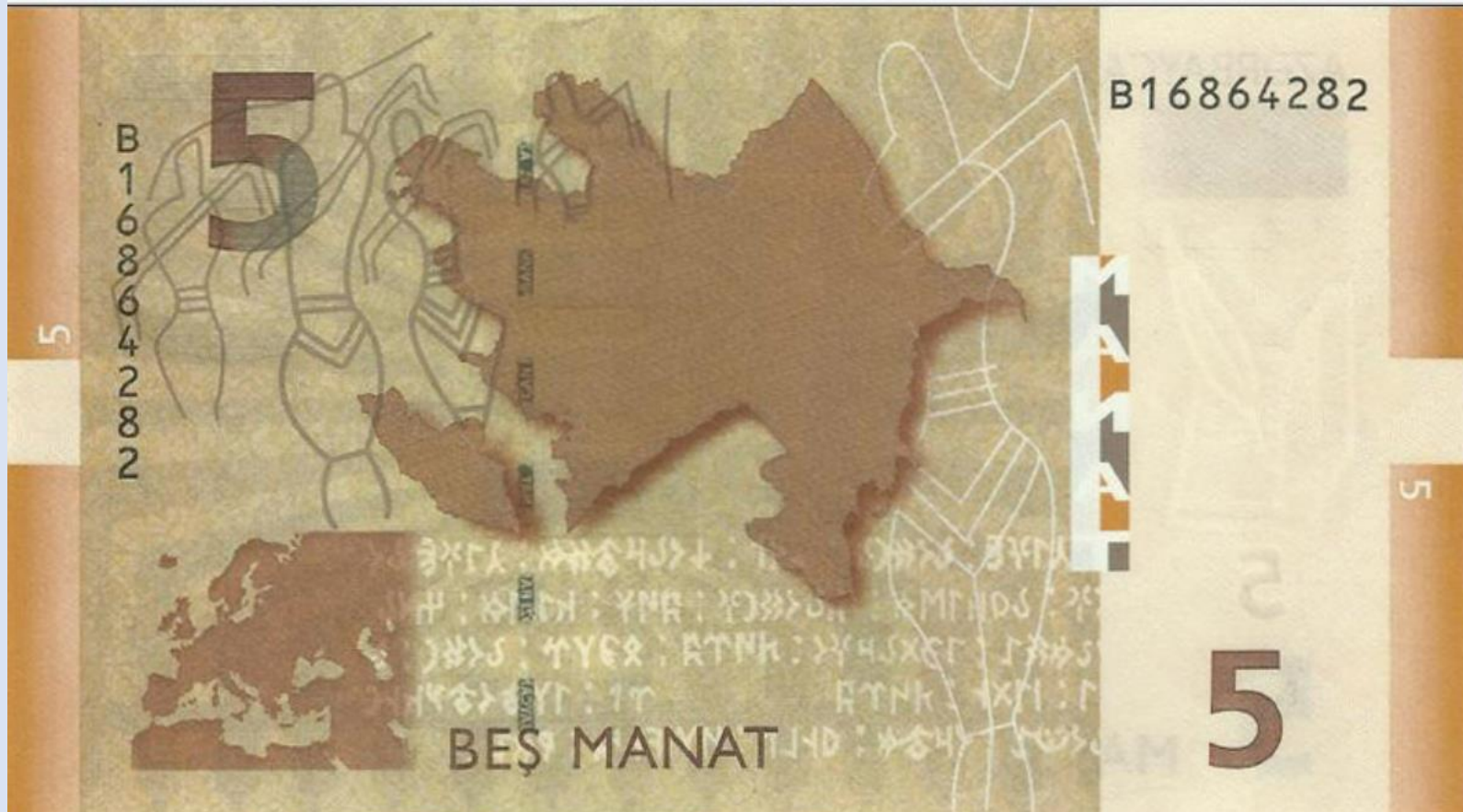
The Turkish Republic traces heritage to the Gokturks, or 1<sup>st</sup> Turkic Khaganate, 500-600s ce, that stretched from Caucuses to Mongolia. Their first script was Sogdian (Iranian language), but they then created their own script.



1<sup>st</sup> Turkic Khaganate developed old Turkic script.  
Examples in Mongolia (Orkhon valley stela and old manuscripts) related to script used in Hungary and Old Uyghur in China

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# Azerbaijani money with Old Turkic script 2006



# Gokturk (1<sup>st</sup> Turkic Empire) Kurgan Art



2<sup>nd</sup> Empire: The Uygur Khanate, 8-9<sup>th</sup> ce (a label popular neither in China nor Turkey – where they are called the Eastern Turkic Khanate)



Where do the Mongolians fit in in the Turkic vision?

Well, if you go by the statues erected in the parks in Turkey over the past few years, they are a Turkic empire.



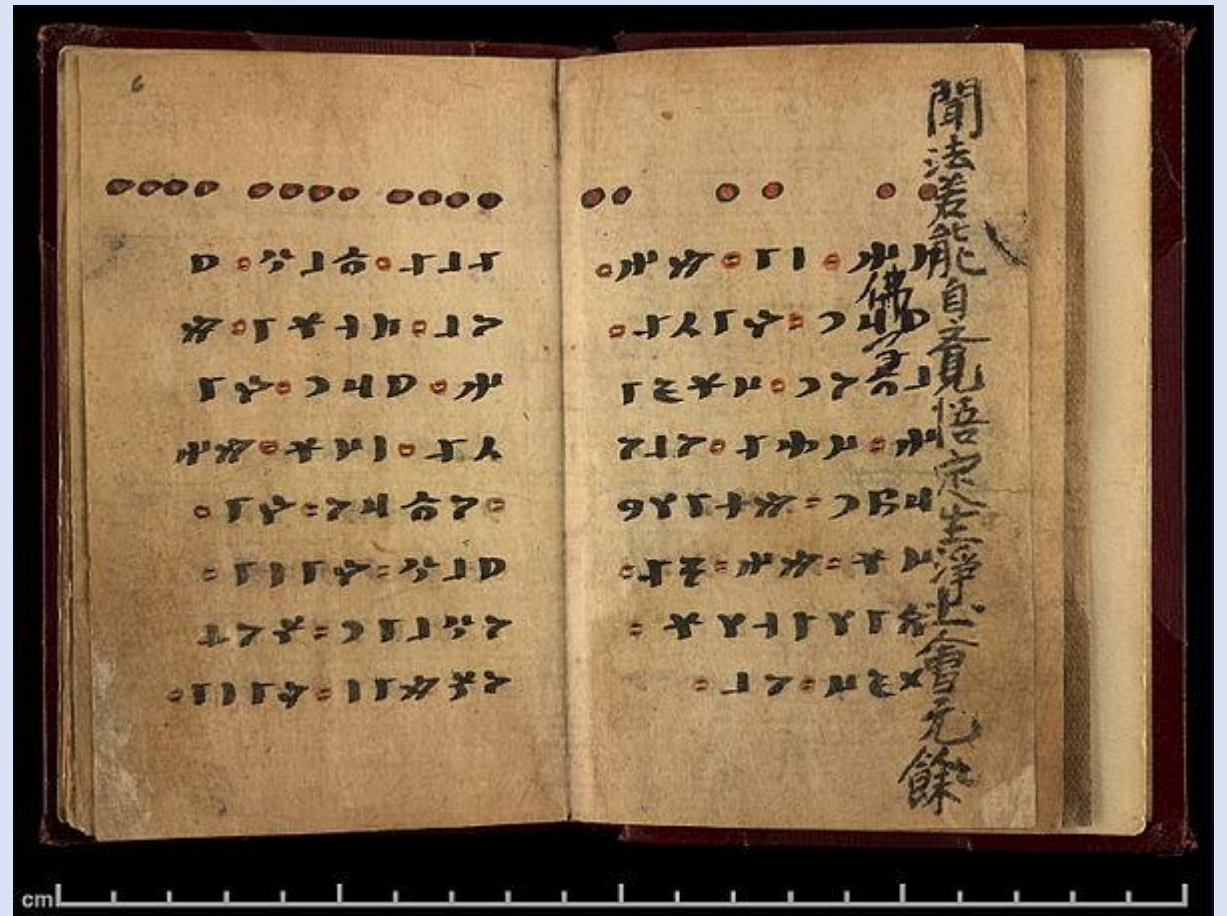


# The Turkic-Mongolian language link

Irk Bitig, or “the book of Omens” written in old Turkic, with Chinese notations added later. Manuscript found in the Dunhuang Caves in (now in the British Museum – of course).

9<sup>th</sup> c. manuscript? The caves sealed in 11<sup>th</sup> c., rediscovered in 20<sup>th</sup> c.

The book a guide to dice casting interpretation.



# Magao Caves in Dunhuang on Ancient Silk Route

Buddhist  
monastery  
site, but also  
libraries.



Photo of manuscripts in the “Library Cave” (Aruef Stein, 1907). This was when German, British and French self-styled archaeologists in a rush to acquire museum pieces.



Paul Pelliot (right) and Aurel Stein purchased thousands of manuscripts before WWI. The monastery used the money to preserve the site. By 1910 the Chinese government moved to forbid export of the manuscripts.



# Becoming Turkic

1<sup>st</sup> Turkic Empire – the Gokturks, c. 600

The Eastern Turkic Khanate (Or Uighyur Empire) c. 800s

By the 900s Turkic tribes migrating West across the Steppes. Form empires like the Seljuks in P

Others – like the Pechenegs and the Kipchak, etc., with shifting borders.

By the year 1000 Turkic tribes scattered across the Steppes all the way to Hungary

They would be welded together by the Mongol Conquests (c. 1200), and again by Timur in the

# Steppes, c. 1015 ce.

Turkic speaking Pechenegs, Oghuz, Kimak and Kipchak peoples will be united briefly under Genghis Khan in the 1200s, but most nomadic federations with similar varieties of the Turkic language



- Biçənək, Azerbaijan
- Peçenek, Kazan, Turkey
- Pečenjevce, Serbia
- Pecineaga, Romania
- Pechenihy, Ukraine
- Besenyőtelek, Hungary
- Besenyőd, Hungary
- Pöttsching, Austria
- Ládbesenyő, Hungary
- Szirmabesenyő, Hungary
- Besnyő, Hungary
- Besenyszög, Hungary
- Pečenice, Slovakia
- Bešeňová, Slovakia
- Pečeňady, Slovakia
- Bešeňov, Slovakia
- Bešenovo, Slovakia
- Bešenovački Prnjavor, Serbia
- Máriabesnyő, Gödöllő, Hungary
- Pecinișca, Romania
- Beščeně, a part of Kunovice, Czech Republic

Towns with “Pecheneg”  
in the name – another way of  
marking spread of Turkic  
cultures