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# Identifying the Huns and the Xiongnu (or Not): Multi-Faceted Implications and Difficulties

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Identifying the Huns and the Xiongnu (or Not):  
Multi-Faceted Implications and Difficulties

by

Xumeng Sun

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## Abstract

The origin of the Huns has been a myth since they made the first appearance in the Eastern Europe in the 370s CE. The early Roman and Gothic historians assume they came from the North, “the frozen ocean,” or the East, associated with the Alans. It was not until the eighteenth century that the French Orientalist Joseph de Guignes first proposed from the political perspective that the mysterious Huns came from Northeastern Asia, where the nomadic Xiongnu rose and became the most powerful enemy of Qin and Han dynasties (221BCE- 220 CE) in China. After defeated by the Chinese and other nomadic groups such as the Xianbei, one part of Xiongnu trekked west and turned out to be the European Huns. This thesis seemingly makes good sense and has thereby attracted a world of followers, who tend to defend the argument from historical, linguistic, or archaeological perspectives, while critics also form a strong case to oppose it. The ongoing debate has been lasting for over two centuries and continues to this day.

Much of the existing research focused only on one or two aspects of the problem, but far less on the comprehensive studies for it is indeed a challenging interdisciplinary undertaking. Historians Otto Maenchen-Helfen (1945), David Curtis Wright (1997), and Étienne de la Vaissière (2005) have made inspiring attempts, and this thesis is a continuing effort, combining both the prior research and the most recent archaeological and anthropological achievements. This project investigates the debate not exclusively from one respect but from four perspectives: historical sources, linguistic connections, ethnic origins, and archaeological finds. According to the definition of “ethnic group” in anthropology, this thesis argues it is an oversimplification to identify the Huns with Xiongnu and that it will be a meaningless venture in future discussions if a consensus or common definition about what an ethnic group is cannot be achieved.

## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

The Huns conquered the Alans in the 370s CE, and later the Eastern and Western Goths as well, creating a massive influx of refugees fleeing into the Roman Empire. By around 400, this ferocious barbarian group had become well known in the West. Their very looks, their unanticipated appearance, their modes of waging war, and their destructive invasions all set them apart from other Europeans, and this fired the Western imagination. Where did they come from? Even contemporary authors in antiquity could hardly answer this question. It was not until the eighteenth century that French Sinologist Joseph de Guignes first traced the origins of the European Huns (c. 370- 469 CE) back to the Northern Xiongnu (a pastoral nomadic people who fled northwestward after their catastrophic defeat by China's Han dynasty towards the end of the first century CE) in East Asia on the basis of the apparent phonetic similarity between the ethnonyms of the two groups. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries historians and linguists exhausted available historical texts to explore possible historical, linguistic, and geographic connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns but still failed to arrive at a consensus. Beginning in the 1940s, when more and more Xiongnu and Hunnic burial sites began to be found, physical anthropologists and archaeologists examined human remains and burial goods to investigate the ethnicities of the two peoples and the customs they practiced. Their studies have contributed to our knowledge of the Xiongnu and Hunnic culture but still have not established a connection or common identity between the two groups.

Scholarship on this controversial topic has for the most part not entailed a comprehensive study of all four of its facets: historical, linguistic, osteological, and archaeological. This thesis will treat all of these facets. Chapter 2 discusses the historical sources for this topic, both Chinese

and Western, and analyzes the flaws of the most significant treatment of these sources by the German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth (1845-1927). Chapter 3 presents an overview of the linguistic debates on the phonetic resemblance between the two ethnonyms, Xiongnu and Huns, and it also discusses the debates among linguists over what languages the two groups spoke. Chapter 4 explores the ethnic origins of the two groups with a focus on relatively new osteological studies. Chapter 5 examines the excavated burial sites and looks into two features potentially exclusive to the Asian Xiongnu and the European Huns: partial horse burial and cauldrons. It considers the remarkable contributions on this topic made by Hungarian archaeologist Miklós Érdy (1931-2017).

## 1.1 Literature Review

The French Orientalist Joseph de Guignes first proposed in 1756 that the ancestors of the mysterious Huns were the Xiongnu of Northeastern Asia, as based on the phonetic resemblance of the ethnonyms of the two peoples. His hypothesis convinced many scholars of European history, most famous among whom were the British historian Edward Gibbon, who popularized it in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.<sup>1</sup> De Guignes's equation was not an airtight case, and before long critics were claiming that it was not sufficiently based on textual evidence. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars dug deeply into historical documents looking for evidence that the ancestors of the Huns were the Xiongnu who had been defeated in East Asia by joint forces of Han China and other nomads and had migrated westward in their defeat across the Central Eurasian steppe at the end of the first century.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph de Guignes, *Histoire Générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols, et des Autres Tartares Occidentaux, Avant & Depuis J.C. Jusqu'à présent*, Paris: Desaint & Saillant, 1756-58; Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London: ElecBook, 1998.



Towards the end of the nineteenth century, scholarly discussion of the putative connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns entered into a new stage as German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth found seemingly incontrovertible evidence in Chinese sources. The cornerstone of his argument was: A) The place name Su-te is the Yan-cai of ancient times, as evidenced by the passage in the *Weishu*; B) The *Hou Hanshu* and the *Weilüe* both inform us that Yan-cai was also called A-lan or A-lan-liao, which of course, Alans. Therefore, Yan-cai is to be identified with Strabo's Aorsi; C) Chinese sources document that the Xiongnu conquered the Alans, and Western sources record the Hunnic conquest of the Alans. These conquests occurred at the same time; D) Since the Alans could not have been conquered at the same time by two different groups, it follows that the Huns and the Xiongnu are one and the same people.<sup>2</sup> This had an immediate effect on scholarship on the question, and a preponderance of scholarly opinion accepted the identity hypothesis.

Additionally, authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also explored other linguistic proofs to demonstrate that the two groups used the same name or that they spoke an identical or similar language. Although de Guignes had pointed out the similarity of two ethnonyms in the middle of the eighteenth century, few scholars were fully persuaded of the equation until important Sogdian letters were discovered in 1907 in northwestern Chinese frontier walls by Sir Aurel Stein. Philologists and linguists such as W.B. Henning and other authors thoroughly studied these ancient letters, noting excitedly that the word *xwn* in them

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Hirth, "Über Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu," *Muenchen: Sitzungs-berichte der. Philologischen und historischen Classe, Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Munich II., 1899: 245-78; "Hunnenforschungen," *Keleti Szemle* 2, 1901: 81-91; "Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 30, 1909: 32-45. Also see David Curtis Wright, "The Hsiung-nu—Hun Equation Revisited (*Eurasian Studies Yearbook* 67, 1997: 77-112)," 94-7. *Weishu* (The *Book of Wei*) records the history of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei from 386 to 550 CE. *Hou Hanshu* (The *Book of the Later Han*) is the official dynastic history of the Later Han period from 6 to 189 CE.

referring to the (Southern) Xiongnu could be read as Hun. For many scholars, this was definitive evidence that the Xiongnu and the Huns had the same identical name.<sup>3</sup> As recently as 2012, Professor C. Atwood continued using the term “*xwn*” to establish phonological equivalence with Chinese *Xiongnu*, Sogdian *Xwn*, Sanskrit *Hūna*, Greek *Ounnoi*, and Latin *Hunni*.<sup>4</sup>

Another contribution by linguists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries regarding the Xiongnu-Hun equation concerned the languages of the two peoples. But unfortunately, due to the paucity of language materials, scholars have been unable to reach an agreement on which language(s) the Xiongnu and the Huns spoke. There are three well-known hypotheses on the language the Xiongnu spoke: Altaic, Iranian, and Yeniseic, and for the Huns there are four hypotheses: Altaic, Yeniseic, Indo-European, or Uralic.<sup>5</sup> Inadequate linguistic data led a number

<sup>3</sup> W. B. Henning, “The date of the Sogdian ancient letters,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 12, No. 3/4, 1948: 601-15; J. Harmatta, “The archaeological evidence for the date of the Sogdian ‘Ancient Letters,’” in *Studies in the Sources of the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, ed. J. Harmatta, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979: 75-90; Nicholas Sims-Williams, “The Sogdian Ancient Letter II,” in *Philologica et Linguistica. Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas*, ed. M.G. Schmidt and W. Bisang, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2001: 267-280; “The Sogdian Ancient letters,” <https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html>, 2004 (accessed 10 August 2020); Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2005a, 43-50.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher P. Atwood, “Huns and Xiōngnú: New Thoughts on an Old Problem,” in *Dubitando: Studies in History and Culture in Honor of Donald Ostrowski*, ed. Brian J. Boeck, Russell E. Martin, and Daniel Rowland, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2012: 27-52.

<sup>5</sup> Xiongnu language:

A) Altaic. Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, *Recherches sur les Langues Tartares*, Paris, 1820; Julius Klaproth, “Sur l’Identite des Tou-kiue et les Hiongnu avec les Turcs,” *Journal Asiatique*, 1825; E. H. Parker, “Turko-Scythian Tribes,” *China Review*, XX, 1892; Friedrich Hirth, “Über Volga Hunnen und Hiung-nu,” *Sitzungsberichte der münchener Akademie der Wissenschaft (Phil.- Hist. Classe)*, II, 1899, 245-278; McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia: A Study of the Scythians and the Huns and the Part They Played in World History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939: 468-70; W. B. Henning, “The date of the Sogdian ancient letters,” 601-15; Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*, Stanford University Press, 1975, etc.

B) Iranian. H. W. Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies: being Khotanese Texts*, VII, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 25-41; János Harmatta, “Conclusion,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations, 700 B. C. to A. D. 250*, ed. János Harmatta, UNESCO, 1994: 485-492; Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*, Princeton University Press, 2009, etc.

C). Yeniseic. Lajos Ligeti, “Mots de civilisation de haute Asie en transcription chinoise,” *Acta Orientalia* I, 1950: 141-185; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” *Asia Major* 9, 1962: 58-144; 206-265; Alexander Vovin, “Did the Xiongnu Speak a Yeniseian Language?” *Central Asiatic Journal* 44, no. 1, 2000: 87-

of scholars to assume that their languages are either unidentifiable/unclassifiable or else multifaceted.<sup>6</sup>

With more archaeological evidence available starting in the twentieth century, anthropologists and archaeologists joined the debate as well by examining newly unearthed materials, including human remains, cauldrons, and grave goods. They argued that if the Xiongnu and Huns were proven to have identical physical appearances, anthropometry, or genetics, or if they used the same objects or practiced the same rituals, the identity between them would be firmly established. Anthropologists tried to construct the phenotypic traits of the two groups by combining historical records and skeletal evidence, and they investigated artificial

104; “Did the Xiongnu speak a Yeniseian language? Part 2: Vocabulary,” in *Altaica Budapestinensia MMII: Proceedings of the 45th Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC)*, ed. Alice Sárközi and Attila Rákos, Budapest, 2002, 389-394, etc.

Hunnic language:

A) Altaic. Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: studies in their history and culture*, ed. Max Knight. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1973; Omeljan Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1982: 428-76; Denis Sinor, “The Hun period,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 177-205; Karl Heinrich Menges, *The Turkic Languages and Peoples: An Introduction to Turkic Studies*, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995; Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, etc.

B) Yeniseic. Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” 1962; “The Chinese and Their neighbors in Pre-historic and Early Historic Times,” in *The origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David N. Keightly, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983: 411-66; “The Hsiung-nu,” in *History of the Turkic Peoples in the Pre-Islamic Period*, ed. H. R. Roemer, *Philologiae et Historiae Turcivae Fundamenta I*, Berlin, 2000: 52-72; Edward J. Vajda, *Yeniseian Peoples and Languages: A History of Yeniseian Studies with an Annotated Bibliography and a Source Guide*, Routledge, 2012, etc.

C) Indo-European. Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” *Byzantion* 17, 1944-1945: 222-43; *The World of the Huns: studies in their history and culture*, 1973; Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, University of California press, 1990; *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*, University of California press, 1997; Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2010; Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns*, Routledge, 2016, etc.

D) Uralic. Julius Heinrich Klaproth, *Tableaux Historiques de l'Asie: Depuis la Monarchie de Cyrus Jusqu'a Nos Jours*, Paris: Schubart, 1926.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Doerfer, “Zur Sprache der Hunnen,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 17.1, 1973: 2-7; Denis Sinor, “The Hun period,” 177-205; Peter B. Golden, “Some Thoughts on the Origins of the Turks and the Shaping of the Turkic Peoples (in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*, ed. Victor H. Mair, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, 136–157),” 136-7; Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, etc.

cranial deformation as widely practiced by the Huns, but not by the Xiongnu.<sup>7</sup> Geneticists studied ancient human genomes from remains across the Eurasian steppe in order to analyze the ancestries of the Xiongnu and the Huns.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the human remains, objects discovered and mortuary practices observed were considered in order to compare the characteristics of Xiongnu and Hunnic cultures. Hungarian archaeologist Miklós Érdy argued that partial horse burials and bronze cauldrons constituted archaeological proof of the shared identity of the two groups.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Carleton Stevens Coon, *The Races of Europe*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939; Pan Qifeng, “An Examination on the Origin of the Xiongnu from the Cranial Materials (Cong lugu ziliao kan Xiongnu zu de renzhong),” *The Archaeological studies in China*, vol. 2, Beijing: Science Press, 1986, 292-301; Huang Wenbi, “The Origin of the Xiongnu (Lun Xiongnu zu zhi qiyuan),” in *The Historical and Archaeological Essays of Huang Wenbi*, Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1989: 85-90; Wu En, “Several Problems in the Studies of the Xiongnu Archaeology (Lun Xiongnu kaogu yanjiu zhong de jige wenti),” *Acta Archaeologica Sinica*, 1990(04): 409-437; Zhu Hong, “Ethnological Xiongnu, Xianbei, and Kitan (Renzhong xue shang de Xiongnu, Xianbei yu Qidan),” *Northern Cultural Relics*, 1994(02): 7-13; Aerdingfu, “The study on the Xiongnu origin (Xiongnu zhongshu kao),” *Inner Mongolia Social Sciences* (Chinese version), 2000(02): 42-45; “Europoid or Mongoloid (Ouluoba Zhong haishi menggu Zhong)?” *Northern Cultural Relics*, 2000(03): 52-58; Zhang Quanchao and Zhu Hong, “Some Understandings on the Xiongnu ethnicity (Guanyu Xiongnu renzhong wenti de jidian renshi),” *Journal of Minzu University of China*, 2006(06): 34-38; Ma Liqing, “The Archaeological and Anthropological Studies on the Xiongnu ethnicity (Guanyu Xiongnu renzhong de kaogu xue he renlei xue yanjiu),” *Journal of Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2007(04): 48-54; Zhao Xin and Yuan Haibing, “A Literature Review of the Ethnographic Study on the Xiongnu and Xianbei (Xiongnu, Xianbei de renzhong xue yanjiu zongshu),” *Inner Mongolia Cultural Relic and Archaeology*, 2008(01): 75-80, etc.

On cranial deformation see Christopher Meiklejohn, Anagnostis Agelarakis and others, “Artificial Cranial Deformation in the Proto-Neolithic and Neolithic Near East and its Possible Origin: Evidence from Four Sites,” *Paléorient* 18, no. 2, 1992: 83-97; Christina Torres-Rouff and Leonid T. Yablonsky, “Cranial Vault Modification as a Cultural artifact: A Comparison of the Eurasian Steppes and the Andes,” *Homo*, vol. 56, 2005: 1-16; Susanne Hakenbeck, “‘Hunnish’ modified skulls: Physical Appearance, Identity and the Transformative Nature of Migrations,” in *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in Burial Archaeology in Honour of Heinrich Härke*, ed. Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams, University of Exeter Press, 2009: 64-80; Peter Mayall, Varsha Pilbrow, and Liana Bitadze, “Migrating Huns and Modified heads: Eigenshape Analysis Comparing Intentionally Modified Crania from Hungary and Georgia in the Migration Period of Europe,” *PLoS ONE* 12 (2), 2017: 1-23, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0171064> (accessed 12 April 2020), etc.

<sup>8</sup> Kijeong Kim and others, “A Western Eurasian Male Is Found in 2000-year-old Elite Xiongnu Cemetery in Northeast Mongolia,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 142, no. 3, 2010: 429-40; P. B. Damgaard and others, “137 ancient human genomes from across the Eurasian steppes,” *Nature*, 557, 2018: 369–373; Endre Neparáczi and others, “Y-chromosome Haplogroups from Hun, Avar and Conquering Hungarian Period Nomadic People of the Carpathian Basin,” *Scientific Reports* 9, 16569, 2019: 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> Miklós Érdy, “Three Archaeological Links between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” in *Proceedings of the Mikhail Griaznov Memorial Conference*, St. Petersburg, 2002: 293-302; “Examination of Eight Archaeological Links Between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” in *Altaica Budapestinensia MMII: Proceedings of the 45<sup>th</sup> Permanent*

It is not my purpose here to cover all dimensions of Western scholarship on this topic. Since debates on this topic among Chinese scholars have not received much attention, they will be introduced at this stage. Chinese scholars did not study relations between the Asian Xiongnu and the European Huns until the mid-nineteenth century, and among those who did, Xu Jiyu 徐繼畬 was the most notable. He observed in his work *Yinghuan Zhilue* 瀛寰志略(1849) that a branch of the ancient Xiongnu migrated to present-day Hungary and established a state during the Xianping era (998-1003 CE) of China's Song dynasty.<sup>10</sup> This was incorrect, but Xu's insightful knowledge about the rest of the world was remarkable in nineteenth-century Qing China. At the end of the nineteenth century the Chinese diplomat Hong Jun 洪鈞, who served as a special emissary of the Qing government in Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria from 1887 to 1892, learned from European historians that the Xiongnu people moving west became the Huns, quoted from Xu's work and commented on this idea in his volume *Yuanshi Yiwen Zhengbu* 元史譯文證補: "The Xiongnu king Attila migrated from Northern Black Sea to present-day Hungary during the reign of Emperor Jianwen (320-372 CE) of the Jin dynasty (266-420 CE)."<sup>11</sup> This claim did not of course agree with the widely acknowledged time of Attila's rule in Europe (434-453 CE). Both of these works were completed in the nineteenth century, when very few Chinese people had any knowledge of European history and foreign languages. Accordingly, any viewpoints from European historical works were accepted immediately by Chinese historians.

*Internation Altaistic Conference*, ed. Alice Sárközi and Attila Rákos, Budapest, 2002: 106-25; "Archaeological Continuity between the Xiongnu and the Huns: Eight Connections Supported by Written Sources," *The Danish Society for Central Asia's Electronic Yearbook*, 2008: 11-27; "Xiongnu and Huns One and the Same: Analyzing Eight Archaeological Links And Data from Ancient Written Sources," *Eurasian Studies Yearbook* 81, Bloomington, 2009: 5-36, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Xu Jiyu, *Yinghuan Zhilue*, Shanghai Shudian Press, 2001. The original citation in Chinese: "奧地利之匈牙利地, 在國之東界, 古時匈奴有別部轉徙至此, 攻獲那盧彌地, 于趙宋咸平年間立國, 稱雄一時, 久而寢衰。" (140)

<sup>11</sup> Hong Jun, *Yuanshi Yiwen Zhengbu*, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=90242&remap=gb> (accessed 10 May 2020).

This included uncritical acceptance of the argument by European historians that the Huns had originated from the Xiongnu people who once flourished in East Asia.

While Yao Congwu 姚從吾 was studying in Germany (1922-1934), he noticed two aspects of European studies on the Huns: the putative connection between the Xiongnu and Huns and the racial identities of the two groups. Having read all available materials in both English and German on the topic, he summarized it as follows: As for the first question, it is widely acknowledged that the Xiongnu in the Chinese records were the same people as the Hunni, Hunnen, or European Huns of the fifth century, as based on the contentions made by De Guignes, De Groot, and Hirth.<sup>12</sup> As for the race issue, he believed there was still no consensus.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century the Xiongnu-Hun identity had been popularized and had a tremendous impact on Chinese scholarship. Other renowned Chinese intellectuals such as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, Ding Qian 丁謙, and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 accepted the equation without criticism and even attempted to examine the westward route of the Northern Xiongnu to Europe.<sup>14</sup> With this “bedrock” belief in mind, subsequent Chinese scholars began to study the sources, race, and language of the Xiongnu and equated the Xiongnu with the Huns in all

<sup>12</sup> Yao Congwu, “The Study of European scholars on the Xiongnu (Ouzhou xuezhe duiyu Xiongnu de yanjiu),” *Beijing daxue guoxue jikan*, dierjuan disanhao, 1930: 437-540.

<sup>13</sup> Yao Congwu wrote in the introduction: “The problem of Xiongnu-Huns equation is solved, but not their races.” (In Chinese: “已決定的問題: 匈奴即是匈人. 未決定的問題: 匈奴與匈人究屬什麼種族.” (437)

<sup>14</sup> Zhang Taiyan, “The examination of Xiongnu migrating into Europe (Xiongnu shiqian ouzhou kao), in *Zhang Taiyan Quanji si*, Shanghai, 1985. Zhang noted in his article that “The present-day Hungary is another name of the Xiongnu who migrated into Europe after being defeated by the Han Chinese general Dou Xian.” (381) Ding Qian, “The study of Xiongnu events in the post-Han period (Han yihou Xiongnu shiji kao),” *Dixue zazhi*, 1919 (10)10-11. Ding believed that the Xiongnu once established the Yueban 悅般 state, the people of which all moved to present-day Russia. He also argued that there were two periods of Xiongnu migration into Europe: 374 CE and 508 CE respectively. (10-11) Liang Qichao, *Research methodology of Chinese history (Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa)*, Shijiazhuang, 2000: 126-9. Liang claimed that the people who founded the state of Hungary, the Fen 芬 were remnants of the Xiongnu who traveled westward to Europe after being crushed by Han general Dou Xian. He agreed with Hirth’s contention that Huni in Chinese records referred to Hernalia (one of Attila’s sons) in western accounts.

translations of international historical works. Even though not all European historians agreed on this issue, countless Chinese academics started to use the two ethnonyms interchangeably. Accordingly, studies of the putative migration of the Northern Xiongnu were inevitably imprecise and unpersuasive, but it did lead Chinese scholars to investigate all relevant Chinese materials exhaustively.

Another Chinese historian, Qi Sihe 齊思和 (1977), argued that although Western scholars had pointed out that the Huns were the Xiongnu known to Chinese history, they had failed to suggest the specific migration route of the Xiongnu. He then proposed four stages (Yueban period, Kangju period, Sogdian Period, and Alans period) of the Xiongnu's westward passage by re-examining primary sources on the Xiongnu and Huns in Chinese and Roman accounts.<sup>15</sup> The vital contribution of his article was his inferred migration route of the Xiongnu, but the whole of his deduction was entirely based *a priori* on the premise that the Huns in Europe were indeed the Asian Xiongnu who moved westward. The article concluded that the Huns were the same people as the Xiongnu, but in this it was not convincing. Based on McGovern's argument, the Chinese scholar Lin Gan 林幹 (1984) suggested three phases of the Northern Xiongnu's westward movement: first the Wusun territory, second the Kangju territory, and third the territory of the Alans. He also insisted that there were three periods of the Huns' invasions of Europe: 374-400 CE, 400-415 CE, and 422-468 CE.<sup>16</sup> Beyond that, Lin Gan (1989, 1990) introduced more

<sup>15</sup> Qi Sihe, "Xiongnu migrating westward and its activities in Europe (Xiongnu Xiqian jiqi zai ouzhou de huodong, *Lishi Yanjiu*, 1977 (03): 126-141. His arguments in Chinese: "北匈奴西遷的過程可以分為四個階段: (一)悅般時期; (二)康居時期; (三)粟特時期; (四)阿蘭時期." See Glossary for a brief introduction to the Yueban, Kangju, Su-te, and A-lan.

<sup>16</sup> Lin Gan, "A study of the westward movement of the Northern Xiongnu (Bei Xiongnu xiqian kaolue)," *Neimenggu Shehui Kexue*, 1984 (01): 59-65. He noted in the original article that "北單于自公元 91 年戰敗, 率領部眾向西遁逃, 即開始了西遷的歷程, 其第一站即遷往烏孫的遊牧地區. 北單于部眾西遷的第二站為康居, 第三站為阿蘭聊 (奄蔡)." (59-62) See Glossary for a brief introduction to the Wusun, Kangju, and A-lan-liao (Yan-cai).

primary European historical records on the Huns (including Ammianus Marcellinus, Priscus, and Jordanes) and secondary studies on the Xiongnu-Hun equation, including Friedrich Hirth and Franz Altheim. Lin Gan then indicated that the equation was not fully substantiated until Hirth's argument based on the *Weishu*. He also presented the European views that rejected the equation, such as Hambis, who argued that Xiongnu and Huns were not the same people and were different races who spoke different languages, and Maenchen-Helfen, whose skeptical studies of the equation are extremely important.<sup>17</sup>

Later, Chen Xujing 陳序經(1980) and Jia Yiken 賈衣肯(2006) summarized both Chinese and non-Chinese scholarly literature on this topic. In his article Chen Xujing dug into pertinent Chinese records, including historical accounts and documents from other schools of thought on the topic, and reviewed important recent research (mainly PRC) on Xiongnu studies.<sup>18</sup> He also summarized Western scholarship on this issue in another article introducing the records of the early Roman historians Ammianus Marcellinus and Priscus on the European Huns, along with the more recent secondary studies by De Guignes, Edward Gibbon, E.L. Godkin, and W.M. McGovern.<sup>19</sup> This was an essential contribution for Chinese scholars studying Western scholarship in the topic. Jia Yiken of the Institute of History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences reconsidered the hypothesis identifying the Huns with the Xiongnu and criticized Chinese scholars for accepting the theory uncritically.<sup>20</sup> The situation did not change until the 1990s, when he shared the viewpoints and evidence of the school objecting to the identification,

<sup>17</sup> Lin Gan, "Review of foreign studies on the Xiongnu and Huns (Waiguo xuezhe yanjiu Xiongren he Xiongnu shuping)," *Neimenggu Daxue Xuebao*, 1989 (04): 30-34; 1990 (01): 21-29.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Xujing, "Chinese historical materials on the history of the Xiongnu (Guanyu Xiongnu shi de zhongguo shiliao)," *Nankai Shixue*, 1980 (01): 321-341.

<sup>19</sup> Chen Xujing, "Foreign historical materials on the history of the Xiongnu (Guanyu Xiongnu shi de Waiguo shiliao)," *Nankai Shixue*, 1980(02): 329-345.

<sup>20</sup> Jia Yiken, "A summary of studies on the westward movement of the Xiongnu (Xiongnu xiqian wenli yanjiu zongshu)," *Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu Dongtai*, 2006(09): 11-19; 2006(10):11-16.



including Maenchen-Helfen, Thompson, Franz Altheim, Louis Hambis, and Etienne De laVaissière, who claimed that there was insufficient literary and archaeological evidence to support the Xiongnu-Hun equation and demonstrated the ethnical and cultural differences between the two peoples from various perspectives. His article, along with Lin Gan's, were comprehensive and encompassing treatments of the problem and accommodated opinions both for and against the equation as much as possible.

By the final decades of the twentieth century, most Chinese historians and archaeologists had conducted their research on the Xiongnu-Huns equation. Few scholars questioned or opposed the equation as much as Qiu Ke 邱克, Wang Jianzhong 王建中(1984), and Yu Taishan 余太山 (1990). Qiu and Wang questioned the equation theory and believed that there had not theretofore been a convincing conclusion for connecting the Xiongnu with the Huns.<sup>21</sup> Yu Taishan was the first authority in Chinese scholarship to systematically refute the equation theory.<sup>22</sup> He held that while the Xiongnu and Huns may have had the same name, they were not, *ipso facto*, members of the same ethnic group. Concerning the physical features of the two groups, he argued based mainly on documentary historical records that the Xiongnu were predominantly Caucasoid while the Huns were on the whole Mongoloid. He did, however, concede that fragmentary human remains and biased historical records alone were insufficient evidence for definitively establishing the ethnic identity of the two groups one way or the other. Thereafter Yu (1992) further speculated that the Huns could have stemmed from the Xianbei people, a piece of speculation based on his analysis on the race and language of the Huns and the

<sup>21</sup> Qiu Ke and Wang Jianzhong, "Questioning the westward movement of Xiongnu into Europe (Guanyu Xiongnu xiqian Ouzhou de zhiyi)," *Xibei Minzu Wencong*, 1984 (04): 58-67.

<sup>22</sup> Yu Taishan, "Questioning the Xiongnu-Huns equation (Xiongnu, Huns tongzu lun zhiyi)," *Wenshi*, 1990: 57-74.

time of their entry into Europe.<sup>23</sup> He maintained that Xianbei people who moved westward toward Europe probably included a number of tribes initially allegiant to the Xiongnu. His hypothesis has had a strong and instant effect on the debate. Later Chinese historians such as Liu Yangang 劉衍剛(2010) compared Chinese and Roman historical texts and argued that the customs of the Xiongnu and Huns were significantly different and the Xiongnu were visibly more advanced than the Huns in every possible way.<sup>24</sup> He disagreed with Hirth's article regarding the position of Sogdiana, as this state was not as far inside southern Russian territory area in his analysis of the *Weishu*. He argued that the Alans in Chinese records were not Yancai but the group who conquered the Yancai, which makes more sense if we carefully scrutinize the sources. Eventually, after decades of debate among Chinese academics, many Chinese historical narratives have stopped claiming that the European Huns were the descendants of the Northern Xiongnu who moved westward. Many popular media have abandoned the equation argument as well, and only a few scholars are still insisting on the equation.

## 1.2 Concepts and Translations

Having looked through all the available literature, one interesting thing I have observed is that the understanding of “ethnic group” or “ethnicity” varies significantly from scholar to scholar. This variance explains in part why authors analyzing the same materials can come up with incompatible and mutually contradictory conclusions. Ethnicity has been uncritically, arbitrarily, and (even worse) inaccurately used in scholarly literature in history and other social sciences. I have thus found it necessary to clarify the concept of ethnic group or ethnicity

<sup>23</sup> Yu Taishan, “Speculation about the origin of the Huns (Guanyu Huns zuyuan de yice),” *Wenshi*, 1992: 286-287.

<sup>24</sup> Liu Yangang, “Huns and Xiongnu in the classical studies (Gudian xue shiye Zhong de Xiong he Xiongnu),” *Gudai Wenming*, 2010 (04): 63-80.

associated with ethnic identity through the lens of anthropology. This section will try to avoid abstract jargon, but admittedly some relevant discussions and implications are rather informative and illuminating. Ethnicity was first noted in sociology as a set of sociocultural features that differentiate ethnic groups from one another, whereas in anthropology it was a term shifted from “tribe” under colonial contexts. It was not until 1969 and the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by anthropologist Fredrik Barth, that the notion became widely used and discussed in social sciences.<sup>25</sup> The definition of ethnic group and the study of ethnic boundaries hypothesized by Barth and his colleagues are instrumental. Here is how an ethnic group was traditionally understood in anthropological literature:

1. It is largely biologically self-perpetuating;
2. It shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms;
3. It constitutes a field of communication and interaction; and
4. It has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.<sup>26</sup>

In traditional terms, distinguishing features of an ethnic group have usually involved race (visible phenotype), culture, and language, along with a larger society that rejects or discriminates against the group. However, this proposition, Barth argued, is problematic because it leads to the erroneous assumption that each group develops its cultural and social forms in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecological factors.<sup>27</sup> Though a common culture shared in a designated population is vital, an ethnic group is far more than a culture-bearer unit

<sup>25</sup> Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969.

<sup>26</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 10-11.

<sup>27</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 11.

because otherwise differences between groups become differences in trait inventories.<sup>28</sup> In addition, an ethnic group spread over a territory with varying ecological circumstances could exhibit regional diversities of overt institutionalized behavior that do not reflect differences in cultural orientation.<sup>29</sup> As a result, it is not the cultural features that one group encompasses that defines ethnicity but socially relevant factors. To give an example, if one group declares its allegiance to the shared culture of A's in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behavior be interpreted and judged as A's and not as B's, however dissimilar with A's may be in their overt behaviour.<sup>30</sup> To summarize, the determination of ethnic groups is not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories and the different ways in which they are maintained, and not only by a once-and-for-all recruitment, but by continual expression and validation.<sup>31</sup> Various examples can be found of individuals and small groups changing their localities, subsistence patterns, or political allegiances because of specific economic and political circumstances, any or all of which lead to a change of their ethnic identity but leave their former ethnic group unaffected (other than in numbers).<sup>32</sup> In this sense, ethnicity should be treated as a subjective process of group identification in which people use ethnic labels to define themselves and their interaction with others.<sup>33</sup> That categorization is done by "outsiders" adds complexity. The implications of ethnic identity explored here will be used in my conclusion on the relations between the Asian Xiongnu and the European Huns.

<sup>28</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology (*Annual Review of Anthropology* 7, 1978: 379-403)," 383.

Sources for this thesis include works in English, Chinese, French, and German. For Chinese sources I have used the now-standard *Pinyin* system of romanization. As historiographical literature in Western languages before the 1980s frequently employed the now-defunct Wade-Giles romanization, a glossary listing both Pinyin and Wade-Giles romanizations of Chinese words is in an appendix. The glossary also covers a brief introduction to the Chinese names and terms seen in this thesis. Concerning the English translations, I have, where possible, used the ones of sources and quotations in other languages as published in English-language scholarship. Where this is not possible, I offer my translations of Chinese, French, and German.

### 1.3 Conclusion

The debate over equating the Huns with the Xiongnu or not has endured for more than two centuries, but neither historians nor archaeologists, scholars from other disciplines have been able to resolve it conclusively. This is because too many difficulties exist. This thesis has dealt with all four facets of this problem (namely history, linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology) and presented the materials, interpretations, and challenges associated with each facet. Beyond historiographical research, this thesis has also borrowed the discussion of what an ethnic group is from anthropology and on that basis concludes that identifying Huns with Xiongnu is an oversimplification, and it is very likely that the two peoples were not one and the same ethnic group.

## Chapter 2. Historical Sources

As pastoral nomads were constantly on the move and without permanent settlements, the chances for the preservation of written documents were slim, and thus, the indigenous sources are scanty. Luckily, the history of peoples once living on the Eurasian steppe were mostly kept in their neighbouring settled civilizations if there were any. There was in particular no exception for the earlier peoples before the writing of the Orkhon inscriptions in eighth-century Mongolia.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the Xiongnu who inhabited in the Eastern Eurasian steppe from the third century BCE to the second century CE, their ethnonym did not appear in Chinese sources until about 318 BCE in the *Records of the Grand Historian* written by Sima Qian. The Xiongnu were a continual threat to early Imperial China, particularly the Qin (221-206 BCE) and Han dynasties (202 BCE-220 CE), and they had relentless conflicts with their sedentary neighbour. Since then, plenty of subsequent Chinese historical accounts devoted parts onto the Xiongnu society and people. When it comes to the Huns, no nomadic people have been as notorious as them, whose name has become synonymous with that of fierce, invincible soldiers. Their most celebrated ruler, Attila, “the scourge of God,” has become the prototype of the legendary savage and merciless leader of barbarians.<sup>35</sup> The Huns did not dramatically enter into the scene of East European history until the second half of the fourth century. Because of that, their origin has greatly intrigued later writers. Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (c.330-400 CE), one of the earliest and most reliable sources, gave a cautious answer: “The nation of the Huns, scarcely known to ancient documents, dwelt beyond the Maeotic marshes (i.e. the Azov Sea) beside the frozen Ocean, and

<sup>34</sup> Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia: A Syllabus* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1969), 51.

<sup>35</sup> Sinor, *Inner Asia*, 133.

surpassed every extreme in ferocity.”<sup>36</sup> By indicating the Huns originated from “frozen Ocean,” the historian placed the newcomers “beyond the pale of the civilized world,” in fact into the “outer darkness,” as “‘cold’ and ‘dark’ go together in mythical geography.”<sup>37</sup>

## 2.1 Chinese Sources on Xiongnu

The Xiongnu were to play in the East a role similar to that of the Scythians in the West. They came to be considered the pastoral nomads *par excellence*, the most dangerous enemies of early Imperial China, and accordingly they had become a significant subject in Chinese historiography since the beginning of the Imperial period (221 BCE-1911CE).<sup>38</sup> According to Denis Sinor, the great value of Chinese sources lies firstly in their unparalleled abundance and secondly in their continuity, the longest of any historical tradition, which, however, can be the weakness of Chinese historical writings: biased accounts towards nomadic peoples barely changed over two thousand years.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese accounts are the most important written sources we have regarding the Xiongnu. Among them, three Chinese records of greater significance are introduced in the following sections.

### 2.1.1 Sima Qian

The first and foremost account concerning Xiongnu is the *Shiji*, also *the Records of the Grand Historian of China*.<sup>40</sup> The author Sima Qian (c. 145—c. 86 BCE) lived when Xiongnu

<sup>36</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)* (Selected and translated by Walter Hamilton with an Introduction and Notes by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Penguin Classics, 1986), Book 31, 411.

<sup>37</sup> Sinor, *Inner Asia*, 134.

<sup>38</sup> Sinor, *Inner Asia*, 85.

<sup>39</sup> Sinor, *Inner Asia*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Shiji* in Chinese version, <http://chinesenotes.com/shiji.html> (accessed on 12 March 2020); in English, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, trans. Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, 1961.

had established a powerful state since 209 BCE, one that posed the biggest threat from the north to the Han dynasty. He had access to the essential sources from generals, soldiers, and envoys sent to the front lines as Emperor Wu (141-87 BCE) launched a series of military campaigns against the Xiongnu. As far as informants were concerned, the personal experiences of the author's contemporary Chinese diplomat Zhang Qian, who had lived for approximately 10 years in captivity among the Xiongnu, significantly contributed to his accounts on the nomads in the *Shiji*.<sup>41</sup> Zhang Qian's first-hand observations of Xiongnu customs are evident in the Chapter 110 of *Shiji*, which is the single largest and most important source on the Xiongnu now available.<sup>42</sup> According to various informants, Sima Qian kept account of the ferocious enemy, Xiongnu, in a meticulous way and tried to capture and convey their origins, customs, military organization, and barbaric nature. His careful and meticulous historical scholarship has made this account in his work invaluable for Xiongnu studies. He recorded that

The ancestor of the Xiongnu was a descendant of the rulers of the Xia dynasty by the name of Chun-wei. As early as the time of Emperors (Kings) Yao and Shun and before, we hear of these people, known as Mountain Barbarians [Shan-rong], Xian-yun, or Hun-zhou, living in the region of the northern barbarians and wandering from place to place pasturing the animals. The animals they raise consist mainly of horses, cows, and sheep, but include such rare beasts as camels, asses, mules, and the wild horses known as tao-tu and tuo-xi. They move about in search of water and pasture and have no walled cities or fixed dwellings, nor do they engage in any kind of agriculture. Their lands, however, are divided into regions under control of various leaders. They have no writing, and even promises and agreements are only verbal. The little boys start out by learning to ride sheep and shoot birds and rats with a bow and arrow, and when they get a little older they shoot foxes and hares, which are used for food. Thus all the young men are able to use a bow and act as armed cavalry in time of war. It is their custom to herd their flocks in times of peace and make their living by hunting, but in periods of crisis they take up

<sup>41</sup> David B. Honey, "The Han-shu, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the Shih-chi: The case of the 'Hsiung-nu lieh-chuan' (*Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol.21, 1999: 67-97)," 67-8.

<sup>42</sup> David C. Wright (ed.), *Peoples of the Steppe: Historical Sources on the Pastoral Nomads of Eurasia* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 49.



arms and go off on plundering and marauding expeditions. This seems to be their inborn nature. For long-range weapons they use bows and arrows, and swords and spears at close range. If the battle is going well for them they will advance, but if not, they will retreat, for they do not consider it a disgrace to run away. Their only concern is self-advantage, and they know nothing of propriety or righteousness.

From the chiefs of the bride on down, everyone eats the meat of the domestic animals and wear clothes of hide or wraps made of felt or fur. They young men eat the richest and best food, while the old get what is left over, since the tribe honors those who are young and strong and despises the weak and aged. On the death of his father, a son will marry his stepmother, and when brothers die, the remaining brothers will take the widows for their own wives. They have no polite names but only personal names, and they observe no taboos in the use of personal names.

.....The Xiongnu make it clear that warfare is their business. And since the old and the weak are not capable of fighting, the best food and drink are naturally allotted to the young men in the prime of life.<sup>43</sup>

From Sima Qian we learn that the Xiongnu were suspected to be the descendants of the royalty of the Xia dynasty, but the existence of this dynasty itself remains a debatable archaeological problem, not to mention the origins of Xiongnu. These people had their own distinctively customs that differed from those of their agricultural neighbours: they honoured the young and strong because they were very warlike, they pastured animals and so did not have fixed settlements, and they were so barbaric that they did not have writings. The accounts by Sima Qian can be biased towards their barbaric nature, and those of the times predating him relied on oral tradition, which may not contain any historic information but simply legends. For the rest, however, I tend to believe, are trustworthy because the great historian Sima Qian had relatively reliable informants who either personally interacted or had been in combat with the Xiongnu.

<sup>43</sup> *Shiji*, vol. 110.

### 2.1.2 Ban Gu and Fan Ye

While the accounts in the *Shiji* written between 110 and 94 BCE are invaluable, they did not include the events after 94 BCE, when the monumental text was finished. Other Chinese documents such as the *Hanshu* (*The Book of the Former Han*) and *Hou Hanshu* (*The Book of the Later Han*) provide indispensable materials on the Xiongnu in later centuries. The *Hanshu* was composed by Ban Gu (32-92 CE), who continued his father's work and modeled it on the *Shiji*, but only covered a single dynasty, the Former Han, from the first emperor in 206 BCE until the fall of Wang Mang in 23 CE. It is the best source for Xiongnu studies for the period from 87 BCE to 23 CE. Chapter 94 is the principal biography concerning the Xiongnu, and fortunately we have translations of it.<sup>44</sup> It includes two parts, of which the preceding part documents the origin of the Xiongnu from the Xia dynasty till 58 BCE when Hu Hanye *chanyu* killed another Xiongnu king, Woyan Qudi, during the Xiongnu Civil War (60-53 BCE), and it was based chiefly on Chapter 110 of *Shiji*; the second part records more details about the Xiongnu civil war and the tributary relations with the Han dynasty under the reign of the Xiongnu king Hu Hanye (r. c. 59-31 BCE) and his successors.<sup>45</sup>

While the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* only covered the Xiongnu in the former Han, the *Hou Hanshu* dealt with them in the later Han period from 6 to 189 CE, which was compiled by Fan Ye (398-445 CE) and others who lived in two centuries later. Accordingly, its sources may not

<sup>44</sup> A. Wylie and Tseen Hanshoo, "History of the Heung-Noo in their relations with China," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3, 1874: 401-452; vol. 5, 1876: 41-80.

<sup>45</sup> With respect to the parallel accounts of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, sinologist David B. Honey has conducted comparative analysis between *Shiji* and *Hanshu* in the case of "Xiongnu liezhuan" in his article "The Han-shu, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the Shih-chi: The case of the 'Hsiung-nu lieh-chuan'." He concluded that "the *Hanshu* account of the Xiongnu, along with most of the *Hanshu*, seems to preserve a more abbreviated version compared to the more expansive *Shiji* text."<sup>(86)</sup> He also compared the textual variants in the two parallel accounts of Sima Qian's Xiongnu traditions and argued that "the physical edition/record included in the *Hanshu* preserves an older, or at least better, version, of Sima Qian's historical text/message."<sup>(92)</sup>

be as trustworthy as the authors who lived in the same ages as the history they documented. Nonetheless, it is a critical supplement to the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* in Xiongnu studies and especially essential regarding where the Northern Xiongnu might have gone. Chapter 89 is a treatise mostly on the Southern Xiongnu but briefly mentions that the Northern Xiongnu fled to parts unknown after their disastrous defeat by the Southern Xiongnu in 85 CE, by the Xianbei in 87 CE, and by the joint force of Xianbei, Southern Xiongnu, and Han troops in 91 CE.

In 88 CE, Geng Bing was made ‘The General Who Campaigns West [Zheng Xi Jiang Jun]’ and marched against the Northern Xiongnu with the famous cavalry general Dou Xian and 30,000 Southern Xiongnu cavalymen. The Northern Xiongnu were greatly defeated, the Northern chanyu fled, and over 200,000 men were either killed or taken prisoner. Other armies caught up with the Northern chanyu and surrounded him by night. The Chanyu startled, barely managed to mount a horse and escape with his life. His jade seal and members of his family were captured. Eight thousand head were cut off, and several thousand captives were taken. In 91 CE, the fugitive shanyu of the Northern Xiongnu was once again tracked down and suffered defeat, but once again he managed to ‘flee to parts unknown.’ His younger brother was installed as the new chanyu. A joint force of Xianbei, Southern Xiongnu, and Han troops attacked the Northern Xiongnu, and a majority of these Northern Xiongnu, totaling over 100,000 tents, abandoned the Northern chanyu and declared themselves Xianbei.<sup>46</sup>

Thereafter, the power of the Northern Xiongnu was crushed, but they still appear occasionally in Han diplomatic records as late as 155 CE. Notwithstanding, they as a power were finished, Central Asianist Thomas J. Barfield concluded.<sup>47</sup> Other chapters in the aforementioned documents have scattered materials, as well as in the later documents as *Weishu*, which refers to other states the Northern Xiongnu may have established.

A variety of written documents are preliminary sources for Xiongnu studies, but these Standard Histories, the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* for Former Han, and the *Hou Hanshu* for Later Han,

<sup>46</sup> There is no English translation for the *Hou Hanshu*, but there is an extract from historian David Curtis Wright’s translation in his article “The Hsiung-nu—Hun Equation Revisited,” 83.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 80.

have certain weaknesses. For instance, the treatments of foreign relations in these works are “presented through Chinese eyes, and coloured by the attitudes, prejudices, and records of Chinese officials. The peoples with whom the imperial officials were in contact at this time left no written records that would give their account of these relations and their view of their Chinese neighbours.”<sup>48</sup> This requires a careful and critical treatment when handling the written sources.

## 2.2 European Sources on Huns

“All we know about the Huns we know from their enemies.”<sup>49</sup> They arrived in Eastern Europe around 375 CE and then moved further westward, defeating the mighty Alans and Goths in the process. By 400 CE they had reached the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire, and by 432 they were intimidating the Romans into paying them tribute. In 451 they invaded the Western Roman province of Gaul, and they invaded Italy the following year. Their looks, their disastrous invasion, and their mysterious origins all caught the western imagination. They greatly challenged the equilibrium of the Western World and contributed to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire (c. 395-480 CE).<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately however, the Huns are “mentioned only cursorily in ancient writers.”<sup>51</sup> The earliest extant record that mentions the name Hun is in a Sogdian letter written in Sogdian shortly after 311 CE when a Sogdian merchant in Suzhou informed his noble lord living in Samarkand of the destruction of the Chinese capital Luoyang

<sup>48</sup> Michael Loewe, “Introduction: The Written Sources and Their Problems (in *The Cambridge History of China: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C. – A.D. 220*, Vol. I, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986),” 5.

<sup>49</sup> Otto Maenchen-Helfen, “The Legend of the Origin of the Huns (*Byzantion* 17, 1944: 244-51),” 244.

<sup>50</sup> Sinor, “The Hun period,” 177.

<sup>51</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 411.

by the Huns [Southern Xiongnu] (spelt as *xwn*).<sup>52</sup> Other key accounts kept by the Roman, Greek, and Gothic historians are examined as follows.

### 2.2.1 Ammianus Marcellinus

The most significant primary source regarding Hunnic studies is the *Book 31* of *The Later Roman Empire* (354-378 CE) written by Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus of Antioch (c. 330-400 CE). He hated all barbarians: he referred to Gallic soldiers who fought so gallantly against the Persians at Amida as *dentatae bestiae* [toothed beasts], and he concluded his work with an encomium for Julius who had all Goths in his territory massacred on learning of the Gothic victory at Adrianople.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the Huns were the worst and were called “the wild race” who were accustomed to “moving without encumbrances and consumed by a savage passion to pillage the property of others.”<sup>54</sup> Marcellinus’s description of them exhibits hatred and fear:

The people of the Huns, who are mentioned only cursorily in ancient writers and who dwell beyond the sea of Azov (Palus Maeotis) near the frozen ocean, are quite abnormally savage. From the moment of birth they make deep gashes in their children's cheeks, so that when in due course hair appears its growth is checked by the wrinkled scars; as they grow older this gives them the unlovely appearance of beardless eunuchs. They have squat bodies, strong limbs, and thick necks, and are so prodigiously ugly and bent that they might be two-legged animals, or the figures crudely carved from stumps which are seen on the parapets of bridges. Still, their shape, however disagreeable, is human; but their way of life is so rough that they have no use for fire or seasoned food, but live on the roots of wild plants and the half-raw flesh of any sort of animal, which they warm a little by placing it between their thighs and the backs of their horses. . . . . None of them ploughs or ever touches a plough-handle. They have no fixed abode, no home or law or settled manner of life, but wander like refugees with the wagons in which they live. In these their wives weave their filthy clothing, mate with their husbands, give birth to their children, and rear them to the age of puberty. No one if asked can tell where

<sup>52</sup> Sinor, “The Hun period,” 179. This letter is considered one of the most important pieces of evidence for the Xiongnu-Hun equation, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 412.

he comes from, having been conceived in one place, born somewhere else, and reared even further off. You cannot make a truce with them, because they are quite unreliable and easily swayed by any breath of rumor which promises advantage; like unreasoning beasts they are entirely at the mercy of the maddest impulses. They are totally ignorant of the distinction between right and wrong, their speech is shifty and obscure, and they are under no restraint from religion or superstition. Their greed for gold is prodigious, and they are so fickle and prone to anger that often in a single day they will quarrel with their allies without any provocation, and then make it up again without anyone attempting to reconcile them.<sup>55</sup>

Modern historian E. A. Thompson, however, believed almost every word of it.<sup>56</sup> He had no hesitation in supposing that Marcellinus's description of the Huns is "something more than a re-hash of an earlier account."<sup>57</sup> He reasoned that the chapter on the Huns is not error-free, such as the story of Huns eating raw meat that they warmed a little by carrying it between their saddles and their horses' back, a claim that has now been proven false by archaeological evidence.<sup>58</sup> However, mistakes of this sort, he argued, are due to the bias of Marcellinus's informants, and thereby apart from the minor inaccuracies, the great Roman historian's portrait of the Huns is "highly vivid and consistent."<sup>59</sup> Maenchen-Helfen believed that in addition to the misinterpretations of the informants, Marcellinus's account is also distorted by hatred and fear.<sup>60</sup> For instance, in Marcellinus's eyes, Huns were so primitive that "their way of life was so rough that they had no use for fire or seasoned food, but lived on the roots of wild plants and the half-raw flesh of any sort of animal." They had no military organizations and "were not subject to the authority of any king."<sup>61</sup> Maenchen-Helfen observed trenchantly that if the Huns had been unable to use fire, forge their swords, and cast their arrowheads, they could never have crossed

<sup>55</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 411-2

<sup>56</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> E.A. Thompson, *The Huns* (revised and with an afterword by Peter Heather, Blackwell, 1996), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 411-2.

the Don; if they had no military organization, they would not have been able to conquer the Alans and pose major threats to the Roman Empire.<sup>62</sup> He also accused Marcellinus of using too many phrases from earlier authors in portraying the Huns, for example by imitating the historian Trogus Pompeius's record on the Scythians, an earlier northern barbarian people.<sup>63</sup> Overall, he commented that Marcellinus's account contains a wealth of reliable material on, for example, how the Huns looked and how they dressed, as well as their horses, weapons, tactics, and wagons.<sup>64</sup> But despite all the weaknesses in Marcellinus's writings, his account of the Huns is regarded as "the single most extensive contemporary description of these ferocious nomadic warriors by any historian."<sup>65</sup>

### 2.2.2 Priscus

The Greek historian Priscus of Panium (c.410-472 CE), who had personally visited the Huns, kept substantial first-hand sources on the Huns. Being an intellectual diplomat, Priscus produced his work for the educated by using the conventional prose style and avoiding expressions common to the spoken language.<sup>66</sup> He accompanied his friend Maximinus, the head of a Byzantine embassy representing Emperor Theodosius the Younger (r. 408-450 CE), on a diplomatic mission to Scythia or Hunnic land in the year 448 CE and wrote a full account of the experience. Beyond his first-hand observations, Priscus also gathered information on the Huns

<sup>62</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, *Peoples of the Steppe*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 12-3.

from interviews with participants in the events he described.<sup>67</sup> The following is an extract from his own trip to Attila's court,

Having passed these rough places we arrived at a plain which was also well wooded. At the river we were received by barbarian ferrymen, who rowed us across the river in boats made by themselves out of single trees hewn and hollowed. These preparations had not been made for our sake, but to convey across a company of Huns; for Attila pretended that he wished to hunt in Roman territory, but his intent was really hostile, because all the deserters had not been given up to him. Having crossed the Danube, and proceeded with the barbarians about seventy stadia, we were compelled to wait in a certain plain, that Edecon and his party might go on in front and inform Attila of our arrival. As we were dining in the evening we heard the sound of horses approaching, and two Scythians arrived with directions that we were to set out to Attila. We asked them first to partake of our meal, and they dismounted and made good cheer. On the next day, under their guidance, we arrived at the tents of Attila, which were numerous, about three o'clock, and when we wished to pitch our tent on a hill the barbarians who met us prevented us, because the tent of Attila was on low ground, so we halted where the Scythians desired.<sup>68</sup>

One notable thing in Priscus' work is his use of the two terms "Scythian" and "Huns," seemingly without distinction. But as historian J. B. Bury perceived, there is a certain difference between the two words: Scythian is not merely an ancient term applied to a new people, in the same way as the Goths and the Slavs were often called *Getae* by pedantic historians; Scythian was a generic term for all nomadic nations, as a great many different nomadic groups were united under the sovereignty of Attila.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the Huns, Attila's own nation, were Scythians, but "all Scythians were not Huns."<sup>70</sup> Thompson argued that at the time of Priscus's accounts, the name "Huns" had not yet been widely used as a generic term by use among classical historians; it was still a new and barbarous name that nobody would introduce into his

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire: From Arcadius to Irene* (395 A.D. to 800 A.D), vol. I (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert Publisher, 1966, originally in 1889), 214.

<sup>69</sup> Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 223.

<sup>70</sup> Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 223.



work if he could avoid it.<sup>71</sup> Later on, only when the works of Priscus and others had become classics in their own right, did the word “Huns” become a term “sanctified” by prolonged usage and familiar to readers. Thus it is safe to assume that when Priscus says “Huns,” he means it.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.2.3 Jordanes

Another relevant text is *The Origin and Deeds of the Getae*, commonly called *Getica*, written by Gothic historian Jordanes (487-583 CE), who relied largely on the lost multi-volume *Gothic History* by Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus (c.485-585 CE). As an abridgment of the history of Cassiodorus, *Getica* lacks originality, but it is as important as other earlier historians whose work has survived because it unfolds some of the greatest and most terrible figures in history: Attila the Hun, “The scourge of God.”<sup>73</sup> Cassiodorus-Jordanes described the death of Attila (in 453 CE) and his funeral as follows:

Shortly before he [The King Attila] died, as the historian Priscus relates, he took in marriage a very beautiful girl names Ildico, after countless other wives, as was the custom of his race. He had given himself up to excessive joy at his wedding, and he lay on his back, heavy with wine and sleep, a rush of superfluous blood, which would ordinarily have flowed from his nose, streamed in deadly course down his throat and killed him, since it was hindered in the usual passages. Thus did drunkenness put a disgraceful end to a king renowned in war. On the following day, when a great part of the morning was spent, the royal attendants suspected some ill and, after a great uproar, broke in the doors. There they found the death of Attila accomplished by an effusion of blood, without any wound, and the girl with downcast face weeping beneath her veil. Then, as is the custom of that race, they plucked out the hair of their heads and made their faces hideous with deep wounds, that the renowned warrior might be mourned, not by effeminate wailings and tears, but by the blood of men. Moreover a wondrous thing took place in connection with Attila’s death. For in a dream some god stood at the side of Marcian, Emperor of the East, while he was disquieted about his fierce foe, and showed him the bow of Attila broken in that same night, as if to intimate that the race of Huns owed much to that weapon. This account the historian Priscus says he accepts upon

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 14-15.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *The Huns*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Cassiodorus-Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Getae* (trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, *The Gothic history of Jordanes*, Ph.D., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), I.

truthful evidence. For so terrible was Attila thought to be to great empires that the Gods announced his death to rulers as a special boon.

We shall not omit to say a few words about the many ways in which his shade was honored by his race. His body was placed in the midst of a plain and lay in state in a silken tent as a sight for men's admiration. The best horsemen of the entire tribe of the Huns rode around in circles, after the manner of circus games, in the place to which he had been brought and told of his deeds in a funeral dirge in the following manner: "The chief of the Huns, King Attila, born of his sire Mundiuch, lord of bravest tribes, sole possessor of the Scythian and German realms—powers unknown before—captured cities and terrified both empires of the Roman world and, appeased by their prayers, took annual tribute to save the rest from plunder. And when he had accomplished all this by the favor of fortune, he fell not by wound of the foe, nor by treachery of friends, but in the midst of his nation at peace, happy in his joy and without sense of pain. Who can rate this as death, when none believes it calls for vengeance?"<sup>74</sup>

As contrasted with Marcellinus's Hunnophobia, the Huns in Cassiodorus-Jordanes's writing had "a wicked greatness."<sup>75</sup> They were "fiercer than ferocity itself," greedy and brutal, but they were courageous people.<sup>76</sup> Theodor Mommsen, a Classical scholar and also the authoritative translator of *Getica*, remarked that in the *Getica* all passages deriving from Priscus dealt with Attila and that conversely, there was no account of Attila that did not come from Priscus; while as contrasted with the smoothness and charm of passages in Priscus, the accounts in Jordanes appeared clumsy and awkward in style.<sup>77</sup> Jordanes was barely literate, so we cannot even be certain that the quotations from Priscus were always exact. But as the few extant texts a wealth of the information on the Huns is based on, they have to be taken as they are.<sup>78</sup>

Other texts related to the Huns, such as *History of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi* written by bishop of Seville, Isidore (Isidorus Hispalensis, c. 560-636 CE), focus on the history of the three peoples (Goths, Vandals, and Suevi) rather than the Huns. This work briefly mentions the

<sup>74</sup> *Getica*, 255-257 (Mierow, *The Gothic history of Jordanes*, 123-4).

<sup>75</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Mierow, *The Gothic history of Jordanes*, 85.

<sup>77</sup> Theodor Mommsen, *Iordanis, Romana et Getica* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi v.I, Berlin 1882), 34-7; Mierow, *The Gothic history of Jordanes*, 31-2.

<sup>78</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 17.

raids and campaigns of the Huns against them, primarily to the Goths, and has nothing to do with the identity of the Huns as a people, and thereby it is only marginally relevant to the topic at hand.

## 2.3 Hirth's Analysis and Critics

Ever since eighteenth-century French Sinologist Joseph de Guignes first traced the origins of the European Huns back to the Northern Xiongnu in Eastern Eurasia, his hypothesis has frequently been criticized for not being based on a solid understanding of reliable primary sources. These criticisms were themselves not called into question until the nineteenth century when Sinologist Friedrich Hirth found evidence in Chinese historical materials (primarily the *Weishu*) that seemed to confirm De Guignes's hypothesis. Hirth's analysis of the *Weishu* is now the cornerstone of the case for affirming De Guignes's original hypothesis.

### 2.3.1 Hirth's Analysis

Hirth's research had a wide range. When it came to the equation of Xiongnu and Huns, his arguments were revealed mainly in three articles: "Ueber Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu" (1899), "Hunnenforschungen" (1901), and "Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu" (1909).<sup>79</sup> Based on the accounts in the *Weishu* and other Chinese historical records, he eventually marshaled a strong case that the Xiongnu in East Asian records were the same people as the Huns in the European ones. Prior to his argumentation on the topic, he pointed out the fundamental problem in European studies on the Xiongnu-Hun equation is that European scholars have not been familiar

<sup>79</sup> Hirth, "Ueber Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu," 1899: 245-78; "Hunnenforschungen," 1901: 81-91; "Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu," 1909: 32-45.

with Chinese records ever since de Guignes first proposed the connection between the two peoples.<sup>80</sup> Since Hirth was well acquainted with Chinese language and classics, he was able to refer to as many Chinese records as he cared to.

His primary evidence is based on the *Weishu*, a classic Chinese historical work compiled by Wei Shou from 551 to 554, recording the history of Northern Wei and Eastern Wei dynasties from 386 to 550 CE. It also has a brief history of neighbouring countries during the same period in volume 102: The Biography of Western Regions. It is worth noting that the *Weishu* was the first official history devoted to the dynasty founded by a non-Han ethnic group and that in many ways the text carried forward Sima Qian's idea of nationality as embodied in his monumental *Shiji*.<sup>81</sup> In an era of various ethnic groups blending together, although the compiler himself was a non-ethnic Han historian, Wei Shou's narrative as a whole was positive and innovative records regarding the coexistence of differing ideas of nationality.<sup>82</sup> To be more specific, only one paragraph in the *Weishu* is fully relevant and the central component in Hirth's thesis:

The country of Su-te lies in the west of the Cong-ling. It is the ancient Yan-cai and is also called Wen-na-sha. It lies on a big sea in the northwestern Kang-ju [Sogdiana] and is 16 000 li distant from Dai. Since the time when the Xiong-nu killed their king and took possession of their country up to their king Hu-ni three generations have elapsed. The merchants of this country often went to the country of Liang for trade, and at the capture of Gu-zang they were all made prisoners. In the beginning of the reign of Kao-zong [452-466 CE] the king of Su-te sent ambassadors to ask for their ransom, which was granted by cabinet order. From this time onward they sent no more tribute missions to our court.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Hirth, “Über Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu,” 246.

<sup>81</sup> Huaiqi Wu, *An Historical Sketch of Chinese Historiography* (trans. Chi Zhen, Berlin: Springer, 2018), 231.

<sup>82</sup> Huaiqi Wu, *An Historical Sketch of Chinese Historiography*, 231.

<sup>83</sup> Hirth, “Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu,” 43-4. Original in Chinese (*Weishu*, vol. 102: Western regions. Please see <http://chinesenotes.com/weishu/weishu108.html>): “粟特國，在葱嶺之西，古之奄蔡，一名溫那沙。居於大澤，在康居西北，去代一萬六千里。先是，匈奴殺其王而有其國，至王忽倪已三世矣。其國商人先多詣涼土販貨，及克姑臧，悉見虜。高宗初，粟特王遣使請贖之，詔聽焉，自後無使朝獻。” In German (Hirth, “Über Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu,” 248-9): “Das Land Su-te liegt im Western des Cong-ling. Es ist das alte Yan-cai und wird auch Wen-na-sha genannt. Es liegt an einem grossen See im Nordwesten von kang-ju [Sogdiana] und ist von Tai [der im Norden der provinz Shan-xi gelegenen Hauptstadt der Toba-Dynastie Wei] 16 000 Li entfernt. Seit der Zeit, da die Hiung-nu, indem sie seinen König tödteten, in den Besitz dieses Landes kamen, bis zum König Hut-ngai-ssī [alte Aussprache für Hu-ni-

Hirth's analysis has two steps. First, he identified Su-te with Alans. The first two sentences in the paragraph inform readers that Su-te is the ancient Yan-cai. According to the *Hou Hanshu*, Yan-cai (An-ts'ai in Hirth's writings) was renamed as A-lan-liao in Later Han China, and therefore Su-te is the previous A-lan-liao, or Alanen [Alans].<sup>84</sup> Secondly, he identified Hu-ni with Hut-ngai-ssī [Ernak].<sup>85</sup> Ernak (r. c. 454-459 CE) was the third son of Attila and the last known ruler of the Huns. Because the above paragraph records that the Xiongnu killed the Su-te (or Alans) king, conquered their territory and established a new country, which had been three generations up until the king Hu-ni, he argued that only if Hu-ni is Ernak would Alans being conquered by Xiongnu three generations earlier make sense. He assumed that one generation is around 25 years and three generations around 75 years, which is precisely when the Xiongnu attacked the Alans, circa 370 CE; later on, they entered into Europe and European historians' records.<sup>86</sup> He ultimately concluded that

If once we are convinced that An-ts'ai [Yan-cai], A-lan, and Suk-Tak [Su-te] must be the Alans of western sources, we are justified in drawing the following logical conclusions: 1. Of the Alans we know from European sources that, just about three generations before the embassy sent to China by the state of Suk-tak (former Alans) in 457 A.D., they were conquered by the Huns. 2. Of the Suk-tak nation we learn in the *Weishu* that their ancestors, the An-ts'ai (Arosi, Alans), three generations before their embassy of 457 A.D., were conquered by the Hiung-nu. 3. Since the same nation cannot

ssi] sind drei Generationen verflossen. Die Kaufleute dieses Landes waren früher in grosser Zahl nach dem Lande Liang gekommen, um dort Handel zu treiben, bis sie bei der Eroberung von Gu-zang sämtlich in Gefangenschaft geriethen. Im Anfang der Regierung des Kaisers Gao-Zong [452-466] schickte der König von Su-te Gesandte mit der Bitte um Auslösung der Gefangenen, die durch Kabinettsbefehl genehmigt wurde. Von da ab hat das Land keine weiteren Tributgesandtschaften zu Hofe geschickt."

<sup>84</sup> Hirth, "Über Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu," 251. French Sinologist E. Chavannes proved beyond a doubt that by the name of A-lan-liao, two different countries are covered: one being called the Alan, the other Liao. Please see E. Chavannes, "Les Pays D'occident D'après Le Wei Lio: Avant-propos (*Tong Bao*, vol. 6, no. 5, 1905: 519-71)," 559, note 1; "Les Pays D'Occident D'Après Le 'Heou Han Chou': Avant-propos (*Tong Bao*, vol. 8, no. 2 1907: 149-234)," 195, note 2.

<sup>85</sup> The name is recorded in possibly three different variants, Ernak(h) by Priscus, Hernac by Jordanes in *Getica*, and Irnik in *Nominalia* of the Bulgarian khans.

<sup>86</sup> Hirth, "Über Wolga-Hunnen und Hiung-nu," 253-8.

at the same time be conquered by two different nations, the result is that the Huns and the Hiung-nu are identical.<sup>87</sup>

His analysis eventually became so widespread that by the middle of the twentieth century, most historians tended to accept the Xiongnu-Hun equation.

### 2.3.2 Hirth's critics

At the end of his reply to Mr. Kingsmill, Hirth used "Q.E.D." to demonstrate that the argument in favour of proof of the Xiongnu-Hun identity is now complete and that no further arguments should be made towards this centuries-old problem.<sup>88</sup> However, not everyone supported Hirth in this. Scholars in the first half of the twentieth century such as Shiratori Kurakichi (1928), Otto Maenchen-Helfen (1944), and K. Enoki (1955) argued that the *Weishu* accounts were not accurate enough to establish the identity of Su-te with Yan-cai.<sup>89</sup> For example, Shiratori argued that Su-(y)i, and not Yan-cai, was an alternate name for Su-te.<sup>90</sup> There is a state called Li-(y)i (栗弋) in the *Hou Hanshu*: "The country of Li-i subordinates to the Kang-ju. It produces excellent horses, cattle, sheep, and grapes. Its water is beautiful and therefore its wine is particularly famous."<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, in later texts such as *Jinshu*, another official Chinese historical text compiled in 648 CE, which covers the history of Jin dynasty (265-420 CE), there is another name, Su-i (粟弋), and no accounts regarding Li-i, which is remarkable, given how closely two names in their original Chinese characters 栗弋 and 粟弋 resemble each other while

<sup>87</sup> Hirth, "Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu," 45.

<sup>88</sup> Hirth, "Mr. Kingsmill and the Hiung-nu," 45.

<sup>89</sup> Shiratori Kurakichi, "A Study of Su-t'e," in *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 2, 1928: 81-145; Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 222-43; K. Enoki, "Sogdiana and the Hsiung-nu," *Central Asiatic Journal* 1, 1955: 43-62.

<sup>90</sup> Shiratori, "A Study of Su-t'e," 94-100.

<sup>91</sup> *Hou Hanshu*, vol. 88.

both countries agree in the contiguity with Kang-ju. Shiratori argued that the two names are probably identical, with one form likely being corrupted from the other.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, *Tongdian*, an encyclopedia dating to the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), records that communication with Su-i starting from the Hou Wei [Later Wei] dynasty (i.e. Northern Wei dynasty, 386-534 CE) and that Su-te is the alternate name for Su-i, which is different with what Hirth argued, namely that Su-te is the former Yan-cai.<sup>93</sup> Based on the accounts in *Tongdian*, Shiratori held that Su-te and Su-i refer to the very same state:

The name Su-te, whose old pronunciation is inferred with reason to have been Suk-dök or suk-dêk, is very likely to have corresponded with *Sughdak*. As for its relation with Suk-yok (Su-i 粟弋), we can agree with Du You [the author of *Tongdian*] in regarding the one as alternative with the other. Although the old pronunciation of 粟弋 is generally assumed to have Suk-yok, yet we can infer from the Annamese sound of the character 弋, dok, that the name may easily have read Suk-dok as well.<sup>94</sup>

If Su-i is Su-te, what was the country of Yan-cai? Shiratori continued arguing that Yan-cai is exactly the nomadic tribe Alans in Western records, according to Chinese sources *Hou Hanshu* and *Weizhi*.<sup>95</sup> However, *Weishu* and *Zhoushu* document that Su-te is the previous Yancai, Shiratori concluded, which erroneously represent Su-te as identical with Yan-cai by comparing different accounts for these two states.<sup>96</sup> With a close examination of the accounts of these states in massive Chinese sources, Shiratori did not agree with Hirth's identification between Su-te and Alans. Another notable criticism is made by Austrian historian Otto Maenchen-Helfen, who criticized "a critical analysis of the Chinese sources does not warrant the

<sup>92</sup> Shiratori, "A Study of Su-t'e," 97.

<sup>93</sup> "Bianfang jiu 邊防九" in *Tongdian*.

<sup>94</sup> Shiratori, "A Study of Su-t'e," 98.

<sup>95</sup> Shiratori, "A Study of Su-t'e," 99.

<sup>96</sup> Shiratori, "A Study of Su-t'e," 99-100.

conclusions drawn from them by Hirth and his followers.”<sup>97</sup> Maenchen-Helfen compared three detailed accounts concerning the state of Yan-cai in the *Weishu* (The history of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei from 386 to 550 CE), *Beishi* (The history of the Northern Wei, Western Wei, Eastern Wei, Northern Zhou, Northern Qi, and Sui dynasty from 386 to 618 CE), and *Zhoushu* (The history of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou from 535 to 581 CE), and drew his conclusion: the current chapter 102 of the *Weishu* did not come from the original text which had been lost before the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but was from the *Beishi* abridged and adapted by Song dynasty editors. *Beishi* (completed between 643 and 659 CE) itself was a composite document with the compiler (Li Yanshou) indiscriminately blending old and new sources, and it was published a decade later than the *Zhoushu*. While the *Zhoushu* says Su-te was presumably (*gai* 蓋) the ancient Yan-cai, later the *Beishi* states the identity of Su-te with Yan-cai as a fact, where there is a considerable difference.<sup>98</sup> Beyond that, there is more direct evidence in *Shisan zhou zhi* (written c. 430 CE), Maenchen-Helfen mentioned in his article, and this tells us that “Yan-cai and Su-te had each of their own rulers.”<sup>99</sup> All of the evidence that Shiratori and Maenchen-Helfen have explored in Chinese sources are collectively strong enough to refute Hirth’s identification of Su-te with Yan-cai (Alans).<sup>100</sup> As Enoki claimed that he does not deny the possibility of identifying the Huns with the Xiongnu, but the statement of the *Weishu* cannot be looked upon as an uncontested proof of establishing the identity of the Huns and the Xiongnu.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 228.

<sup>98</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 225-31.

<sup>99</sup> *Shisan zhou zhi* (*Annals of the Thirteen Prefectures*) is a geographical treatise written by the Northern Wei period (386-534 CE) scholar Kan Yin. It records that “Yan-cai and Su-te had each of their own rulers, but Wei Shou, the author of *Weishu* mistreated them as one state, which is incorrect (The original text in Chinese: 奄蔡粟特各有長, 而魏收以為一國, 謬也).” Also see Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 229.

<sup>100</sup> As for the identity of Su-te, Shiratori and Maenchen-Helfen both agreed that Su-te is Sogdiana based on the phonetic resemblance of two names, but when it comes to who was the conqueror of this people, the former insisted it was the Xiongnu while the latter tended to believe it was probably Hephthalites.

<sup>101</sup> Enoki, “Sogdiana and the Hsiung-nu,” 45.



In this case, the cornerstone of Hirth's analysis crumbles and his entire thesis cannot remain convincing.

To conclude, I think Hirth's analysis is problematic for three reasons. First, Hirth chose to believe every word of certain Chinese sources, even when there are self-contradictory accounts in them. For example, the name of Su-te did not appear in Chinese records until the post-Han period. There are other sources such as the aforementioned *Zhoushu* (completed in 636 CE) that were compiled later than *Weishu* (completed in 554 CE) but extant, which demonstrates there could be some possible connection between Su-te and Yan-cai, but not as an absolute fact, and this tended to be misunderstood by later authors.<sup>102</sup> I am surprised that Hirth referred to *Hou Hanshu*, *Weishu*, *Tongdian*, and so forth but not to *Zhoushu*, which holds a different opinion with other texts; thus one is left to wonder whether Hirth selectively used only information that substantiated his arguments. Plus, it is fairly common in Chinese literature that original texts were lost and that authors in later dynasties tended to compile indiscriminately all they can find into the texts, thus forming the current versions of the texts we have today. Chances are high that compiled texts contain erroneous and even self-contradictory accounts, and this serves as a reminder for researchers to be careful with the accounts themselves.

Second, Hirth made a mistake in the temporal dimension, and we use his theory to prove there are flaws in his arguments. In his thesis, Alans or Su-te were conquered by the Xiongnu in c. 370 CE, who had established a new state, and it had been three generations up until Huni or Ernak (r. c. 454-459 CE), Attila's son. In this case, the first generation is supposed to be the father of Attila or his uncles. According to the *Getica*,

Attila was the son of Mundzucus, whose brothers were Octar and Ruas, who were supposed to have been kings before Attila, although not altogether of the same

<sup>102</sup> As Maenchen-Helfen argued, this is because the original text of the *Weishu* was lost in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the current version was put together by later authors.

[territories] as he. After their death [in c. 430 and 434 CE], he succeeded to the Hunnic kingdom together with his brother Bleda.<sup>103</sup>

While Alans was conquered around 370 CE, even if the brother rulers Octar and Ruas had reigned for three decades or longer, which would be close to 400 CE, they cannot have attacked Alans in 370, another three decades earlier. In fact, due to constant warfare with each other, the kings of nomadic tribes typically did not rule for long periods. Hirth took around 75 years for three generations, and 75 years before Ernak was exactly around 370 CE. Apart from that, the *Weishu* notes that Huni was the third generation instead of three generations before Huni. If we were to count 25 years as one generation as Hirth suggested, two generations before Huni should be around 405 CE, when the Huns had already started their first large-scale attack on the Eastern Roman Empire, not to mention their strikes on the Alans. What is more, in the essential paragraph Hirth relied on it is also mentioned that “In the beginning of the reign of Kao-zong (452-466 CE) the king of Su-te sent ambassadors to ask for their ransom.” If Su-te were Alans, who were conquered by the Xiongnu or Huns, who would the Su-te king here be: the king of the Huns or the king of the Alans? Neither Chinese nor Western sources have recorded that the Huns or Alans had sent ambassadors to the Far East or China in this period. In either way, Hirth’s chronological assumptions did not pan out.

Finally, Hirth neglected the different geographical locations of Su-te and Alans. The *Weishu* says that Su-te is “16,000 *li* distant from Dai.”<sup>104</sup> We cannot estimate the actual distance depending on this plain description, but we are informed of the relative location of Su-te when there are comparisons with other states. There is a widely acknowledged convention in Chinese

<sup>103</sup> *Getica*, 180 (Mierow, *The Gothic history of Jordanes*, 101).

<sup>104</sup> *Weishu*, vol. 102. *Li* 里, a tradition Chinese unit of distance, varying considerably over time but now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer (500 meters or 1,640 feet).

historical accounts of the Western regions that the authors of such works tended to document the countries based on their distance to some specific landmark references in China, such as the capital city or the border city. In the same chapter of the *Weishu*, the country before Su-te is Luo-na, i.e. Da-yuan is “14,450 *li* distant from Dai,” which was situated in the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia, while the country after Su-te is Bo-si, i.e. Persia, located primarily in the present-day Iranian Plateau, is “24,228 *li* distant from Dai.”<sup>105</sup> Since Su-te is only 1,550 *li* away from the Central Asian state of Luo-na, it is safe to assume that Su-te was also located in Central Asia, possibly in the fertile valley of the Zeravshan.<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, the Alans in Western sources (Yan-cai in Chinese sources) had occupied the steppe region northeast of the Black Sea since the first century CE.<sup>107</sup> Given the distinctively different geographical territories of Su-te and Alans, it is not likely that they were one and the same people.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Hirth’s identification of Su-te with the Alans is problematic and his thesis regarding the Xiongnu-Hun equation as based on it does not hold water. This chapter has discussed the historical sources on the Xiongnu and the Huns. Because they did not keep their own records, records of their events were primarily kept in their neighbouring countries, Han China for the Xiongnu and the Roman Empire for the Huns. With respect to the Xiongnu, the most influential authors are Sima Qian (*Shiji*), Ban Gu (*Hanshu*), and Fan Ye (*Hou Hanshu*). When it comes to the Huns, historians such as Marcellinus, Priscus, and Jordanes kept

<sup>105</sup> *Weishu*, vol. 102.

<sup>106</sup> Maenchen-Helfen surmised that Su-te was in the Zarafshan-valley in “Huns and Hsiung-nu.” (231)

<sup>107</sup> Peter B. Golden, “Alāns (In Kate Fleet, et al. eds, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd, Brill Online, 2009. doi:10.1163/1573-3912\_ei3\_COM\_22193, accessed 7 May 2020).” Also see V.I. Abaev, H.W. Bailey, “Alans (*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. I, 1985, Fasc. 8.)” 801–803.

critical accounts. To study this subject well requires that one make good use of both Chinese and Western sources. However, the majority of earlier European scholars did not possess the requisite language skills in Chinese until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the German sinologist Friedrich Hirth employed Chinese sources, principally the *Weishu*, to re-examine this problem. His thesis had been wide acknowledged back to the first half of the twentieth century, but this does not, *ipso facto*, mean that his argument is flawless. Critics such as Shiratori, Maenchen-Helfen, and Enoki, have pointed out the weakness of his hypothesis, and I also consider his theory problematic for three reasons: 1) he believed every word of the source; 2) he made a temporal mistake in identifying Huni with Ernak; and 3) he disregarded the different geographical locations of Su-te and the Alans. In summary, Hirth's analysis of textual sources does not support the identification of the Xiongnu with the Huns.

## Chapter 3. Linguistic Connections

The debate on the possible connections between the Huns and the Xiongnu has been a long-lasting problem since Joseph de Guignes first proposed this equation thesis in 1756 from the linguistic stand, primarily based on the resemblance of the two ethnonyms, Xiongnu and Hun. Later on there were endlessly continuing discussions about their names and languages. The linguistic perspective has always been one of the most important angles concerning the hypothesis of the Xiongnu-Hun identity. This chapter investigates the two principal aspects of this perspective chronologically tracing relevant studies and concludes that the linguistic debate on this issue has reached a dead end, due to scant evidence.

### 3.1 Equation of names

Starting with De Guignes, numerous scholars have occupied themselves with the phonetic similarity of the two ethnonyms, especially after the discovery of several Sogdian letters in 1907, in which the Xiongnu people were written as *xwn*. With the evidence from these ancient documents, some linguists began to believe that the Xiongnu and the Huns were one and the same people.

#### 3.1.1 De Guignes

The eighteenth-century French historian Joseph de Guignes was the first to notice that ancient Chinese records referred to members of tribes associated with the Xiongnu by names similar to “Hun,” albeit with varying Chinese characters. In addition to the phonetic resemblance of two names, the Xiongnu were conquered by the Eastern Han general Dou Xian and “fled to parts unknown,” possibly to the north and west, while the European Huns were known to have

come from the east. De Guignes argued that it was evident that the Huns must be the Xiongnu who trekked west because both were nomads, expert horsemen, and highly mobile. He wrote in his notable work, *Histoire Générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols, et des Autres Tartares Occidentaux, Avant & depuis J.C. Jusqu'à present* that

Ce font ces Huns qui pafferent dans la fuite en Europe fous le regne de l'Empereur Valens: ils étoient alors gouvernés par différens Chefs, dont voici les plus confidérables, & ceux don't les noms font parvenus jufqu'à nous.

(These were the Huns who later sojourned in Europe under the reign of the Emperor Valens; they were governed by different leaders, the most prominent of whom are known to us today by their names.)<sup>108</sup>

In his narrative, the history of Xiongnu in the Far East apparently was that of the ancient Huns, and in most cases, he directly referred to the Xiongnu as Huns when describing events pertaining to the Xiongnu. To give an example, he listed the Hun leaders Balamir, Uldes, Aspar, Roïlas, Roua, Attila, Bleda, and Ellac as successors (not necessarily literal descendants) of the Yu-chu-jian Chanyu (“Yu-chu-kien-tanjou” in the text), who was defeated in 91 CE by the Han dynasty and fled to the north.<sup>109</sup> De Guignes’s view was adopted and widely spread by his contemporary English historian Edward Gibbon, who published the monumental six-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In chapter XXVI of the second volume, inspired by De Guignes, he noted that

The Huns, who under the reign of Valens threatened the empire of Rome, had been formidable, in a much earlier period, to the empire of China. Their ancient, perhaps their original, seat was an extensive, though dry and barren, tract of country, immediately on the north side of the great wall. Their place is at present occupied by the forty-nine Hords or Banners of the Mongous, a pastoral nation, which consists of about two hundred thousand families. But the valour of the Huns had extended the narrow limits of their dominions; and their rustic chiefs, who assumed the appellation of *Tanjou*, gradually became the conquerors, and the sovereigns of a formidable empire.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Joseph de Guignes, *Histoire Générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols, et des Autres Tartares Occidentaux*, vol. I, tome I. part. I, 217. The English translation is from Wright, “The Hsiung-nu-Hun Equation Revisited,” 84.

<sup>109</sup> De Guignes, vol. I, Introd. Tome I. Part. I, 217-8.

<sup>110</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. II, 528.

The Xiongnu-Huns equation, first proposed by de Guignes and then popularized by Gibbon, has prevailed on the whole, although it has been challenged from time to time ever since the eighteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Maenchen-Helfen noted critically that the only aspect De Guignes cared for in his argument was the political one; and that De Guignes's was essentially "a political history."<sup>112</sup> He further explained,

Even if he had found that the Xiongnu perished to the last man, he could have regarded the Huns as identical with them, provided the continuity of the political organization was preserved. For de Guignes, Huns, Xianbei, Avars, Turks, and Mongols were all alike "Tartares." The Huns were Xiongnu if at one time they had formed part of the Xiongnu empire, whether they spoke the same language as the Xiongnu, had the same customs, or were of the same "race," was immaterial. De Guignes was only, and exclusively, interested in the genealogy of political entities. He could say, as he actually did, that the Turks were formerly called Xiongnu, or that the Mongols were the Turks of olden times.<sup>113</sup>

As Maenchen-Helfen stated, the identification of the Xiongnu and Huns is far more than a political problem. In order to prove that the two groups were one and the same people, the linguistic, ethnic, and archaeological aspects of the question are relevant considerations.

### **3.1.2 W.B. Henning**

The evidence based on the phonetic resemblance of the ethnonyms Xiongnu and Hun faded in the nineteenth century but witnessed a revival in the twentieth century with the discovery of Sogdian letters in the remains of a watchtower on a Chinese frontier wall. These ancient letters, probably written in the first decades of the fourth century, are the earliest Sogdian

<sup>111</sup> The two main critics towards De Guignes' Xiongnu-Huns identity are sinologists Jean-Pierre Abel-Remusat (*Recherches sur les langues Tartares*) and Julius Heinrich Klaproth (*Tableaux Historiques de l'Asie*). Also see Wright, "The Hsiung-nu-Hun Equation Revisited," 89-90.

<sup>112</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 222.

<sup>113</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 222.

handwritten texts and the oldest available paper documents.<sup>114</sup> One of these letters, Letter II, was written by one servant Nanai-vandak and sent to his noble lord Varzakk in Samarkand, describing what for one modern scholar is the sack of Loyang in 311 CE by the (Southern) Xiongnu chieftain Liu Yuan.<sup>115</sup> The significance of this letter lies in its reference to the Xiongnu as *xwn*, Huns.

Henning was one of the earliest scholars who thoroughly studied the Sogdian letters. Although his primary purpose was to date these ancient documents by utilizing the events noted in Letter II, he remarked in the end of his work regarding the Xiongnu-Huns equation,

Of far greater interest is *xwn* = Hsiung-nu... *xwn* can be read as *Hun* or *Hūn* or *Xun* or *Xūn*. In recent years there has been some considerable reaction, led by O. Maenchen-Helfen, against the firmly established but possibly naïve belief in the identity – in whatever terms conceived – of the Hsiung-nu of the Far East with the Hunni of Europe (with the Indian *Hūna* coming in as weak third); much doubt has been thrown on the identity of even the names. Yet here we find a name that is indistinguishable from that of the *Hūna*, *Hunni*, *Saka Huna* ..., employed not of nomads of vague definition, but actually of the genuine Far-Eastern Hsiung-nu. And, what is more remarkable still, this name, unlike that found in the Saka *Lehrgedicht*, was in use well before the time when either the European Huns or the tribes that became known as *Hūna* to the Indians made their first appearance in history.<sup>116</sup>

It seemed to Henning that the Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu) = *xwn* =Huns hypothesis confirmed the identification of the Xiongnu and Huns. This argument did attract some supporters like

<sup>114</sup> Vladimir Livshits, “The Sogdian ‘Ancient Letters (I, III)’ (*Iran & the Caucasus*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2008: 289-293),” 289.

<sup>115</sup> Some important studies on letter II are, Henning, “The date of the Sogdian ancient letters,” 1948: 601-15; Harmatta, “The archaeological evidence for the date of the Sogdian ‘Ancient Letters’,” 1979: 75-90; Sims-Williams, “The Sogdian Ancient Letter II,” 2001: 267-280; “The Sogdian Ancient letters,” 2004; de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 2005a, 43-50.

<sup>116</sup> Henning, “The date of the Sogdian ancient letters,” 615. With respect to the date of the unearthed Sogdian letters, Henning (1948) believed that Letter II was written in the June 313 CE based on the content of the capture of Lo-yang, the capital city of the Western Jin dynasty (265-311 CE), by the Xiongnu. J. Harmatta (1979) argued that this letter corresponds to the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty at the end of second century CE, based on the archaeological finds of the Dun-huang Limes and the date of other Chinese documents discovered.



Prusek (1971) and Pulleyblank (1983).<sup>117</sup> For example, Jaroslav Prusek referred to Henning and held that “the identification of the Xiongnu with the historical Huns has been proved without doubt.”<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, scholars like H.W. Bailey (1954), Maenchen-Helfen (1959), Luc Kwanten (1979), and Denis Sinor (1990) treated this evidence of the identification hypothesis as establishing nothing more than “a tenuous relation at best between the Xiongnu and the Huns.”<sup>119</sup> Initially, Bailey expressed doubts that the Sogdian *xwn* was actually taken directly from the name Xiongnu, but instead the *xwn* were only a part of the Xiongnu, or that the old name Hyaona-, which had survived among the Sogdiana and then used of the Xiongnu.<sup>120</sup> Maenchen-Helfen argued that even if the two names Xiongnu and *xwn*/Huns were identical, it “does not prove the identity of language, economy, social institutions, religion, or art.”<sup>121</sup> He noted critically that “like most scholars who busied themselves with this question, Henning paid no attention to anything but the name,” and also that this question has more than one aspect.<sup>122</sup> Sinor also disagreed with this thesis by claiming that “the flaw in this argument is its disregard of the fact that the name Hun has been used consistently as a generic for many barbarian or barbarous peoples – for example in Byzantine sources in which Hungarians or Ottomans are called Huns.”<sup>123</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Jaroslav Prusek, *Chinese Statelets and the Northern Barbarians in the Period 1400-300 B.C.*, New York: Humanities Press, 1971; Pulleyblank, “The Chinese and Their neighbors in Pre-historic and Early Historic Times,” 411-66.

<sup>118</sup> Prusek, *Chinese Statelets and the Northern Barbarians in the Period 1400-300 B.C.*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> H.W. Bailey, “Hārahūna,” *Asiatica. Festschrift Er. Weller*, Leipzig, 1954: 12-21; Otto Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” in *Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Didicata*, ed. Soven Egerod and Else Glahn, Copenhagen: Enjar Munks-gaard, 1959: 223-38; Luc Kwanten, *Imperial Nomads: A History of Central Asia, 500-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 14; Sinor, “The Hun period,” 177-205.

<sup>120</sup> Bailey, “Hārahūna,” note 40, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” 223.

<sup>122</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” 223.

<sup>123</sup> Sinor, “The Hun period,” 179. With respect to Sinor’s argument, there are disagreements from Maenchen-Helfen (*The World of The Huns*) and Étienne de la Vaissière (“Huns et Xiongnu,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 49, no. 1, 2005b: 3-26): the former maintained that the name Hun could be a generic one for the later writers but in the fifth and sixth

### 3.1.3 Étienne de la Vaissière

As a matter of fact, neither Henning nor Maenchen-Helfen succeeded in convincing recent scholars such as De laVaissière, for the former failed to explain in detail and the latter believed that “the philological difficulties cannot be overcome.”<sup>124</sup> As a firm supporter of Xiongnu-Huns equation, de la Vaissière in his essay found fault with the arguments of critics one by one, including Maenchen-Helfen, Bailey, and Sinor. Admitting that not all the argumentation of Maenchen-Helfen’s is unconvincing, he started with pointing out flaws in Maenchen-Helfen’s reasoning,

Il est vrai que Maenchen-Helfen a mis en garde à plusieurs reprises contre de tels raisonnements: ce serait raisonner sur les seuls noms, là où seules les réalités ethnographiques et archéologiques devraient importer. Mais présentée de manière aussi radicale, la thèse est inacceptable..... Les Rhomaïoi [One counterexample in Maenchen-Helfen’s article] se proclament les héritiers des Romains, et peuvent y prétendre en terme d’histoire politique, et les Huns ont pu également se proclamer ceux des Xiongnu. La steppe aussi a le droit d’avoir des idées et une histoire politiques, toutes choses que convoie un nom propre, et on ne voit pas très bien pourquoi cela serait dénué d’importance.<sup>125</sup>

(It is true that Maenchen-Helfen has repeatedly warned against such reasoning: it would be reasoning only on names, where only ethnographic and archaeological realities should matter. But presented in such a radical way, the thesis is unacceptable..... The Rhomaïoi proclaim themselves the heirs of the Romans and can claim that in terms of political history, and the Huns were also able to proclaim themselves those of the Xiongnu. The steppe also has the right to have political ideas and history, all of which have proper names, and it is unclear why this would be irrelevant.)

De la Vaissière at first agreed with Maenchen-Helfen that ethnographic and archaeological perspectives are far more critical than the phonetic resemblance of the names and then remarked that “obviously he went too far to ignore that the ethnonyms can indicate the

centuries historians definitely distinguished the Huns from other northern barbarians; the idea of the latter will be discussed later in the same section.

<sup>124</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 3-26; Atwood, “Huns and Xiōngnú,” 30.

<sup>125</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 5.

connections to some degree.”<sup>126</sup> There is one counterexample in Maenchen-Helfen’s reasoning to demonstrate “the sameness of a group name not sufficient to equate its bearers”: there was a world of differences between the Rhomaioi of Constantinople and the Romani in Latium, but Diocletian, Charlemagne, John Tzimiskes, and Joseph II were all “Roman” emperors.<sup>127</sup> In respect to the example above, de la Vaissière commented that the political dimension of a designation is ignored in the analysis of Maenchen-Helfen and that otherwise much of the history of political ideas must be considered negligible.<sup>128</sup>

When it comes to Bailey’s idea that the Sogdian *xwn* was not actually taken directly from the name Xiongnu, but from the old Iranian name Hyaona, de laVaissière proclaimed that contrary to Maenchen-Helfen’s purpose of opposing the link of two names, Bailey’s goal was mainly to propose a link between the Sogdian *xwn* and the Iranian Hyaona, rather than to reject the possible connections between *xwn* and Xiongnu.<sup>129</sup> Technically, Bailey did not take a stand against the similarity of the ethnonyms of the two groups. Concerning Sinor’s point about the name Hun being a generic term, de la Vaissière tried to investigate when the word “Hun” became generic,

..... Sinor ne court pas grand risqué d’être démenti car il est effectivement parfaitement clair que le mot de Hun est devenu générique. Tout le problème est de préciser quand. Pour convaincre, Sinor aurait dû invoquer des usages génériques du terme Hun antérieurs au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle..... Sur le caractère générique surtout: si le terme Hun était générique, comment se fait-il que les peuples descendants des nomads scytho-sarmates ne l’emploie pas (où sont les Huns ossètes?) et, plus précisément, comment se fait-il que dans les rares usages du terme antérieurs au Ve siècle, le terme ne soit justement jamais

<sup>126</sup> De La Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 5.

<sup>127</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Pseudo-Huns (*Central Asiatic Journal* 1, no. 2, 1955: 101-06),” 101.

<sup>128</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 5

<sup>129</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 6. Jamsheed K. Choksy has discussed in detail in his article “Xiiiaona-or Hun Reconsidered (*Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 65, no. 1, 2012: 93-98)” regarding the orthographic and linguistic issues relating to Iranian usages of the word *xiiiaona* (one variant form of *Hyaona*). He concluded that the word could have been picked up by the Avestan people and rendered into their language to serve as a discriminatory designation for a nearby groups of enemies among the various Proto-Iranian folk.

générique? Enfin, si vraiment le terme Hun était générique et d'origine iranienne, comment se fait-il que les Huns d'Europe se l'appliquent à eux-mêmes?<sup>130</sup>

(Sinor does not run a great risk of being denied because he is indeed perfectly clear that the word Hun has become generic. The whole problem is to specify when. To convince, Sinor should have invoked generic uses of the term Hun before the 4th century..... On the generic character above all: if the term Hun were generic, how is it that the descendants of Scythian-Sarmatian nomads do not use it (where are the Ossetian Huns?) And more precisely, how is it that in the rare uses of the term prior to the 5th century, the term is precisely never generic? Finally, if the term Hun were really generic and of Iranian origin, how is it that the Huns of Europe applied it to themselves?)

De la Vaissière certainly acknowledged that the term “Huns” is incontestably generic, but not before the fourth century, as there is no evidence to demonstrate any generic character of the word “Huns” before the fourth century; also it could be linked to the expansion of the Huns in Central Asia and in Europe.<sup>131</sup> Finally, he concluded for one point that along with the archaeological and textual evidence, language and blood did not matter in estimating the relations of groups on the steppe; for another, the Huns were very likely descended from the dispersed Xiongnu, through the political and cultural identity that made it possible to unite the Altai nomad tribes based on the concentrations of Xiongnu cauldrons in the region, which will be discussed in a later chapter.<sup>132</sup> Atwood (2012) has contended that de la Vaissière has marshaled a strong case that the Asian Xiongnu were equivalent to the European Huns, but with one weakness in his interpretation, namely the phonological equivalence between Chinese *Xiongnu*, Sogdian *Xwn*, Sanskrit *Hūna*, Greek *Ounnoi*, and Latin *Hunni*, which by the way is the principal goal of Atwood's essay.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 6-9.

<sup>131</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 10.

<sup>132</sup> De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 23.

<sup>133</sup> Atwood, “Huns and Xiōngnú,” 27. To make de la Vaissière's argument more specific, he held that the people identified in Sogdian as *Xwn* and in Sanskrit as *Hūna* were the same people as the Chinese *Xiongnu*, and that given that *Xwn* and *Hūna* are usually identified with the Greek *Ounnoi* or Latin *Hunni*, this leads to the equation of Xiongnu with Huns.

Regarding all the debates above, I sympathize with all the efforts that either linguists or historians have made, but as Maenchen-Helfen lucidly noted, it is best to “stop the merry game of name-finding” as it pertains to ethnicity because the name of a group does not matter much.<sup>134</sup> For one, aside from the existence of generic names, nomadic peoples change their names depending on general circumstances. For example, a wealth of Chinese sources have recorded that when one branch of the Xiongnu was conquered by the Wuhuan (another nomadic group in northern China) towards the end of the first century, they named themselves as Wuhuan. Does the alteration of the name make them different from their original ethnicity Xiongnu? For another, during the reign of the Xiongnu on the Eastern and Central Eurasian steppes (c. 209 BCE- 89CE) they had subjugated numerous peoples, be they Yuezhi or Wusun or Dingling or other groups, and the subdued people also tended to alter their names to Xiongnu to avoid the further attack, which means that the Xiongnu united various ethnic groups under one name – their own. In a similar vein, it might well be asked whether the name difference revealed distinctions in who they were.

### 3.2 The languages of the Xiongnu and Huns

Another achievement linguists have made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concerning the Xiongnu-Huns equation related to the languages of two peoples. They held that if the two groups spoke the same language, chances would be higher that the Xiongnu could be identified with the Huns; otherwise, not. For instance, early in the nineteenth century some scholars rejected the equation largely on the grounds that the Xiongnu were probably Turkish in

<sup>134</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Archaistic Names of the Hiung-nu (*Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1961: 249-261),” 257.

speech, while the Huns were presumably Finno-Ugric in origin.<sup>135</sup> But later researchers showed that the language of the European Huns, though probably containing a large complement of Finno-Ugrian elements, also consisted at least in part of considerable Turkish-speaking elements.<sup>136</sup> Even though ancient writers did not leave us plentiful sources on what the language(s) of the Xiongnu and Huns were like, modern and contemporary scholars have made use of everything they can find from scattered documents to examine the potential languages the two peoples spoke. It is not the intention of this section to analyze historical language materials pertaining to the two peoples the way a linguist or philologist did, but to present an overview of relevant discussions over two centuries, as based on the bibliographical essay on this literature written by McGovern (1939).<sup>137</sup>

### **3.2.1 The Xiongnu language: Altaic, Iranian, or Yeniseic?**

In the nineteenth century a few scholars argued that the Xiongnu spoke a Finnish or Finno-Ugrian language, a theory now universally abandoned.<sup>138</sup> Later on the debate centred on three widely spread hypotheses: Altaic, Iranian, and Yeniseic. Altaic languages include Turkish, Mongolian, and Tungus, and opinions of experts varied on whether the Xiongnu spoke one of these languages. Some experts, including M. Alexander Castrén (1857), F. Krause (1925), and Lucien Gibert (1934), believed that the Xiongnu did not speak any of these three languages but

<sup>135</sup> McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 467. These scholars included Klaproth, *Tableaux Historiques de l'Asie*, 11; Abel-Rémusat, *Recherches sur les Langues Tartares*, 11; and Henry Hoyle Howorth, "Some Notes on the Huns," *Sixth Oriental Congress*, IV, 1883: 179-95.

<sup>136</sup> McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 467. These researchers included Hermann Vámbéry, *Der Ursprung der Magyaren: Eine Ethnologische Studie*, Leipzig, 1882; Gomboc, *Die Bulgarisch-türkische Lehnwörter in der Ungarische Sprache*, Helsinki: Société finno-ougrienne, 1912; etc.

<sup>137</sup> McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 467-70.

<sup>138</sup> McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 468-9.

instead the common ancestor of all Altaic languages.<sup>139</sup> Still others held that the language of Xiongnu was either Mongolian or Turkish based on their ethnicity, Mongols or Turks. British Historian H. H. Howorth (1883) insisted that there was substantial evidence that the Xiongnu were typical Mongols, including the same geographical location of two peoples from the Chinese border to Lake Baikal, and the continually used term Chan-yu as the great chief.<sup>140</sup> As a matter of fact, as an amateur historian, Howorth's rationale was not convincing, but there were indeed some theories based on anthropological evidence indicating that the Xiongnu might have been the ancestors of the Mongols.<sup>141</sup> Japanese Sinologist Shiratori (1923) also agreed that the Xiongnu were Mongols (Mongolian element dominant), but mixed with Tungus.<sup>142</sup> The majority of those who believed that the Xiongnu spoke Altaic languages tended to believe that the Xiongnu were either Turks or proto-Turks and, as such, spoke Turkish. Authorities who held this view included Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1820), Julius Klaproth (1825), E. H. Parker (1892), Friedrich Hirth (1899), William M. McGovern (1939), W. B. Henning (1948), Charles O. Hucker (1975), Sims-Williams (2004), and others.<sup>143</sup> More importantly, official Chinese annals, for example the *Zhoushu* (the history of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou dynasties, 535-581

<sup>139</sup> McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 469. See M. Alexander Castrén, *Ethnologische Vorlesungen über die Altaischen Völker* (St. Petersburg, 1857), 35; F. Krause, *Geschichte Ostasiens*, vol. I (Göttingen, 1925), 313; and Lucien Gibert, *Dictionnaire Historique de la Mandchourie* (Imprimerie de la Société des missions-étrangères, 1934), 897.

<sup>140</sup> Howorth, "Some Notes on the Huns," 185-7. He explained that Genghis Khan refers to the time of Modu Chanyu as "the remote times of our Chanyu" in his letter to Daoist Qiu Chuji. (185)

<sup>141</sup> D. Tumen, "Anthropology of Archaeological Populations from Inner Asia (*Mongolian Journal of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2008: 162-183)," 171.

<sup>142</sup> Kurakichi Shiratori, "Sur l'Origine des Hiong-nou (*Journal Asiatique: Recueil de Mémoires*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1923, 71-81), 71.

<sup>143</sup> Abel-Rémusat, *Recherches sur les Langues Tartares*, 1820; Klaproth, "Sur l'Identite des Tou-kiue et les Hiongnu avec les Turcs," 1825; Parker, "Turko-Scythian Tribes," 1892; Hirth, "Über Volga Hunnen und Hiung-nu," 1899, 245-278; McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia*, 468-70; Henning, "The date of the Sogdian ancient letters," 1948: 601-15; Hucker, *China's Imperial Past*, 1975; Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Ancient Letters."

CE) and the *Beishi* (the history of the historical period from 386 to 618 CE in China) regard the Tujue (Turks) as descendants of the Xiongnu.<sup>144</sup>

The second popular theory regarding the Xiongnu language was the Iranian one, originally proposed by H. W. Bailey, who studied all of the earliest Xiongnu names of the second century BCE and recognized them as being of Iranian origin.<sup>145</sup> This theory was supported by János Harmatta (1994):

Their [Xiongnu] royal tribes and kings (shan-yü) bore Iranian names and all the Hsiung-nu words noted by the Chinese can be explained from an Iranian language of Saka type. It is therefore clear that the majority of Hsiung-nu tribes spoke an Eastern Iranian language.<sup>146</sup>

Today Central Asianist Christopher I. Beckwith (2009) held a similar opinion, namely that the name “Xiongnu” in Middle Chinese could correspond to a form of the name of Northern Iranians, Soyđâ, Soyłâ, Sak(a)dâ.<sup>147</sup> According to Beckwith, it is probable that the Xiongnu included an Iranian component when they started out, but more likely they learned the Iranian nomadic model by serving for a time as subjects of an Iranian steppe zone people.<sup>148</sup> When it comes to the Iranian element in the Xiongnu language, Maenchen-Helfen (1945) assumed that it was reasonable that “some Xiongnu terms are Iranian loan-words, but less likely that Xiongnu spoke the Iranian language.”<sup>149</sup> Obviously, this hypothesis did not become popular until the second half of the twentieth century.

<sup>144</sup> Both *Zhoushu* (vol. 50) and *Beishi* (vol. 99) record that “Tujue [Turks] were presumably one branch or a subgroup of the Xiongnu people, and they were the Ashina clan (突厥者，蓋匈奴之別種，姓阿史那氏).”

<sup>145</sup> Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies: being Khotanese Texts*, VII, 25-41.

<sup>146</sup> Harmatta, “Conclusion,” 488.

<sup>147</sup> Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 72. See endnote 52 for the transcription of the name Xiongnu. (405)

<sup>148</sup> Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 72-3.

<sup>149</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 224.



The third assumption in this debate concerns the Yeniseian language family of Central Siberia. Hungarian philologist Lajos Ligeti (1950) was the first to suggest that the Xiongnu spoke a Yeniseian language.<sup>150</sup> Thereafter Canadian Sinologist Edwin G. Pulleyblank (1962) expanded upon this idea with credible evidence based on his thorough studies of the historical phonology of Chinese language.<sup>151</sup> He gathered about 190 probable Xiongnu words during the former Han period from the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, 57 more from the *Hou Hanshu*, and 31 from the *Jinchu*, most of which were proper names or titles, to examine the whole body of Xiongnu transcriptions. After the careful investigation, he concluded that

(1) The evidence for the existence of initial *r* and *l* and initial clusters in Xiongnu makes it most unlikely that it was an Altaic language; (2) a number of words for which the meaning is given or can be inferred correspond quite closely to words of the same or similar meaning in the Yenisei languages – among them the words for “son”, “milk”, “stone” may be especially noted as being unlikely to be loanwords in Yeniseian; (3) certain Xiongnu titles (and also the words for “heaven”, “sour milk”, and “kumiss”) can be traced later in Mongolian or Turkish or both. The simplest hypothesis to explain these facts is that the Xiongnu spoke a language of the Yenisei family and that the Mongolians and Turks who followed them as masters of the eastern steppes inherited elements of culture and political organization, with the corresponding names.<sup>152</sup>

This theory, based on linguistic evidence, stands on one condition, Pulleyblank added: it must be tested by reference to other types of evidence, particularly archaeological.<sup>153</sup> Decades later, Russian-American linguist Alexander Vovin (2000; 2002) enthusiastically embraced Pulleyblank's argument, stating that “all previous attempts to identify the Xiongnu language with one or the other later languages of East or Central Asia were relying on modern readings of Chinese characters, or in a few limited cases, on the outdated reconstruction of Old Chinese by

<sup>150</sup> Lajos Ligeti, “Mots de civilization de haute Asie en transcription chinoise,” 141-185.

<sup>151</sup> Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” 58-144; 206-265.

<sup>152</sup> Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” 265.

<sup>153</sup> Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” 265.

Karlgren [Swedish sinologist and linguist].”<sup>154</sup> By utilizing the most recent reconstruction of Old Chinese phonology by Starostin (1989) and Baxter (1991) and updated reconstruction of the Yeniseian language, Vovin reanalyzed and found further support for the Yeniseic theory in a short poem in *Jie* 羯 language, one believed to be a variety of Xiongnu.<sup>155</sup>

Beyond all theories above is one more piece of speculation, namely that the Xiongnu confederation was a mixture of different ethnic and linguistic groups, albeit one whose “kingly” language, to the extent that it is represented in the Chinese records, is not currently identifiable.<sup>156</sup> Professor Hyun Jin Kim (2013) also favoured the idea of the Xiongnu empire as being one of the “historical reality of these extensive, multiethnic, polyglot steppe empires.”<sup>157</sup> Turkologist Gerhard Doerfer (1973) has rejected any possibility of a relationship between the Xiongnu language and any other known languages, and he has also strongly rejected any connection with Turkic or Mongolian.<sup>158</sup>

In sum, although the Turkish theory prevails preponderantly in speculation on the Xiongnu language, none of the attempts to identify Xiongnu words, titles, or names has been successful. As Vovin observed, the scarcity of the material prevents any definite decisions.<sup>159</sup> Maenchen-Helfen’s critical observation that the assumption that the language of the Xiongnu

<sup>154</sup> A. Vovin, “Did the Xiong-nu Speak a Yeniseian Language?” 87-104; “Did the Xiongnu speak a Yeniseian language? Part 2: Vocabulary,” 389-394. The citation is from Vovin, “Did the Xiong-nu Speak a Yeniseian Language?” 87-8. The reconstruction of Old Chinese by Karlgren is problematic because he studied historical Chinese phonology using modern comparative methods, neglecting the fact that Chinese phonology underwent tremendous changes over the last two thousand years.

<sup>155</sup> See Vovin, “Did the Xiong-nu Speak a Yeniseian Language?” (93-103) for his analysis of the poem.

<sup>156</sup> Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 165.

<sup>157</sup> Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, 31.

<sup>158</sup> Doerfer, “Zur Sprache der Hunnen,” 2-7.

<sup>159</sup> Vovin, “Did the Xiong-nu Speak a Yeniseian Language?” 92.

remained the same over seven centuries is too naïve to warrant serious discussion is on the mark and irrefutable.<sup>160</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Hunnic language: Altaic, Yeniseic, Indo-European, or Uralic?

The sources are too scanty to identify the Xiongnu language, and when it comes to the language of the Huns they are even more scarce. Owing to the dearth of language materials, the debate on the Hunnic language has varied dramatically from scholar to scholar. The only known sources we possess are the names of the Hunnic rulers and the associates recorded by classical historians, and our sources did not give the meaning of any of them. Even so, however, linguists and philologists have attempted to determine the language of the Huns on the basis of these onomastic materials. As Ukrainianist Omeljan Pritsak (1982) assumed, probably all these persons (the Hunnic rulers and generals) spoke the same idiom, and therefore it is reasonable to use these sources to decide the language of the ruling clan or class of the European Huns.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, to identify the Hunnic language is to explore the etymology of names. B. F. Bergmann (1804) was the first to etymologize Hunnic names, and he took them for Mongolian.<sup>162</sup> Maenchen-Helfen noted that nineteenth-century scholars, be they historians with some linguistic training or philologists with a knowledge of history, were inclined to examine only materials that substantiated their theories rather than studying “the entire material in all its complexity.”<sup>163</sup> Vámbéry (1882) first listed not merely the names he thought he could explain, but all he could find.<sup>164</sup> Even though his list is incomplete and his etymologies frequently failed

<sup>160</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” 225.

<sup>161</sup> Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” 430.

<sup>162</sup> B. F. Bergmann, *Nomadische Streifzüge unter den Kalmüken*, Riga, 1804. See Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of The Huns*, 376, note 7.

<sup>163</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of The Huns*, 377.

<sup>164</sup> A. Vámbéry, *Der Ursprung der Magyaren* (Leipzig, 1882), 40-50.

to make sense, Vámbéry was methodologically on the right track.<sup>165</sup> Thereafter in the twentieth century, more and more scholars joined in the discussion of the Hunnic language. Overall, there were four assumptions inherent this issue.

First, as with the mainstream viewpoint of the Xiongnu language – Altaic theory, multiple scholars held the same idea towards the Hunnic language. Maenchen-Helfen (1973) carefully studied the literary context in which the names appeared, lumped all transcriptions together, and then analyzed the etymology of every name.<sup>166</sup> He concluded that many tribal and proper names among the Huns appear to have originated in Turkic languages, indicating that the language was Turkic.<sup>167</sup> Differing from Maenchen-Helfen’s exhaustive analysis on all the potential Hunnic names, Omeljian Pritsak (1982) selected 33 names and divided them into two groups, the majority of which were recorded by the historian Priscus, who spent some time at Attila’s court.<sup>168</sup> Based on the information he gathered, Pritsak suggested that “it was not a Turkic language, but one between Turkic and Mongolian, probably closer to the former than the latter. The language had strong ties to Old Bulgarian and to modern Chuvash, but also has some important connections, especially lexical and morphological, to Ottoman and Yakut.”<sup>169</sup>

Pritsak had complete confidence in the clear structural patterns, including morphemic systems and accentuation patterns, in the Hunnic language he reconstructed. Not only did it work on linguistic grounds, but the deciphering of the meanings of reconstructed words and forms also found corroboration in the realia of Hunnic history and culture.<sup>170</sup> Although Denis Sinor (1990) argued that the proper names Bleda or Scottas or the word *strava* (a Hunnic term for a funeral

<sup>165</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of The Huns*, 377.

<sup>166</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of The Huns*, 376-443.

<sup>167</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of The Huns*, 392-411.

<sup>168</sup> Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” 431.

<sup>169</sup> Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” 470.

<sup>170</sup> Pritsak, “The Hunnic Language of the Attila Clan,” 471.

feast) could not be Altaic, he did believe that some Hunnic personal names, such as Iliger, Dengizikh, had a decidedly Turkic character and lent support to the *a priori* assumption that the Huns were Turks or Mongols.<sup>171</sup> Hyun Jin Kim (2013) held a similar speculation that most Hunnic names we know of are very likely to be Turkic and that the Hunnic elite was therefore predominantly Turkic-speaking.<sup>172</sup>

Apart from linguistic standpoints, Karl Heinrich Menges (1995) surmised that there are ethnological reasons for considering the Huns Turkic or close to the Turks. Linguistically, he suggested, the Huns could possibly be “an Altaic group which was an intermediary between Turkic and Mongolian.”<sup>173</sup> Interesting enough, British historian Peter Heather altered his stand from supporting the Turkic hypothesis as the “best guess” in 1995 to an agnostic one in 2010 with his statement that “the truth is that we do not know what language the Huns spoke, and probably never will.”<sup>174</sup>

Secondly, a few scholars have been convinced that the Huns spoke one or another language of the Yeniseian language family. Specifically, Pulleyblank (1962) suggested that Ket — a Siberian language and the sole surviving member of the Yeniseian language family — may have been a major source of the Xiongnu languages (see Pulleyblank’s earlier discussion on the Xiongnu language).<sup>175</sup> As he announced that “as far as the names [Xiongnu and Hun] are concerned, one can now assert confidently that they must be the same,” it is safe to assume that Pulleyblank also believed there were continuities between the Hunnic language and the Xiongnu

<sup>171</sup> Sinor, “The Hun period,” 202.

<sup>172</sup> Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, 30.

<sup>173</sup> Menges, *The Turkic Languages and Peoples*, 17.

<sup>174</sup> Heather, “The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe,” 5; *Empires and Barbarians*, 209.

<sup>175</sup> Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” 265; “The Chinese and Their neighbors in Pre-historic and Early Historic Times,” 451; “The Hsinug-nu,” 62-65.

one, who were Kettish in speech.<sup>176</sup> Kim (2013) agreed that the original Xiongnu/Huns probably spoke Kettic but that they experienced a language transformation like the Golden Horde and the Chagatai Khanate, shifting from Yeniseian to Turkic language after absorbing the bulk of the Turkic Dingling people.<sup>177</sup> Historical linguist Edward J. Vajda (2012) also argued that the ruling elite of the Huns spoke a Yeniseian language and influenced other languages in the region.<sup>178</sup> One thing in common that the various scholars have in arguing that the Xiongnu/Huns were a Yeniseian-speaking group is their *a priori* and full acceptance of the Xiongnu/Hun identity without any doubts, and this makes their arguments less cogent.

Thirdly, as the European Huns frequently interacted with neighbouring peoples in the western Eurasian steppe, some experts reasoned that the Huns could be an Indo-European language-speaking group. The only Hunnic word the meaning of which is known, namely *strava*, “funeral,” has been explained as Slavic, Gothic, and Turkish.<sup>179</sup> Later Maenchen-Helfen (1973) maintained that this word remained as having a Slavic etymology, but it is most unlikely that the Huns turned to Slavs for a term, but it is more probable that Priscus or Jordanes, who knew neither Hunnic nor Slavic and were misled by their Slav informants, could have taken *strava* for a Hunnic word.<sup>180</sup> Names like Attila, Bleda, Laudarius, Ruga, and so forth, he continued, were Germanic, while some other names had roots in Iranian.<sup>181</sup> Kim (2016) explained that the Germanicization of Hunnic names may have been a conscious policy of the Hunnic elite in the western part of the empire, although the core language, in his view, of the European Huns was

<sup>176</sup> Pulleyblank, “The Chinese and Their neighbors in Pre-historic and Early Historic Times,” 451.

<sup>177</sup> Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, 29; also see note 88-91, 176-7.

<sup>178</sup> Vajda, *Yeniseian Peoples and Languages*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>179</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 225.

<sup>180</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 426.

<sup>181</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 386-92. With respect to the names Ruga, Attila, and Bleda, Kim (*The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*) claimed that they are “more probable Turkic etymologies.” (30)

very likely to have been Oghuric Turkic, given the names of their kings and princes.<sup>182</sup> In the meantime, he admitted that there was a considerable presence of Iranian speakers among the Huns.<sup>183</sup> Historians Herwig Wolfram (1990; 1997) and Peter Heather (2010) suspected that a Germanic language, possibly Gothic, may have coexisted with another Hunnic language as the lingua franca of the Hunnic language.<sup>184</sup> Christopher Atwood (2012) supported the Iranian theory when he explained his proposed etymology of the name Hun by claiming that “their [*Huna/Ounna*, the Huns] state or confederation must be seen as the result of Sogdian/Baktrian [Iranian-speaking] leadership and organization.”<sup>185</sup> In addition to the Germanic and Iranian hypotheses, some Russian scholars believe that the Huns spoke a Slavic language, but this has attracted very few supporters.<sup>186</sup>

Lastly, the German sinologist Julius Heinrich Klaproth (1826) argued that the Huns had spoken a Uralic language. He began arguing his thesis by refuting the Xiongnu-Hun identity, first proposed by de Guignes in the eighteenth century, and then pointed out connections between the Huns and ancient Hungarians, who were the members of Finno-Ugric group of the Uralic language family.<sup>187</sup> This theory was hardly mentioned by scholars of the Hunnic language over the ensuing two centuries.

Although this subject has been studied for centuries, attempts to investigate the specific language the Huns spoke by employing limited onomastic materials are *a priori* doomed to failure for the following three problems: A) It is not certain that all names in our sources are

<sup>182</sup> Kim, *The Huns*, 111.

<sup>183</sup> Kim, *The Huns*, 8.

<sup>184</sup> Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (University of California press, 1990), 254; *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (University of California press, 1997), 142; Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 329.

<sup>185</sup> Atwood, “Huns and Xiōngnú,” 47.

<sup>186</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 223.

<sup>187</sup> Klaproth, *Tableaux Historiques de l’Asie*, 239-43. Also see Wright, “The Hsiung-nu—Hun Equation Revisited,” 89.

those by which the Huns called themselves. Prior to the East Romans had any direct contact with the Huns, Romans heard about them from the Goths and other non-Huns, by whom the original Hunnic names were possibly Gothicized; B) Late Roman and Byzantine writers tended to alter foreign names until they sounded like Latin or Greek ones, and this could well cause inexactness in transcription; C) Treating transcribed Hunnic names warrants utmost caution regarding the circumstances under which they have come down to us, especially since proper names are particularly liable to undergo corruption or morphological changes in manuscript tradition.<sup>188</sup> What is more, because of these existing problems, some authorities have started to believe either that the Hunnic language is unidentifiable or that there were many languages spoken among the multiethnic Huns.<sup>189</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of twentieth century, the Xiongnu-Hun identity was supported or opposed mainly on linguistic basis that involved two directions. For one, considerable labor was employed to investigate the ethnonyms (Xiongnu and Huns), as first proposed by de Guignes. Neither protagonists nor antagonists of de Guignes's equation have convinced each other. The debate on the names did not flourish again until the discovery of the ancient Sogdian letters in the early twentieth century. Researchers such as Henning, Prusek, Pulleyblank, de laVaissière, and Atwood dug into the newly found documents trying to establish the connections between the Xiongnu and Huns through the intermediary *xwn* in the Sogdian letters, while other experts such as Bailey, Maenchen-Helfen, Kwanten, and Denis Sinor attacked

<sup>188</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 381-2; 385.

<sup>189</sup> Gerhard Doerfer, "Zur Sprache der Hunnen," 50; Sinor, "The Hun period," 201-2; Golden, "Some Thoughts on the Origins of the Turks and the Shaping of the Turkic Peoples," 136-7; Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 209.



this evidence as “phonetically unsound.” Further, historical linguists and philologists have made various attempts to identify and classify the languages the two peoples spoke. In this chapter I have not examined linguistic materials the way a linguist would do but have instead sketched scholarship on this contention. Regarding what language(s) the Xiongnu spoke, three theories have prevailed (Altaic, Iranian, and Yeniseic languages), with the Altaic (specifically Turkish) the most prevalent. The language of the Huns is in even more dispute, with Altaic, Yeniseic, Indo-European, or Finno-Ugric and scholars have failed to reach any consensus. Beyond the arguments above, a number of professors have tended to assume that their languages were either unidentifiable/unclassifiable or involved multiple ones. In summary, the fragmentary nature of the evidence prevents us from determining the languages of the two groups. What is more, even if we were able to specify which languages the Xiongnu and Huns spoke, this would still remain of little probative value for establishing the possible connections between the two groups, because Hunnic tribes speaking Turkish or any other language might have lived for centuries in East Russia without any contact with the Xiongnu in Kansu and Mongolia.<sup>190</sup> Another notable point raised again by Maenchen-Helfen (1945) is that linguists tend to overlook that historians mean by “identity” something quite different from what they as linguists mean by the term, even though historians may accept linguistic findings as corroborating their theories.<sup>191</sup> The conceptual gap between linguists and historians regarding “identity” tends to occasion disputes between them. In the eyes of historians, it is not necessarily true that peoples who speak the same language are, *ipso facto*, members of the same ethnic group.

<sup>190</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 224.

<sup>191</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 223.

## Chapter 4. Ethnic Origins

Aside from debatable historical evidence and linguistic connections, scholars in the twentieth century have also engaged in exploring the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu and Huns. Their standpoint is that if the two peoples were proven to have identical physical appearance or anthropometry or genetics (in other words, their racial status), the identity between them would undoubtedly be affirmed. Noteworthy, the term “race” might have been outdated, but when it comes to discussing ethnic origins in historical literature, one inevitably encounters this old-fashioned concept implying human biological differentiation. To be specific, a race is a certain group of people who possess the majority of their physical characteristics in common; in the meantime, racial features are continually changing under the influence of three forces – amalgamation, selection, and environmental response, however ill-defined the race is.<sup>192</sup> With the relatively new science of osteology emerging, scholars have widened their scope from limited historical sources to skeletal remains to investigate the ethnic origins of groups. Historians are no exceptions, for in addition to written records, crania and long bones can provide valuable information. Before diving in skeletal evidence, it is necessary to examine potential physiognomy and related customs of the two peoples from written sources.

### 4.1 Historical Records

Chinese sources do not contain abundant accounts of the Xiongnu’s physical appearance, which is unusual for ancient Chinese writers, who typically recorded exotic things and peoples.

<sup>192</sup> Anthropologist Carleton Stevens Coon (*The Races of Europe*) had an excellent discussion on the concept of race. (3-12) For the race issue in the history studies, historian Martin S. Staum (an emeritus professor of history at the University of Calgary) had a fundamental and inspiring analysis on the attitude of phrenologists, ethnologists, and anthropologists in the nineteenth-century France towards race and colonialism. (Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815-1848*, Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003.)

There is only one place in the *Hanshu* with a brief description of the appearance of a Xiongnu prince. Fortunately some artifacts have more direct illustrations on the phenotypic traits of the Xiongnu, which is also one of the most essential sources for this section. With respect to the European Huns, their very distinctive looks had attracted ancient historians' attention since they made the first appearance in Europe in the late fourth century. For this, *Book 31 of The Later Roman Empire* from Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus is an essential source. This section will examine the physical appearances of members of the two groups and also discuss comparable cultural customs among them.

#### 4.1.1 Physical appearance

When it comes to ethnographic features, facial traits are the most understanding ones. As noted earlier, the scanty information recorded in Chinese historical texts does not make the image of the Xiongnu clear. In the vol. 68 of *Hanshu*, Jin Midi 金日磾 (134-86 BCE), a prominent general of the Han dynasty of Xiongnu ethnicity and the prince of Xiutu (one royal Xiongnu family), was described as “eight *chi* two *cun* tall with a stern appearance.”<sup>193</sup> This figure also appears in the mural paintings of the Eastern Han tomb in Helinge'er in modern-day Inner Mongolia, but the painting is not clear enough to tell his facial traits, leading one Chinese archaeologist to comment that they indicated no evident difference with the ethnic Han Chinese.<sup>194</sup> Another relevant account in the vol. 107 of the *Jinshu* (the official dynastic history of the Jin dynasty 265-420 CE) said that Ran Min 冉閔, a military leader during the era of the Sixteen Kingdoms in China (304-439 CE) and the only emperor of the short-lived state Ran Wei

<sup>193</sup> *Hanshu*, vol. 68, original in Chinese: “日磾長八尺二寸，容貌甚嚴。”

<sup>194</sup> Ma Liqing, “The Archaeological and Anthropological Studies on the race of the Xiongnu,” 48-54.

冉魏 (350-352 CE) state, committed the genocide in 350 CE against the *Jie* people under the Later Zhao, who were considered the descendants of the Xiongnu. As a result, more than half of those with “high noses and full beards” were slaughtered.<sup>195</sup> According to this description, Chinese historian Wang Guowei deduced that the Xiongnu as the ancestors of *Jie* people should be correspondingly recognized as “deep eye orbit, high nose, and full beard” with no distinctions from the “west barbarians” dwelling in modern Xinjiang, China.<sup>196</sup> However, archaeologist Huang Wenbi maintained another viewpoint based on the stone carving depicting a horse trampling a Xiongnu in the tomb of Huo Qubing, a distinguished military general renowned for a series of military campaigns against the Xiongnu. The carved stone exhibits a Xiongnu figure with high cheekbones, broad face, thick lips, flat nose, small eyes, and triangular eyelids who holds a bow and arrows. Huang Wenbi remarked that this figure is a typical Mongoloid one.<sup>197</sup> Thereafter, given the very scant historical sources, scholarship has initiated a heated debate over the race of the Xiongnu people, primarily from the analysis of human remains, which will be discussed later.

Regarding the Huns, ancient historian Ammianus Marcellinus left us with a somewhat distorted picture of the Huns:

From the moment of birth they make deep gashes in their children's cheeks, so that when in due course hair appears its growth is checked by the wrinkled scars; as they grow older this gives them the unlovely appearance of beardless eunuchs. They have squat bodies, strong limbs, and thick necks, and are so prodigiously ugly and bent that

<sup>195</sup> *Jinshu*, vol. 107, original in Chinese: “于時高鼻多須至有濫死者半。”

<sup>196</sup> Wang Guowei, “The continued studies on the West Barbarians (Xihu xukao, in *Guantang Jilin*, Hebei Jiaoyu Press, 2003, 312-4),” 313. The “West Barbarians,” also known as Xihu, is compared to the Donghu (“East Barbarians”) people. They were biologically recognized as the Europoid groups with deep eye orbit, high nose, and full beards by ancient Chinese historians like Sima Qian, Ban Gu, *etc.* There are also scholars who rejected that the *Jie* were of Xiongnu origin as Tsunoda Bumie (1954), Pulleyblank (1963), S. G. Klyashtorny (1964), see Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 372.

<sup>197</sup> Huang Wenbi, “The Origin of the Xiongnu,” 89.

they might be two-legged animals, or the figures crudely carved from stumps which are seen on the parapets of bridges.<sup>198</sup>

From this portrayal, we know that the Huns had no beards, and their monster-like ugliness distinctively differed from that of other peoples with whom the Romans were familiar, such as the Alans, who in the eyes of the same historian Marcellinus were as follows: “Almost all Alans are tall and handsome with yellowish hair and frighteningly fierce eyes.”<sup>199</sup> What is more, Jordanes depicted the king Attila as “short of stature with a broad chest and a large head; his eyes were small, his beard thin and sprinkled with gray; and he had a flat nose and a swarthy complexion, showing the evidences of his origin.”<sup>200</sup> Compared with Marcellinus’s description, Maenchen-Helfen noted that Jordanes’s depiction, which directly quoted Priscus (who was personally acquainted with Attila, his sons, his uncles, and many other Hunnic dignitaries), was more trustworthy.<sup>201</sup> The weakly accentuated profile, along with the small eyes and flat nose, point to a Mongoloid strain among the Huns, although the term “Hun” here was used loosely with no claim to anthropological accuracy.<sup>202</sup> In the meantime, as many Huns were of mixed ethnic heritage, it is unlikely that the Huns of the fourth and fifth centuries were as Mongoloid as the contemporary Yakut or Tunguz.<sup>203</sup>

Apart from facial features, the Huns had “squat bodies, strong limbs, and thick necks” and were “short of stature,” which seems to imply more East Asian phenotypical features. Our sources are not, however, always consistent in their narratives. Marcellinus, for example, also revealed the hairiness of the Huns by describing how they protected their hairy legs with

<sup>198</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 412.

<sup>199</sup> Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Book 31, 414.

<sup>200</sup> *Getica*, 182 (Mierow, 102).

<sup>201</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 361.

<sup>202</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 363; Sinor, “The Hun period,” 202.

<sup>203</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 364.

goatskins, a description which, according to Maenchen-Helfen, implied that the hairiness set the Huns apart from Mongoloids, who have very little bodily hair and whose beards are poorly developed as defined by physical anthropologist L. H. D. Buxton.<sup>204</sup> Overall, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Marcellinus and Jordanes had to depict the Huns as looking like sub-human monsters and savages, given how they hated the Huns with such an intensity.<sup>205</sup>

Concerning the Xiongnu, Chinese texts record the surprising stature of some prominent Xiongnu figures: the mentioned Xiutu prince – Jin Midi (134-86 BCE), eight *chi* two *cun* tall (around 189 cm); Liu Yüan (251-310 CE), the founding emperor of the Xiongnu state Han Zhao (304-329 CE), eight *chi* four *cun* tall (around 194 cm) with red strains in his long beard; Helian Bobo (381-425 CE), the founding emperor of the Xiongnu short-lived Xia state (407-431 CE), a contemporary of Attila, eight *chi* five *cun* tall (around 196cm).<sup>206</sup> It could be assumed from our limited sources that Xiongnu royalty were unusually tall in stature, and this might not accord with general assumptions about the stature of Mongoloid groups. At the same time, however, it is also possible that both the Xiongnu and the Huns were mixed populations, a possibility firmly supported by Hyun Jin Kim, and that misunderstandings sometimes arose over the more pronounced racial features in a mixed population, which often attracted much attention.<sup>207</sup> To sum up, the paucity of written accounts are not strong enough to determine the physical

<sup>204</sup> Leonard H. D. Buxton, *The Peoples of Asia* (London, 1925), 60.

<sup>205</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 363.

<sup>206</sup> Jin Midi, *Hanshu*, vol. 68; Liu Yüan, *Jinshu*, vol. 101; Helian Bobo, *Jinshu*, vol. 130. *Chi* and *Cun* were traditional Chinese units of length: 10 *cun* are equal to 1 *chi*; the value of 1 *chi* varied between 23.09 and 24.3cm in the period of the Han dynasty and the Three Kingdoms (Kangshen Shen and others, *The Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art: Companion and Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1999, 8). The heights given here are calculated based on the minimum limit, 1 *chi* = 23.09 cm. Maenchen-Helfen (*The World of the Huns*, 373-4) had different numbers for their lengths, 192cm, 184cm, and 195cm, respectively, which are not reliable according to the original accounts from our Chinese sources. Nonetheless, this does not attenuate the observation that Xiongnu royalty were impressively tall.

<sup>207</sup> Kim, *The Huns*, 7; Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 363.

appearance of the two peoples. Relevant cultural customs and, more importantly, the study of their human remains will be consulted in the following sections.

#### 4.1.2 Cultural customs

Apart from physical features, cultural customs related to appearance have a considerable effect on how one looks. This section focuses on the coiffures and face-cutting customs of the Xiongnu and the Huns. The coiffure can be a symbol of the identity, such as the Manchu queue during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), where the front portion of the head is shaved and the rest is braided; ethnic Han Chinese men were required to change their traditional hairstyle to the Manchu queue after the Manchu's conquest of China in the seventeenth century, on pain of decapitation. Often hairstyle becomes one of the most distinctive features or characteristics between different peoples. In spite of its significance, studies of coiffures are minimal. For one, historical sources have provided very scanty information. For another, hair does not endure long in most cases, though longer than skin and flesh, and this makes hair extremely valuable in archaeological finds. Some archaeologists in China have attempted to examine the coiffures of the Xiongnu principally from newly found ancient relics. Among them, the Japanese scholar Kurakichi Shiratori (1929) and Ma Liqing (2008) made some achievements.<sup>208</sup> Chinese sources record three potential hairstyles of the Xiongnu: A) Draped hair (*Pi fa* 披髮). The ancient Chinese literary anthology *Huainan zi* documented that the Xiongnu people and other barbarians wore their hair down. The Xiongnu figure mentioned earlier on the carved stone from the tomb of the Han general Huo Qubing testified to this type of coiffure; B) Plaited hair (*Bian fa* 辮髮).

<sup>208</sup> Kurakichi Shiratori, "The Queue among the Peoples of North Asia," *Memoirs of the Research Dept. of the Toyo Bunko*, vol. 4, Tokyo, 1929, 1-69; Ma Liqing, "The Study on the Xiongnu Hairstyles and Their Hair Martyrdom (Xiongnu ren de faxing he faxun kao)," *Inner Mongolia Social Sciences* (Chinese version), 2008 (05): 33-40.

Among the gifts the Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BCE) of the Han dynasty gave to the Xiongnu king, Modu *Chanyu*, was a golden grooming tool for the queue, “*Bi yu* 比余.” The queue was also found in the Noin-Ula burial site in Mongolia, which contained the tombs of Xiongnu aristocracy, and this afforded more direct evidence for the Xiongnu queue hairstyle; C) Hanging and bun (*Pifa Chuiji* 披髮垂髻). The Xiongnu also tended to hang hair around two temples with a bun on the head. The *Hanshu* says Li Ling and Wei Lü, two former Han generals who surrendered to the Xiongnu and remained with them, were seen wearing Xiongnu clothing and sporting Xiongnu coiffures known as “*chuijie* 椎結,” or topknots.<sup>209</sup> Some terracotta Xiongnu and murals discovered in recent years have confirmed the existence of this fashion among the Xiongnu people. It is noteworthy that this sort of coiffure is still seen today among the Miaos 苗, one ethnic group residing in the southwestern China.<sup>210</sup>

As far as the coiffure of the Huns is concerned, Maenchen-Helfen argued that they could not have worn queues because Greek chroniclers had ample opportunity to see Huns but did not even mention queues. But another ancient writer emphasized that it was the strange hairdress of the Huns that impressed the Greek so much, for otherwise “they were like the other Huns.”<sup>211</sup> Priscus corroborated this by trying to be a native in his Hunnic dress with his hair “neatly clipped all round his head” when he visited Attila’s court.<sup>212</sup> The late Byzantine Greek historian Procopius (c. 500-570 CE) also gave an interesting description of the Hunnic hairdress in chapter 7 and 10 of the *Secret History*, speaking about the Blues and the Greens (political factions in the

<sup>209</sup> *Huainan zi*, vol. 11, original in Chinese, “胡貉匈奴之國，縱體施髮，箕倨反言。” *Shiji*, vol. 110, in Chinese, “比余一，黃金飾具帶一，黃金胥紕一。” *Hanshu*, vol.54, in Chinese, “(李)陵(衛)律持牛酒勞漢使，博飲，兩人皆胡服椎結。” For the archaeological evidence, see Ma Liqing, “The Study on the Xiongnu Hairstyles and Their Hair Martyrdom,” 35.

<sup>210</sup> Shiratori, “The Queue among the Peoples of North Asia,” 4.

<sup>211</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 237.

<sup>212</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 237.



Byzantine Empire in the sixth century) “clipping the hair short on the front of the head down to the temples, and let it hang down in great length and disorder in the back, as the Massagetae do. This weird combination they called the Hun haircut.”<sup>213</sup> Different from the coiffure above, Jordanes related of the Huns that “as is the custom of that race [the Huns], they plucked out the hair of their heads and made their faces hideous with deep wounds.”<sup>214</sup> Even though neither ancient writers nor archaeological evidence have demonstrated that the Huns had queues, it somehow became the widespread image of the Huns.

They had different hairstyles, but the two peoples did have one custom in common: face-cutting. Jordanes noted that the Huns “grew old beardless and their young men were without comeliness, because a face furrowed by the sword spoils by its scars the natural beauty of a beard” and “made their faces hideous with deep wounds,” both of which reveal that this people had a custom of face-cutting, mostly to mourn the dead.<sup>215</sup> Similarly, Chinese texts indicate that when the Xiongnu heard of the death of Geng Bing (d. 91 CE), a prominent general of the Later Han dynasty (25-220 CE), they were so sorrowful that they cut their faces until they bled.<sup>216</sup> Interesting enough, earlier Chinese historical annals such as the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, our two most important primary sources, do not mention any such customs among the Xiongnu. Chinese archaeologist Pan Ling (2006) speculated that face-cutting did not stem from the Xiongnu but from other nomads dwelling in northwestern China and that the Xiongnu did not adopt this

<sup>213</sup> *The Secret History of Procopius*, trans. By Richard Atwater, 1927.  
<https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/proc/shp/index.htm> (accessed 20 June 2020).

<sup>214</sup> *Getica*, 255-257 (Mierow, 124).

<sup>215</sup> *Getica*, 128 (Mierow, 87); *Getica*, 255-257 (Mierow, 124).

<sup>216</sup> *Hou Hanshu*, vol. 19, in Chinese: “匈奴聞秉卒，舉國號哭，或至梨[慄]面流血。” Chinese scholar Pan Ling (“The Origin of the Face-cutting Custom and its Spread,” *The Western Regions Studies*, 2006(04):100-104+119) commented that it was likely not the Northern Xiongnu who mourned this general who conquered them, but the Southern Xiongnu (the Xiongnu had split into the Northern and Southern realms in 48 CE).

practice until the Later Han dynasty.<sup>217</sup> Later peoples, for instance the Turks, were said to practice this custom frequently at funerals.<sup>218</sup> Consequently, although both the Xiongnu and the Huns practiced face-cutting, this tradition was not exclusively shared by the two peoples but by plenty of other nomadic groups as well. Beyond that, Maenchen-Helfen also remarked that the Huns might have practiced killing the aged as one of their customs, like their Germanic neighbours, but Chinese historians never accused the Xiongnu of such practices.<sup>219</sup> In summary, neither coiffures nor face-cutting practices constitute viable evidence for the Xiongnu-Hun identity.

## 4.2 Human Remains

Osteology is a relatively new science, and its terminology is still fluid.<sup>220</sup> Even so, osteologists or physical anthropologists have developed useful methods, in most cases anthropometric ones, to reconstruct (at least partially) the physical appearance of one people to determine their ethnic origins. Be they measurements of crania or long bones, they are of great help in estimating biological information regarding skeletons, but overall, crania are more accurate in presenting these data.<sup>221</sup> This section first treats osteological studies of the Xiongnu and the Huns, then discusses the most remarkable customs of the Huns – artificial cranial deformation, and briefly reviews the most up-to-date genetic studies of the two groups.

<sup>217</sup> Pan Ling, “The Origin of the Face-cutting Custom and its Spread,” 101.

<sup>218</sup> *Zhoushu*, vol. 50.

<sup>219</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “Huns and Hsiung-nu,” 237-8.

<sup>220</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 358.

<sup>221</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 15.

### 4.2.1 Skeletal studies

As the Xiongnu once inhabited the Eastern Eurasian steppe, with the Northern Xiongnu in present-day Siberia and Mongolia and the Southern Xiongnu in contemporary China, their burial sites have been discovered mostly by early Russian archaeologists and later by their Mongolian and Chinese counterparts. Due to the language barrier, archaeological reports in Chinese and a few in English are my principal references. Achievements have been made in scholarship concerning the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu from the perspective of biological anthropology. Physical anthropologist Pan Qifeng came up with the three phases in the ethnicity development process of the Xiongnu:

1) The early Xiongnu before the third century BCE, represented by the human remains from the two burial sites Taohongbala 桃紅巴拉, unearthed in 1973, and Maoqinggou 毛慶溝 in 1982, both in Inner Mongolia. They are Mongoloid in ethnicity and have the characteristics of a mixture of East Asian and North Asian races.

2) The second stage between the third century BCE and the first century CE involved plenty of integration between different tribes. Skeletal materials were chiefly found on the Mongolian Plateau and the Trans-Baikal region and contain both Europoid and Mongoloid races, but the predominant component of the Xiongnu should be the ancient Siberian type. These remains involved rather different features from those discovered in the Datong burial site excavated in what is now Qinghai province in China in 1977. According to this, Pan concluded that the Southern and Northern Xiongnu possibly differed in their physical features even before their split in 48 CE.

3). The Southern Xiongnu in the post-division period, represented by the Datong burials, tended to be closer to the sub-group North Asian of Mongoloid peoples, accompanied by certain connections with the East Asian group. However, the European Huns who descended from the Northern Xiongnu migrating westward are a mixture of Europoid and Mongoloid origins.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Pan Qifeng, "An Examination on the Origin of the Xiongnu from the Cranial Materials (Cong lugu ziliao kan Xiongnu zu de renzhong, in *Archaeological Studies in China*, vol. 2, Beijing: Science Press, 1986: 292-301),"299-300.

In summary, the conclusion that the predominant element of the Xiongnu was Asian ancestry, with those dwelling in the Transbaikal region mixed in with peoples of Europoid origin, is supported by most Chinese scholars.<sup>223</sup> There is another notable argument stating that there existed pronounced differences between the Northern and Southern Xiongnu based on skeletal studies from their burials. Chinese archaeologist Wu En (1990) remarked that this theory is backed by anthropological evidence.<sup>224</sup> Though Maenchen-Helfen did not mention any distinctions between the Northern and Southern Xiongnu, he argued that the nucleus of the Xiongnu during the early Later Han period consisted of Mongoloids of the Baikal type. This neither made all Mongoloids of the Baikal type into Xiongnu nor proved that all members of the confederacy were of the Baikal type.<sup>225</sup> In the meantime, Lin Gan, the renowned Chinese historian on the history of the Xiongnu, took a stand against the argument that the Xiongnu had Asian ancestry. He criticized the work physical anthropologists had done was not based on adequate remains of the Xiongnu, which in his view has made their conclusions less persuasive.<sup>226</sup> Instead, he believed that the Xiongnu were originally of European ancestry, just as McGovern (1939) did, and that they were associated with Asians because of political intermarriage (*heqin*) between the Han and Xiongnu courts and inter-migration between two peoples.<sup>227</sup> He also mentioned two pieces of archaeological evidence, one an embroidered

<sup>223</sup> Huang Wenbi, "The Origin of the Xiongnu," 85-90; Wu En, "Several Problems in the Studies of the Xiongnu Archaeology," 1990(04): 409-437; Zhu Hong, "Ethnological Xiongnu, Xianbei, and Kitan," 1994(02): 7-13; Aerdingfu, "The study on the Xiongnu origin," 2000(02):42-45; "Europoid or Mongoloid?" 2000(03):52-58; Zhang Quanchao and Zhu Hong, "Some Understandings on the Xiongnu ethnicity," 2006(06):34-38; Ma Liqing, "The Archaeological and Anthropological Studies on the Xiongnu ethnicity," 2007(04):48-54; Zhao Xin and Yuan Haibing, "A Literature Review of the Ethnographic Study on the Xiongnu and Xianbei," 2008(01):75-80.

<sup>224</sup> Wu En, "Several Problems in the Studies of the Xiongnu Archaeology," 427.

<sup>225</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 367.

<sup>226</sup> Lin Gan, "The Investigation on the origins of three peoples, Xiongnu, Donghu, and Turks (Guanyu Xiongnu, Donghu, Tujie san da zuxi renzhong de tansuo)," *Journal of Inner Mongolia University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 1997(05): 7-16.

<sup>227</sup> Lin Gan, "The Investigation on the origins of three peoples, Xiongnu, Donghu, and Turks," 8-9.

portrait of a Xiongnu with blue eyes and a thick beard uncovered in the Noin-Ula burial sites in Mongolia, and the other a Xiongnu figure on two rectangular openwork copper ornaments with high noses found in a Xiongnu grave located in modern Shaanxi province, China, to establish the Turkish origin of the Xiongnu.<sup>228</sup> Of course, he also disagreed with the hypothesis on the different ethnic origins of the Northern and Southern Xiongnu. Another anthropologist, Han Kangxin (1992), espoused a similar view after investigating human skeletal remains unearthed in Central Asia.<sup>229</sup> He tended to believe that these remains possibly belonged to the Northern Xiongnu, a group who involved more European ancestry and generally practiced artificial cranial deformation, a prominent feature different from those crania found around Lake Baikal.<sup>230</sup> Overall, the mainstream theory on the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu is Asian ancestry, either as an admixture East and North Asian origins or as an ancient Siberia group.

As far as the Huns are concerned, many Hunnic burial sites exist and contain thousands of skulls.<sup>231</sup> American physical anthropologist Carleton Stevens Coon (1939) maintained that the leading classes of the Huns appear to have kept themselves apart and to have preserved their Mongoloid racial types pure throughout the centuries of their political dominance.<sup>232</sup> He summarized the ideas of the respected Hungarian anthropologist Lajos Bartucz, who published his fundamental study on ethnic groups in Hungary in 1935. Bartucz found one certain Mongoloid type in Hunnic burials and named it Type A:

Type A is dolicho- to mesocephalic with a mean index of 75.5 for the males and 77.0 for the females. These skulls are of great length and considerable size. The forehead is very narrow, the temples sharply curved, and the zygomatic arches laterally bowed. The occiput is narrow and conical at the end. From the side profile, the forehead appears

<sup>228</sup> Lin Gan, "The Investigation on the origins of three peoples, Xiongnu, Donghu, and Turks," 9.

<sup>229</sup> Han Kangxin, "Ethnic Anthropological Features of the Sai [Saka], Wusun, Xiongnu, and Turks (Sai, Wusun, Xiongnu he Tujie zhi zhongzu renlei xuetzheng)," *The Western Regions Studies*, 1992(02): 3-23.

<sup>230</sup> Han Kangxin, "Ethnic Anthropological Features of the Sai [Saka], Wusun, Xiongnu, and Turks," 17.

<sup>231</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 230.

<sup>232</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 231.

exceptionally low and slanting. The vertex falls well back of bregma, and the profile is curved through the extent of its length. In the occipital region the line of neck muscle attachment forms a powerful torus. The vault of this type is lower than that found in any European group. . . . . The nasal bones are long, narrow, and flat; so that the nasal skeleton sometimes fails to project in front of the malars. The lower borders of the nasal opening are smoothly rounded. The malars are extremely large and prominent, the canine fossa completely lacking, and the maxillary sinus, which overlies it, is so blown out that the surface of the bone is at this point often raised. The dental arch of the palate is U-shaped. The mandible is heavy, but the chin, however, but slightly developed. The whole sub-nasal portion of the face is enormous. The stature of this type, calculated from the long bones, is 164.4 cm for the males, 153.1 cm for the females.<sup>233</sup>

This identification of Type A predominantly with the Huns is generally regarded as valid.<sup>234</sup> The Asian/Mongoloid origins of the Huns are further verified by a study of Hunnic head hair from graves dating to the same period. The sample was “very fine, straight, and jet black,” in other words classically Asian, but the fineness cast some doubt upon the generalization that all Asian hair must be coarse.<sup>235</sup> Evidence of incontrovertibly human remains in eastern European graves completely dispels the theory that the Huns may have been largely European in racial type, Professor Coon concluded. He further explained that if the Xiongnu were the ancestors of the Huns, then “the early inhabitants of Mongolia were definitely Mongoloid.”<sup>236</sup> With respect to the Chinese references McGovern found describing the Xiongnu as “hairy, big-nosed, and partially blond,” Coon argued that on the basis of available skeletal remains, it is unlikely that this influence could have penetrated the entire Hunnic nation.<sup>237</sup> Although Coon was deeply convinced that there is no problem in identifying the Huns with the Xiongnu, both of whom had

<sup>233</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 230. Dolichocephalic refers to possessing a cephalic index of 75.9 and under for males (75 and under for females) and means “long-headed.” Mesocephalic indicates possessing a cephalic index of 76.0 to 80.9 for males (75.0 to 82.9 for females) and means “medium-headed.” Here in a non-terminological sense, Bartuca assumed that Hunnic males tended to be more long-headed, while females were more medium-headed, according to his studies on the Hunnic crania. (I am unfortunately unable to read his work in Hungarian).

<sup>234</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 231.

<sup>235</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 231.

<sup>236</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 232.

<sup>237</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 232.

largely Mongoloid ancestry, his interpretation of Professor Bartucz's argumentation was problematic, according to Maenchen-Helfen. As Bartucz (whose analysis of human remains in Hungarian graves was instrumental) noted, he did not know "of a single skull which could, beyond any doubt, be regarded as Hunnic."<sup>238</sup> We may then ask what the standards are for telling whether a grave belongs to the Huns or other contemporary peoples dwelling in the same region. The leading problem remains, which is that the material from Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania is by far too small to determine quantitative relationships between various races in Attila's empire.<sup>239</sup> What is more, as mentioned earlier the upper classes in Hunnic society tried to set a clear boundary with the lower ones, especially pertaining to physical appearance. If there were such thing, it would not be surprising that racial phenotypes differed over different classes, and this would certainly need to be taken into consideration. Most of the skulls in all likelihood came from the graves of poor people because Maenchen-Helfen speculated that prominent Huns were likely cremated.<sup>240</sup>

In addition to limited skeletal material, other general difficulties encountered in osteological studies of the Huns and Xiongnu make things more complicated. There are, for instance, considerations of whether the material has been published and is accessible and whether it is properly documented as to sex, provenience, and cultural association. If not, measures of variability are of only slight value, and what is worse, they jeopardize the use of this metric means.<sup>241</sup> Further, if the material was frequently found in a fragmentary state, metric

<sup>238</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 364.

<sup>239</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 367.

<sup>240</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 367.

<sup>241</sup> Coon, *The Races of Europe*, 13.

methods are impractical.<sup>242</sup> These difficulties apply to the anthropological studies on both the Xiongnu and Huns and militate against arriving at any conclusive estimation of their ethnic origins.

#### 4.2.2 Artificial cranial deformation

One of the most striking features of Hunnic crania is their modification, or artificial cranial deformation, in which the skull of a human being, typically starting in childhood, is intentionally deformed by applying force. The modification involves different shapes: flat, elongated, rounded, and conical. This custom has been practiced in many geographically and chronologically different cultures since as early as the Neolithic period (c. 10,000- 4,500 BCE).<sup>243</sup> However, it is not advisable to suggest continuity with the continuing presence of head binding across separate ages and areas, as this is more likely a culturally defined behavior that arose independently at different times in several different regions.<sup>244</sup> In Late Antiquity (300-600 CE) the Huns, Alans, and East Germanic tribes ruled by the Huns practiced deformation, and the distribution of deformation in the Hunnic territory suggests neither age/sex bias nor a relationship to social stratification.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless, modified skulls do constitute a marker of

<sup>242</sup> Fortunately I had one opportunity to visit one of the world's largest collections of Xiongnu remains, in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the National University of Mongolia in the summer 2019. Unfortunately, there were few complete skulls here.

<sup>243</sup> Meiklejohn and others, "Artificial Cranial Deformation in the Proto-Neolithic and Neolithic Near East and its Possible Origin: Evidence from Four Sites," 84. Figure 2 in this article demonstrates the various types of skull deformations. (90-93)

<sup>244</sup> Meiklejohn and others, "Artificial Cranial Deformation in the Proto-Neolithic and Neolithic Near East and its Possible Origin," 95-6. This idea was proposed by one of the authors, Ralph Solecki.

<sup>245</sup> Marianne Görman, "Influences from the Huns on Scandinavian Sacrificial Customs during 300-500 AD (in *The Problem of Ritual*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck, Finland, 1993: 275-98)," 279. Anthropologists A. Schliz (1905) and F. Holter (1925) suggested that German tribes took over the practice of head-flattening from the Sarmatians instead of the Huns (Maenchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 238), because plenty of modified skulls were discovered in Romanian burial sites associated with the Sarmatians and dating from the second and third centuries CE (Hakenbeck, "'Hunnic' modified skulls," 69-70).



group identity.<sup>246</sup> Anthropologists Torres-Rouff and Yablonsky (2005) noted that cranial deformation in particular created physical differentiation in a society where biological differences did not necessarily exist.<sup>247</sup>

Deformed skulls were found in the Pannonian Basin covering the timespan of the Migration Period (c. 300-600 CE). They were associated with the Sarmatians in the pre-Hunnic invasion period, but after the arrival of the Huns the incidence of modified crania rose sharply in burials in Hungary to around 50 to 80 percent of skulls.<sup>248</sup> What is more, they started to appear more frequently in nomadic burials throughout Europe, which suggests the cultural influence of the Huns.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, cranial deformation did not remain fashionable for long and fell into disuse among Germanic peoples and nomads of the Western Eurasian Steppe when the reign of Attila ended.<sup>250</sup> It is difficult to decide which ethnic group a burial site containing deformed skulls belongs to, but burials from the Carpathian Basin in Hungary during the late fourth century and the first half of the fifth century were likely associated with the Huns.

Anthropologists Peter Mayall and others compared crania found in Hungary with those found in Georgia and concluded that

They [The Hungarian crania] were characterized by relatively moderate frontal gradient, wide and shallow parietal outline and shallow occipital outline. This suggests that they were modified using the two-bandage technique. This characteristic of Hungarian crania from the Migration Period has been recognized for some time. Pap [Hungarian anthropologist] described the binding process at the site of Keszthely-Fenékpuszta as having one concentrically fitted bandage going from forehead to the nape of the neck across the temporal, and another bandage going from the crown of the head to

<sup>246</sup> Hakenbeck, “‘Hunnic’ modified skulls,” 67.

<sup>247</sup> Torres-Rouff and Yablonsky, “Cranial Vault Modification as a Cultural artifact,” 4.

<sup>248</sup> Mayall and others, “Migrating Huns and Modified heads,” 3. I personally think the skull modification rate of 50% to 80% is too high. This is because according to professor Hakenbeck (“‘Hunnic’ modified skulls,” 69-70), in the cluster of modified skulls from the area around Vienna, Lower Austria, and Moravia (dating to the mid fifth century, the peak of the Hunnic Empire), individuals with cranial deformations accounted on average for between 10% and 20% of all inhumations.

<sup>249</sup> Mayall and others, “Migrating Huns and Modified heads,” 19.

<sup>250</sup> Görman, “Influences from the Huns on Scandinavian Sacrificial Customs during 300-500 AD,” 279.

continue under the chin. The second bandage caused a bregmatic depression around the coronal suture reducing cranial height while also reducing the height of the mandibular ramus and symphysis and flattening the ramus. Pap suggested that the second bandage would not have hindered opening the mouth for food intake but would have tightened the bandage to make it more effective.<sup>251</sup>

This two-bandage method, adopted by the Huns who tried to promote their identity by improving an existing cultural custom, became prevalent in the Transdanubian region following the Hunnic invasion.<sup>252</sup> It also suggests that the Huns, regardless of their genetic and ethnic background, were ingeniously able to differentiate themselves from other contemporary groups by standardizing the technique of modification as an identity marker to make their modified crania with low cranial vaults.<sup>253</sup> Although there exists relatively plentiful research on artificial cranial deformation as practiced by the Huns, no clear-cut conclusions have been drawn on how this practice relates to other factors like age, sex, and social stratification. Cranial deformation also makes it nearly impossible to determine the ethnic origins of the Huns, as all cranial indices were severely affected.<sup>254</sup>

As for the Xiongnu, whether they ever practiced this tradition is debatable. Modified skulls were indeed found among the Mongolian Kenkol group (suspected to be the Northern Xiongnu) from the Tian Shan and Pamir mountains, dating to the first century CE. Anthropologist Werner believed that this tradition was transmitted to the Sarmatians and Alans in the third and fourth centuries CE and then spread into Central Europe with the Hunnic

<sup>251</sup> Mayall and others, "Migrating Huns and Modified heads," 15. The two-bandage technique is cited from Ildiko Pap ("Data to the Problem of Artificial Cranial Deformation," Part 3, *Annales Historico-Naturales Musei Nationalis Hungarici* 77, 1985: 281-289).

<sup>252</sup> Mayall and others, "Migrating Huns and Modified heads," 16.

<sup>253</sup> Mayall and others, "Migrating Huns and Modified heads," 18.

<sup>254</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 366.

expansion in the early fifth century.<sup>255</sup> Overall, the custom of cranial modification was widespread over the Eurasian steppe from South Russia to Central Asia in late antiquity. Even if evidence shows that the Xiongnu adopted the practice, it is of little help in identifying the Huns with them.

#### 4.2.3 Genetic studies

The application of genetic studies to historical relationship between different peoples did not start until the past two decades. As a new science, even historians have high expectations for this field, hoping to look for answers to historically and archaeologically unsolved problems. Applying multiple strands of evidence to historical puzzles requires unprecedented collaboration between different disciplines. There have indeed been some attempts involving genetic studies to consider the Xiongnu-Huns identity. Scholars Kijeong Kim and other authors (2010) analyzed the genetic components of three skeletons from the Xiongnu elite cemetery at the Duurlig Nars, Mongolia, and scientifically found for the first time that Indo-European elements were present in the Xiongnu Empire of ancient Mongolia.<sup>256</sup> This western Eurasian male individual was not of East Asian origin but rather of either Transbaikalian or Scythian type, thus suggesting multiethnic tolerance and identity within the Xiongnu Empire.<sup>257</sup> The authors did not specify the relations between this individual and other group members or other nomads but proposed that the West Eurasian male likely represented a Bronze Age migration from the Black Sea region.<sup>258</sup> They also agreed with an earlier theory that the Xiongnu were linked to more than one ethnicity,

<sup>255</sup> Joachim Werner, *Beiträge zur Archäologie des Attila-Reiches* (München: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1956), 11.

<sup>256</sup> Kijeong Kim and others, "A Western Eurasian Male is Found in 2000-year-old Elite Xiongnu Cemetery in Northeast Mongolia," 438.

<sup>257</sup> Kim and others, "A Western Eurasian Male is Found," 438.

<sup>258</sup> Kim and others, "A Western Eurasian Male is Found," 437.

especially since they had ruled over vast territories, including diverse nomadic tribes, for three centuries.<sup>259</sup>

Later on, scientists P. B. Damgaard and others (2018) studied 137 ancient human genomes from across the Eurasian steppes and concluded with similar ideas concerning the Xiongnu: for one, Xiongnu individuals were admixtures of East Asian and West Eurasian origins; for another, the Xiongnu confederation was genetically heterogeneous.<sup>260</sup> The authors tended to believe that the European Huns were descended from the Xiongnu who expanded westwards and mixed with the Sakas whose territory they had invaded.<sup>261</sup> While the said two articles paid more attention to the Xiongnu and much less to specifically Hunnic samples, the Hungarian geneticists Endre Neparácski and others (2019) took 49 individuals of the Huns, Avars, and other nomadic peoples who conquered the Carpathian Basin as their objects, including three possible Hunnic elites.<sup>262</sup> As all three Hunnic males studied had brown eyes and black/brown hair, indicating an admixture of European and East Asian ancestry, the authors suspected that while their genetic data might connect the European Huns with the Asian Xiongnu, no strong inferences could be drawn due to the small sample.<sup>263</sup>

Di Cosmo has summarized three problems encountered in the genetics: A) The overlap between a biological notion of population on the one hand and ethnic, political or cultural concepts of “people” on the other. This raises the issue of the validity of historically sensitive

<sup>259</sup> Kim and others, “A Western Eurasian Male is Found,” 429.

<sup>260</sup> Damgaard and others, “137 ancient human genomes from across the Eurasian steppes,” 369–373.

<sup>261</sup> Damgaard and others, “137 ancient human genomes,” 371. Here is a surprising find regarding the authors’ view on the Xiongnu language, “The East Asian migration starting with the Xiongnu accords well with the hypothesis that early Turkic was the major language of Xiongnu group.” (373-4)

<sup>262</sup> Endre Neparácski and others, “Y-chromosome Haplogroups from Hun, Avar and Conquering Hungarian Period Nomadic People of the Carpathian Basin,” 1-12.

<sup>263</sup> Neparácski and others, “Y-chromosome Haplogroups from Hun, Avar and Conquering Hungarian Period Nomadic People of the Carpathian Basin,” 9.

conclusions based exclusively or primarily on genetic data; B) Given that the data available are still extremely scarce and that research on ancient DNA is intrinsically unstable, and that DNA test results are subject to contamination and other technical pitfalls, it takes time to map the region genetically; C) Often complicating the potential usefulness of DNA data is the tendency of scientists to confirm rather than problematize and confute existing archaeological or historical conjectures.<sup>264</sup> He also remarked that future genetic research could contribute to the formulation of more accurate historical hypotheses regarding population movements only if archaeological and anthropological data complement it. This would allow a critical re-assessment of existing theories.<sup>265</sup> Altogether, most recent DNA studies have been unable to determine genetic affinity between the two peoples, owing to the existing difficulties.

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the ethnic origins of two peoples, including their physical appearance and skeletal traits, from two main sources: historical records and unearthed human remains. Given that written sources contain few scattered relevant accounts on phenotypical appearance, I also make use of discovered relics that have portraits of the Xiongnu or Huns. The sources did not provide more information to reconstruct the physical features and led scholars into wild imagination and endless debates, because the accounts may have pictured distinctive individuals as one group. This is why more and more experts now believe that both the Xiongnu and the Huns were heterogeneous groups.

<sup>264</sup> Nicola Di Cosmo, "Ethnogenesis, Coevolution and Political Morphology of the Earliest Steppe Empire: the Xiongnu Question Revisited (in *Xiongnu Archaeology: Multidisciplinary perspectives of the First Steppe Empire in Inner Asia*, ed. Ursula Brosseder and Bryan K. Miller, Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology, vol. 5. Bonn, 2011, 35-48)," 40-2.

<sup>265</sup> Di Cosmo, "Ethnogenesis, Coevolution and Political Morphology of the Earliest Steppe Empire," 42.

I then continue to discuss the cultural customs of two peoples, including coiffures and face-cutting traditions, both of which could be identity markers and inevitably affect how they looked. As a matter of fact, I do not find evidence stating that the two groups shared some exclusive customs, as plenty of other nomads on the steppe practiced identical or similar traditions.

After that, I move on to examine the osteological source, involving crania and skeletons. According to the existing skeletal studies, it has been shown that the mainstream theory on the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu is Asian ancestry, either as a mixture of East and North Asian peoples or as an ancient Siberia group, with the Northern Xiongnu tending to have mixed with European ancestry. The Huns, for their part, were likely an admixture of both European and Asian origin, but no conclusive evidence has been found to prove that the two peoples were one and the same. Genetic studies have afforded the same result, demonstrating nothing more than that both groups were multiethnic in their origins. Neither anthropological studies nor genetic analysis have succeeded in providing an incontrovertible conclusion, and this is because studies on human remains have met up with certain challenges, for example the minimal sample size and other factors indicating who the owners of burial sites were. As Sinor claimed, none of the tombs found can be attributed to the Huns with certainty.<sup>266</sup> Beyond that, the custom of artificial cranial deformation as practiced by the Huns makes racial diagnosis even more difficult. I also briefly discuss skull modification practices adopted by many geographically and chronologically different groups.

In sum, the contributions that existing scholarship has made are limited to demonstrating that both the Xiongnu and the Huns were racially diverse, but it has not established the identity

<sup>266</sup> Sinor, "The Hun period," 202-3.

between them. Again, even if the two groups were proven to be physically and genetically identical, as perceived by French orientalist de laVaissière, “dans la steppe, la langue et le sang important peu (Language and blood did not matter in the steppe).” Instead, it was political and cultural identity that counted most.<sup>267</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Étienne de la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 23.

## Chapter 5. Archaeological Finds

Only when archaeological and historical sources are combined does a picture of possible connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns emerge. While some of the customs of both peoples were common to all nomads and semi-nomads in the Eurasian steppe, archaeologists believe that if there existed some particular features of the Huns' material culture exclusively found nowhere else but among the Xiongnu, then it would be safe to assume that there were continuities between two entities. In other words, under these circumstances the Xiongnu-Hun equation would be proven.

Historians have started to incorporate excavated material culture as evidence into historical discussions since the 1940s, especially those involving the work of Maenchen-Helfen, who did a masterful synthesis and analysis of rather inaccessible material in 1973. But it was not until the 1990s that scholars tried to establish a connection between Asian Xiongnu and European Huns through archaeological analysis of artifacts. For instance, Russian experts Irina Zaseckaja and Nikolai Bokovenko examined the Hunnic type cauldrons found primarily in the Europe to determine their origin, and they believed that the distribution of metal cauldrons across Eurasia reflected a gradual migration of the Xiongnu group to the West.<sup>268</sup> Thereafter scholars increasingly involved archaeological evidence into the debate, and in turn archaeology was expected to produce meaningful scholarship in order to advance the discussion. David Curtis Wright believed that the future of this problem more than likely lay in archaeology.<sup>269</sup> This chapter covers an overview of Xiongnu and Hunnic burial sites and two key archaeological markers: horse burials and cauldrons.

<sup>268</sup> Irina Zaseckaja and Nikolai Bokovenko, "The Origin of the Hunnish Cauldrons in East-Europe," in *The Archaeology of the Steppes: Methods and Strategies*, ed. Bruno Genito, Napoli, 1994: 701-24.

<sup>269</sup> Wright, "The Hsiung-nu-Hun Equation Revisited," 106.



## 5.1 Cemeteries

Since the Noin-Ula burial site in northern Mongolia was found and excavated by Pyotr Kozlov in the 1920s, new excavations have never been stopped in Mongolia and Transbaikalia. The Noin-Ula burial grounds are considered the tombs of the aristocracy of the Xiongnu, and they contain over 200 large burial mounds, all of which were robbed in antiquity and had bodies and valuable objects removed from them. In a time-honored tradition among nomads, new nomadic leaders tended to desecrate the *Chanyus'* royal catacombs for revenge and union with their subjects. Fortunately, some weaponry, utensils, and artifacts were left behind in the wake of these lootings. As the old homeland of the ancient Xiongnu, plenty of cemeteries found by Russian and Mongolian archaeologists in Mongolia and the Lake Baikal region were related to Xiongnu. Yet in archaeology, scholars have not yet arrived at a consensus on Xiongnu culture and Xiongnu archaeology. This is because there exist two fundamental issues: archaeological determination of Xiongnu sites and periodization of archaeological culture associated with the Xiongnu.<sup>270</sup>

Concerning the former issue, it is necessary to establish the designation of the term “Xiongnu.” A majority of experts have agreed that this name denotes a unified macro-regional polity in the social-political sense instead of “a coherent entity of people with the same language, same ethnic affiliation, a uniform biological heritage or a completely homogeneous archaeological culture.”<sup>271</sup> The variation on the understanding of “Xiongnu culture” does not enable archaeologists to fully define the “archaeological culture” or “archaeological cultural

<sup>270</sup> Ursula Brosseder and Bryan K. Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies (in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 19-33),” 30.

<sup>271</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 30-1.

groups” of Transbaikalia, Mongolia, and northern China in the late Iron Age.<sup>272</sup> Periodizing Xiongnu remains requires not only the identification of beginning and end dates of material attributed to the Xiongnu phenomenon, but also, and more importantly, possible sub-periods within the time span of the Xiongnu, all in order to identify particular developments. This is of course a challenge in scholarship.<sup>273</sup> Due to the existing problems in Xiongnu archaeology, there remains the thorny challenge posed by Nicola Di Cosmo (2011) regarding the difference between two completely separate spheres (Northern China and Mongolia) and their surrounding regions, which in turn generate two archaeological schools, Chinese and Soviet-Mongol:<sup>274</sup>

Each of them defines its “Xiongnu” cultures in entirely different ways, both methodologically and typologically: in China, a Northern non-Chinese site is located in an area and dated to a period consistent with the presence of the Xiongnu people, it would be classified as “Xiongnu”; in the Mongolian region, the identification is mostly based on elements such as the typology of the site and excavated artifacts.<sup>275</sup>

Due to the inconsistent understandings of these two distinct schools and the limited excavations, the archaeological culture of the Xiongnu appears fragmented. However, the volume *Xiongnu Archaeology: Multidisciplinary Perspectives of the First Steppe Empire in Inner Asia*, edited by archaeologists Ursula Brosseder and Bryan K. Miller on the 2,220<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the First Empire in Mongol Territory by the Xiongnu, has presented us with updated insights on the elements of the Xiongnu culture and the polity itself.<sup>276</sup> In this volume Chinese archaeologist Ling Pan summarized six main sites of the Xiongnu within the northern periphery of China (the frontier zone of the Great Wall), whereas other authors

<sup>272</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 31.

<sup>273</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 33.

<sup>274</sup> Di Cosmo, “Ethnogenesis, Coevolution and Political Morphology of the Earliest Steppe Empire,” 35-48.

<sup>275</sup> Di Cosmo, “Ethnogenesis, Coevolution and Political Morphology of the Earliest Steppe Empire,” 39.

<sup>276</sup> Brosseder and Miller (ed.), *Xiongnu Archaeology: Multidisciplinary perspectives of the First Steppe Empire in Inner Asia*. Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology, vol. 5. Bonn, 2011.

chose one or several of the thousands of tombs in Mongolia and Transbaikalia as their case study.<sup>277</sup> Despite of the vast quantities of the burials related to the Xiongnu, there are only four fully excavated Xiongnu cemeteries so far: Ivolga, Dyrestui, Burkhan Tolgoi, and Daodunzi.<sup>278</sup> What is worse, the overwhelming majority of steppe burials bear traces of destruction and looting, and as a result extant burial assemblages are often grossly incomplete.<sup>279</sup> Aside from the horse burials and cauldrons discussed in the following sections, I intend to introduce some notable achievements that scholarship has made concerning the cemeteries of the two entities.

There were two main types of Xiongnu burials: the squared ramped “terrace” tombs and the more common circular tombs.<sup>280</sup> The former type is shared among the large mortuary complexes of the Xiongnu elite, with prominent visible components in central Mongolia and the immediate surrounding areas, which are believed to have been the core of the Xiongnu confederacy. The latter typically occurred in clusters or larger cemeteries and lacked the same degree of visual prominence as the former monument types.<sup>281</sup> The division between two types has been equated to a difference between “elite” and “commoner” graves, but such an explanation, Brosseder and Miller argued, is problematic because of “its simplicity and ignorance of the nature of the mortuary investments and typically luxuriant burial assemblages” and also because of the discovery of other lesser interments which do not qualify as either of these varieties.<sup>282</sup> Archaeologists also have found agricultural tools in Xiongnu tombs, and this

<sup>277</sup> Ling Pan, “A Summary of Xiongnu Sites within the Northern Periphery of China,” in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 463-74.

<sup>278</sup> Kim, *The Huns*, 32.

<sup>279</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 26.

<sup>280</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 24; Erik G. Johannesson, “Grave Matters: Reconstructing a Xiongnu Identity from Mortuary Stone Monuments (in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 201-12),” 208.

<sup>281</sup> Johannesson, “Grave Matters,” 208.

<sup>282</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 24.

indicates that agriculture also played a significant role in addition to the pastoralism, which was previously assumed to have been the primary mode of production among the Xiongnu entity.<sup>283</sup> Along with agriculture, up to twenty fortified settlements as permanent sites with buildings of various types have so far been documented.<sup>284</sup> Beyond that, the Xiongnu were active in both regional and interregional trade, as indicated by grave goods found in their burials involving Chinese metals, lacquer vessels, and textiles as well as items originating from the Greco-Bactrian realm.<sup>285</sup> Although the various cemeteries in the vast territory of the Xiongnu differ in funerary assemblages of artifacts including weaponry and jewelry, and in styles of furnishing, there is one thing in common among the majority of larger tombs: the tradition of using wooden coffins to bury their deceased noblemen. This custom was practiced even before the introduction of the rectangular-shaped tombs with entrance shafts.<sup>286</sup> Even though its southern neighbor, the Han dynasty of China, had a long history of utilizing wooden cists, archaeologist Gelegdorzh Eregzen believed that the burial structures for Xiongnu nobility were not products of Han cultural influence, but instead were elements of indigenous nomadic culture, and this because the tradition of constructing wooden-chambered tombs was already prevalent among the nomads no later than the middle of the first millennium BCE.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>283</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 27; Kim, *The Huns*, 26.

<sup>284</sup> See Sergei V. Danilov (“Typology of Ancient Settlement Complexes of the Xiongnu in Mongolia and Transbaikalia,” in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 129-36) for details on these settlements and their fortifications and buildings, *etc.*

<sup>285</sup> Brosseder and Miller, “State of Research and Future of Xiongnu Studies,” 2011, 25; Bryan K. Miller, “Permutations of Peripheries in the Xiongnu Empire (in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 559-78),” 578.

<sup>286</sup> Gelegdorzh Eregzen, “A Comparative Analysis of Xiongnu Noble tombs and Burials in Adjacent Regions (in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 275-84),” 281.

<sup>287</sup> Eregzen, “A Comparative Analysis of Xiongnu Noble tombs and Burials in Adjacent Regions,” 282; Miller (“Permutations of Peripheries in the Xiongnu Empire,” 570) held the similar observations, even the Xiongnu burials in the southern Altai where generally lack tree coverage still appear to adhere to the old tradition in the Xiongnu core (Mongolia), of interring the deceased in wooden coffins.

When it comes to Hunnic burial sites, unfortunately the archaeological record is less extensive due to the nomadic nature of Hunnic society and, more importantly, the relative lack of identified and exclusive features of Hunnic material culture. Although a great amount of archaeological sites has been discovered on the Great Hungarian Plain and its environs since 1945, by 2005 there were no more than two hundred positively identified Hunnic burials with potential Hunnic materials.<sup>288</sup> What is more, “proper” Huns have proved extremely hard to find. These burials are distinct as they contain bows, non-standard European modes of dress, elongated skulls, and so-called Hunnic cauldrons.<sup>289</sup> One explanation for the scarcity of Hunnic material was propounded by Maenchen-Helfen, and it was that the noble Huns may have been cremated without leaving any traces.<sup>290</sup> Another reason could be that the Huns started to dress like their Germanic subject peoples, just as they learned Gothic languages, thus making it impossible to tell Huns from Goths (or anyone else), in burial complexes.<sup>291</sup> Even though it is difficult to assign any artifact to the Huns ethnically, some archaeologists who have studied their arrowheads, gold diadems, mirrors and related burial rituals (broken metallic mirrors buried with the dead), artificial cranial deformation as discussed in the last chapter, along with the personal ornaments and cauldrons to be covered in the following section. Maenchen-Helfen examined tanged arrowheads in Hunnic burials, which were “of iron, cast in molds, and sharpened by rubbing on a stone” with either triangular-bladed or triangular-solid points, and he noted that the Hunnic arrowheads were virtually identical with Sarmatian ones.<sup>292</sup> Meanwhile, the most commonly found bone points of the Xiongnu were in entirely different shapes.<sup>293</sup> He also listed a

<sup>288</sup> Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 331.

<sup>289</sup> Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 331.

<sup>290</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 367.

<sup>291</sup> Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 332.

<sup>292</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” 232.

<sup>293</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, “The Ethnic Name Hun,” 232.

total of six known Hunnic diadems, the usage of which was confirmed by both textual sources and archaeological finds.<sup>294</sup>

Chinese mirrors are interesting finds. As the neighbouring state of Han dynasty, the Xiongnu either frequently traded with the Chinese or received numerous gifts by paying respects to the Han Emperors, in which case it would not be unusual for Chinese mirrors to be found in Xiongnu burials. But their appearance in Hunnic tombs has left scholars puzzling. Sarmatian loop-mirrors (disks of whitish bronze with a loop or perforated knob on the back for attaching to a cord that secured them) supposedly worn by the Huns, Maenchen-Helfen remarked, ultimately go back to Chinese TLV mirrors (one type of bronze mirror popular during the Han dynasty with symbols resembling the letters T, L, and V) found in Xiongnu graves.<sup>295</sup> This does not *ipso facto* establish connections between the Huns and the Xiongnu, but it does demonstrate the strong influence of Central Asian civilizations, themselves in contact with China, on the Sarmatians.<sup>296</sup>

However, why were the loop-mirrors not Hunnic, especially since they were found in Hunnic burial sites? Archaeologist J. Werner argued that these mirrors came to the West together with the Huns but belonged to Sarmatians, who possessed them long before the Huns.

Maenchen-Helfen offered further specific speculations: the original bearers of the mirrors were Eastern Sarmatians, whom the Huns forced to join them east of the Don and with whom they had made an alliance on the Don.<sup>297</sup> In the meantime, what did the Huns use these mirrors for? Why

<sup>294</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 297-306. Gold (or gilt) diadems of Hunnic noble women from the Xiongnu and the Huns were considered one of eight archaeological links between two groups by Miklós Érdy (“Three Archaeological Links between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” 293-302; “Examination of Eight Archaeological Links Between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” 106-25; “Archaeological Continuity between the Xiongnu and the Huns: Eight Connections Supported by Written Sources,” 11-27; “Xiongnu and Huns One and the Same: Analyzing Eight Archaeological Links And Data from Ancient Written Sources,” 5-36.).

<sup>295</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 347-52.

<sup>296</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 352.

<sup>297</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 353.

were many of the mirrors unearthed intentionally broken before being placed in the grave? There have not been relevant theories brought forward, except for ritual purposes. No evidence thus far available indicates that the Xiongnu celebrated similar traditions. Maenchen-Helfen, the indefatigable critic of the Xiongnu-Hun equation, also investigated the personal ornaments of the Huns, including gold plaques on garments, embroidery, and beads, in order to show that the Huns of the fifth century followed “international” fashion, as these ornaments were often either the products of Roman workshops or else products from all parts of the Roman Empire, Persia, and other regions.<sup>298</sup> In summary, the problems in identifying the Xiongnu and the Hun burial sites and the lack of exclusive features of material cultures possessed by the two peoples (excepting the horse burials and cauldrons to be discussed in the ensuing sections) have prevented us from advancing the question from archaeological perspectives.

## 5.2 Partial Horse Burials

It is of no necessity to emphasize the significance of horses to mounted nomadic peoples throughout the Eurasian steppe. Obviously regarded as the most “noble” animal, even in the sacrificial rites practiced among various nomads, horses were often deposited in burials last.<sup>299</sup> Though scholars have investigated the horse burials of the Xiongnu and the Huns, Miklós Érdy was the first to come up with the parallels between two entities’ mortuary practice of this specific type. Notably, historian David Curtis Wright first in 1997 mentioned Érdy’s contribution to this problem in archaeological perspective, unfortunately which has been hardly recognized by other contemporary scholars. Therefore, this section concentrates on introducing Érdy’s argumentation

<sup>298</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 354-7.

<sup>299</sup> Hélène Martin, “The Animal in the Xiongnu Funeral Universe: Companion of the Living, Escort of the Dead (in *Xiongnu Archaeology*, 229-242),” 241.

regarding the “new archaeological evidence” for the Xiongnu-Hun identification and some of my own thoughts.

Érdy (1931-2017) was a versatile and productive researcher specializing in Oriental archaeology, a chemical engineer, and a Hungarian-born dentist. He made plenty of intriguing archaeological observations, including the partial horse burials and the unique bronze cauldrons commonly found among both the Xiongnu and Hunnic burial sites. His works have failed to attract much scholarly attention for two possible causes, I suppose: for one, most of his early essays were written in Hungarian, a language which the majority of the academia has difficulties with; for another, Érdy was not from the start a professional archaeologist, and many readers and scholars seem to deem his achievements as less noteworthy and trustworthy. Even so, it is worthwhile to incorporate his discussions and observations critically.

Érdy suggested eight archaeological links between the Xiongnu and the Huns, one of which was the partial horse burials typified by the placement of the skulls, extremity bones of horses, and sometimes only with the symbolic horse gears.<sup>300</sup> He noticed that there were three basic structures of such burials: A) rectangular pit graves, where the horse remains frequently are placed by the foot or lower leg of the dead; B) graves with an elevated shelf used for placing the horse remains and other funerary objects; and C) a grave with a side chamber constructed at the bottom of the grave itself, paralleling a long axis for the animal skeletons and other items.<sup>301</sup> Beyond that, symbolic horse burials were discovered as well in which there were no horse remains but only horse gear, of which the most important part was a bit representing the head,

<sup>300</sup> For Érdy’s eight archaeological links, see note 294. He discussed the tradition of horse burials in details in “Partial horse Burials and Grave Structures of the Xiongnu (in *Altaic Affinities: Proceedings of the 40<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference* (PIAC), ed. David B. Honey and David C. Wright, Indiana, 2001: 26-65).”

<sup>301</sup> Érdy, “Partial horse Burials and Grave Structures of the Xiongnu,” 26.



which seems to have been thought of making the horse come back to life to serve his master in the afterlife.<sup>302</sup> This symbolic type of horseless horse burial could occur in any of the burial structures, he further explained, as a horse sacrifice may cost too much for a household at times.<sup>303</sup> In addition to the three underground structures of the graves, there were also three kinds of above-ground arrangements: A) burials that could be demarcated by piles and also circular or square line-ups of stones and rocks, in which case the arrangement is referred to as *kereksur*; B) the grave could lie under a sizable earthen mound; and C) an unmarked Hunnic grave.<sup>304</sup>

Other peoples as Scythians, Avars, Alans, Shanrong, Xianbei, and other northern barbarians have been reported to have performed similar horse rituals with only a few variations, thus indicating that this tradition once pervaded both Asia and Europe.<sup>305</sup> Apparently not influenced by these observations, Érdy concluded that the partial horse burial was exclusively practiced by the Xiongnu, the Huns, and the later Hungarians. One flaw in his reasoning is his failure to specify the relations between the much earlier Shanrong/Rong and other northern barbarians and the Xiongnu. Did the Xiongnu adopt the practice under the influence of northern barbarians? In a relatively compelling argument, he did clarify that because the Xianbei were subjugated by the Xiongnu for around three centuries, they did, therefore, practice similar funerary customs under the cultural influence of the Xiongnu. Concerning other groups on the steppe, especially the western ones, he explained that existing pastoral nomads such as the

<sup>302</sup> Érdy, “Partial horse Burials and Grave Structures of the Xiongnu,” 26.

<sup>303</sup> Érdy, “Examination of Eight Archaeological Links Between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” 106.

<sup>304</sup> Érdy, “Xiongnu and Huns One and the Same,” 8. “Kereksur” is a term coined by Russian archaeologists for ancient tombs in Mongolia and Transbaikalia where stone paving is arranged according to certain geometric principles. See Paul Pelliot, “Le Terme ‘Kereksur’ (*Tong Bao*, vol. 37, Brill, 1944, 114-24)” for details.

<sup>305</sup> Martin, “The Animal in the Xiongnu Funeral Universe,” 241-2; Érdy, “Xiongnu and Huns One and the Same,” 11-2. The Shanrong were a collection of nomadic tribes living in Northern China during the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771-476 BCE). The Xianbei were one branch of the nomadic Donghu who resided in the Eastern Eurasian steppe, including present-day Northern China and Mongolia, from the second century BCE to the third century CE.

Scythians and Avars buried the complete horse, in contrast with the partial horse burial of the Huns, and proposed the historical steps of the Eurasian nomadic horse burials,

Ancient Shanrong, proto-Hun [Xiongnu] burials (8<sup>th</sup> century BCE), early Xiongnu graves in the Ordos area (6<sup>th</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE), Far-Eastern Xiongnu graves (Daodunzi, Baikal region, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), Central Asian Xiongnu/Hun graves (Yenisei region, Lake Balkhash area, Sidorovka by the Irtysh River (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), Hunnic graves of the Pontic Steppes (4<sup>th</sup> century CE)..... finally Hunnic graves in the Carpathian Basin (5<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>306</sup>

This hypothesis might prove compelling for laypersons, but not so much for archaeologists. Based on my observations, few other authors with expertise in Xiongnu archaeology addressed horse burials of this particular type in the terms that Érdy suggested. The problem of identifying a Xiongnu tomb itself, as mentioned earlier, makes things even more complicated. When one is unable to decide whether a burial belongs to the Xiongnu or some other contemporary nomadic group, it is hard to assign one custom peculiar to one specific group. If this feature is as obvious and noticeable as Érdy described, why did not other archaeologists observe it? While regarding the partial horse burials of the Huns, other experts have observed this custom as well. Swedish scholar Marianne Görman examined the horse sacrificial customs in Scandinavia and traced this custom back to the Huns who laid down horses' skulls and feet in the graves and influenced neighbouring groups in the fourth century.<sup>307</sup> She also noted a grave found in Leuna, Central Germany and dating to 200-400 CE, close to which a cavity was discovered containing the skull of a horse and was surrounded by extremity bones. More importantly, comparable finds have been unearthed from Slovakia and Hungary from the third through seventh centuries.<sup>308</sup> She remarked that this form of tradition originated

<sup>306</sup> Érdy, "Xiongnu and Huns One and the Same," 11.

<sup>307</sup> Görman, "Influences from the Huns on Scandinavian Sacrificial Customs during 300-500 AD," 275-98.

<sup>308</sup> Görman, "Influences from the Huns on Scandinavian Sacrificial Customs during 300-500 AD," 289.

from southern Russia and southern Siberia, where instances can already be found from the fourth and fifth centuries CE, but not from earlier periods.<sup>309</sup> This implies that the practice of partial horse burial may indeed have stemmed from the Eastern Eurasian steppe, but this does not necessarily point to the Xiongnu who lived much earlier than the fourth century. According to Érdy, as early as the eighth century BCE, the Shanrong had started performing such rituals. If this were true, other authorities would likely have made similar observations long ago in connection with numerous archaeological finds and excavations in the Eastern steppe. Hungarian archaeologist Margit Nagy also spotted this specific practice in a Hun-age burial in Budapest.<sup>310</sup> From all available evidence I conclude that horse burials do not necessarily substantiate Érdy's contention that the tradition was identifiably unique among the Xiongnu and Huns.

### 5.3 Cauldrons

Bronze cauldrons were widely used by various nomadic tribes since the ninth century BCE till the tenth century CE from the Korean Peninsula to Central Europe.<sup>311</sup> They were regarded as “the most characteristic and most frequently occurring items of Hun archaeological remains” and seen as central to the discussion of the Xiongnu-Hun identification.<sup>312</sup> Studies on the cauldrons began in the nineteenth century when they were first discovered by Hungarian scholar F. Römer in 1869, and Érdy has done an excellent and detailed review concerning the

<sup>309</sup> Görman, “Influences from the Huns on Scandinavian Sacrificial Customs during 300-500 AD,” 294.

<sup>310</sup> Margit Nagy, “A Hun-Age burial with male Skeleton and Horse Bones Found in Budapest,” in *Neglected Barbarians: Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. F. Curta, Brepols, 2010: 137-75.

<sup>311</sup> Toshio Hayashi, “Huns were Xiongnu or not? From the viewpoint Archaeological Material (in *Altay Communities: Migrations and Emergence of Nations*, ed. Han Woo Choi and others, Istanbul, 2014: 13-26),” 13.

<sup>312</sup> Érdy, “Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia,” 10; Ursula B. Brosseder, “Xiongnu and Huns: Archaeological Perspectives on a Centuries-Old Debate about Identity and Migration (in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. N. Di Cosmo and M. Maas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018: 176-188),” 181.

early literature on this subject.<sup>313</sup> Nevertheless, there has continued to exist one major problem in the scholarship: although cauldrons had been found at both ends of the steppe, archaeologists had not discussed the finds altogether. Chinese scholars have occupied themselves with establishing classifications of Xiongnu vessels in Northern China, and few of them have ever referred to the existence of vessels further to the west and Europe. By the same token, European scholars have concentrated chiefly upon European cauldrons and much less on their Oriental counterparts.<sup>314</sup> Érdy claimed to have been the first and only scholar to have examined in detail all cauldron finds, including Xiongnu cauldrons in the East, Hunnic cauldrons in the West, and Central Asian discoveries in between.<sup>315</sup> Érdy indeed has made a monumental contribution to the debate on the putative connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns from an archaeological perspective specifically involving cauldrons. Before addressing his research, I wish to note that other fruitful attempts at considering the cauldrons had been made, such as those by Maenchen-Helfen. As early 1945, Maenchen-Helfen began seeking evidence from unearthed bronze cauldrons and maintained that Hunnic Danubian cauldrons could not have developed in Xiongnu territory.<sup>316</sup> None of the hundreds of Ordos vessels of the Xiongnu we know of show anything even remotely comparable to the surface pattern of the Danubian ones, he continued.<sup>317</sup> However, with more cauldrons uncovered, Maenchen-Helfen changed his view entirely three decades later. In 1973, after analyzing seventeen cauldrons found in Europe in detail, he turned to arguing that there could be no doubt that the Hunnic cauldrons originated on China's Northern and Northwestern

<sup>313</sup> Érdy, "Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia," 10-16.

<sup>314</sup> Érdy, "Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia," 15; Zaseckaja and Bokovenko, "The Origin of the Hunnish Cauldrons in East-Europe," 703.

<sup>315</sup> Érdy, "Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia," 15; "Unique Xiong-nu Cauldron from Urumqi," *Inner Asia Report*, Newsletter-Harvard, Cambridge, 1990: 11-3.

<sup>316</sup> Manchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 242.

<sup>317</sup> Manchen-Helfen, "Huns and Hsiung-nu," 242.

borders, and that if the Hunnic cauldrons were not the direct descendants of the Ordos cauldrons, they were certainly their cousins.<sup>318</sup> This conclusion by Maenchen-Helfen laid the cornerstone for modern studies of the cauldrons of the two peoples.

Russian archaeologists Zaseckaja and Bokovenko (1994) were also early authors who explored the origin of Hunnic cauldrons in East Europe. They investigated forty-five samples of Xiongnu-Hunnic cauldrons and divided them into two main groups on the basis of a typological classification.<sup>319</sup> They came to the conclusion that the exclusive features of Xiongnu and Hunnic cauldrons both involve a repoussé edge under the rim which separates the neck part from the trunk and four parts on the body surface, the latter of which could be interpreted as a traditional element of Xiongnu culture associated with the concept of the four parts of the world.<sup>320</sup> As far as the debate about possible connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns is concerned, the authors held that Hun ethnic and cultural unity were formed as an assimilation process of the Xiongnu and Uyghurs.<sup>321</sup> Finally, when it comes to Érdy there is no doubt that he presented and analyzed the most significant collections of cauldrons in a more comprehensive than any other scholar regarding all vessels in three media: bronze, ceramics, and petroglyphic depictions.<sup>322</sup> Érdy suggested that Xiongnu/Hunnic type cauldrons clustered in six areas from East to the West: the Yellow River and Liao River region, the Lake Baikal-Orkhon region, the Dzungaria-Tian Shan region, the Upper Yenisei region, the Volga-Ob region, and the Danube-Don region.<sup>323</sup> Square handles were the most characteristic part of cauldron finds from the Ordos in the east to

<sup>318</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 332-7.

<sup>319</sup> Zaseckaja and Bokovenko, "The Origin of the Hunnish Cauldrons in East-Europe," 706-7.

<sup>320</sup> Zaseckaja and Bokovenko, "The Origin of the Hunnish Cauldrons in East-Europe," 707.

<sup>321</sup> Zaseckaja and Bokovenko, "The Origin of the Hunnish Cauldrons in East-Europe," 711.

<sup>322</sup> Érdy, "An overview of the Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds of Eurasia in Three Media with Historical Observations," in *The Archaeology of the Steppes: Methods and Strategies*, ed. Bruno Genito, Napoli, 1994: 379-438.

<sup>323</sup> Érdy, "Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia," 8.

Central Europe, and when they proceeded west they underwent a progressive sophistication and an enrichment of design.<sup>324</sup> He insisted that “such a gradual change in this bronze art could not occur haphazardly but develop only within a single coherent ethnic culture,” which had remained intact during the Xiongnu’s westward movement across Central Eurasia.<sup>325</sup> Regarding the functions of the vessels, Érdy inferred that the places where the cauldrons on the Asiatic side were found (not on the steppes but at the borderline of the steppe zone and the forested mountain areas, mostly near water) and fire marks on the outer surfaces all suggested they were used for cooking. Furthermore, the cooking could have been both sacrificial and ordinary cooking, as can be inferred from examinations of the petroglyphs.<sup>326</sup> Maenchen-Helfen also demonstrated the sacral character of the cauldrons, as most were not buried with the dead and were not owned by one person but by a larger group, indicating that the vessels not used for preparing everyday meals. He commented that the findspots were the places where the sacrifices were performed.<sup>327</sup>

Although the ritual usage of Hunnic cauldrons has been confirmed, archaeologist Brosseder expressed doubts about the Asian Xiongnu vessels being used in the same sacral manner, because in Mongolia, Transbaikalia or in the Minusinsk Basin and Tuva, metal cauldrons were generally placed in graves as part of funerary assemblages, while in Altai, cauldrons were extremely rare from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.<sup>328</sup> According to Brosseder, cauldrons in Inner Asia and in Eastern Europe were not used in a similar way. That is, cauldrons were used as part of grave inventories all over Inner Asia, whereas the European ones were

<sup>324</sup> See Érdy, “Examination of Eight Archaeological Links Between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” (108) for more details.

<sup>325</sup> Érdy, “Examination of Eight Archaeological Links Between the Xiongnu and the Huns,” 108; “An overview of the Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds of Eurasia in Three Media with Historical Observations,” 404; “Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia,” 51.

<sup>326</sup> Érdy, “Hun and Xiongnu Type Cauldron Finds Throughout Eurasia,” 8.

<sup>327</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, 327.

<sup>328</sup> Brosseder, “Xiongnu and Huns,” 182.

deposited only in riparian areas and were only rarely part of funerary offerings).<sup>329</sup> There are other problems put forward by Japanese archaeologist Toshio Hayashi, for instance his observations that the minimal number of Hunnic cauldrons (twenty-four, including eight small fragments) makes it difficult to classify and group all available vessels and that the features of the cauldrons do not overlap.<sup>330</sup> Concerning the four stages of cauldron development proposed by Érdy (from three buttons on a circular handle in South and West Siberia, to three bulges and then to three knobs in Central Eurasia, to standing flat mushrooms in Europe, Hayashi held that they did not fit the general archaeological patterns of a small ornaments becoming bigger and bigger, as button-like ornament can never become smaller bulges, not to mention that vessels with three buttons have not been seen in Mongolia and North China, the homeland of the Xiongnu.<sup>331</sup> Interestingly, although Hayashi pointed out the problems in Érdy's argument, he still maintained that the Huns were likely some sub-groups of Xiongnu who migrated west in five stages.<sup>332</sup>

Overall, there is no doubt that the connections between Xiongnu and Hunnic cauldrons established by Maenchen-Helfen and especially by Érdy has provided some insight regarding our debate. Still, the existing problems critics have pointed out, such as the paucity of Hunnic cauldrons, remain unresolved and constitute lingering issues that still render putative connections between Xiongnu and Huns as somewhat tentative and debatable.<sup>333</sup> One more issue leaves us wondering whether a single archaeological object could be regarded as a “marker” of a group

<sup>329</sup> Brosseder, “Xiongnu and Huns,” 183.

<sup>330</sup> Hayashi, “Huns were Xiongnu or not? From the viewpoint Archaeological Material,” 15.

<sup>331</sup> Hayashi, “Huns were Xiongnu or not?” 14.

<sup>332</sup> Hayashi, “Huns were Xiongnu or not?” 15-6.

<sup>333</sup> One note on Érdy's work, he is prolific without any doubt, but the same contents frequently repeatedly occurred in works from different years, which tend to make readers confused.

and thus indicative of a migration.<sup>334</sup> I agree with Brosseder that this is not valid in archaeology, for “the absence of objects not only furnishes no proof of migration; it also furnishes no basis for disproving it.”<sup>335</sup>

## 5.4 Conclusion

Archaeology has been long expected to yield more firmly established evidence to either support the Xiongnu-Hun connection or refute it. Yet in the above analysis, it has thus far failed our expectations despite significant advances made since Maenchen-Helfen in the 1940s. This chapter introduced an overview of the studies on the Xiongnu and Hunnic cemeteries, including definitions of the terms themselves like Xiongnu culture, their burial sites, grave goods, and key features of their graves. The major problem here is to identify the ethnicity of the owner of a Xiongnu/Hunnic tomb. Russian and Mongolian archaeologists clearly have different standards with their Chinese colleagues for differentiating Xiongnu tumuli from those of other nomads in the same period. The same case applies to Hunnic tombs. Who is the owner of a burial -- a Hun, an Avar, or a Sarmatian? They interacted much more than we previously imagined, and they influenced each other with their customs such as skull deformation, horse burials, and the use of cauldrons. Under these circumstances, it is hard to tell which features or objects could be regarded as exclusively Hunnic. Researchers have therefore come up with two potential characteristics of Xiongnu/Hun culture: partial horse burials and bronze cauldrons. As far as horse burials are concerned, Miklós Érdy was the first archaeologist to study the parallels between two entities' mortuary practices of this specific type, namely the placement of horse

<sup>334</sup> Brosseder, “Xiongnu and Huns,” 182.

<sup>335</sup> Brosseder, “Xiongnu and Huns,” 182.



skulls and extremity bones, occasionally along with horse gear for symbolic purposes. This might well have been one key feature of Hunnic civilization that had an impact on other surrounding peoples as far afield as Scandinavia. However, no other archaeologists have confirmed this mortuary practice in Xiongnu catacombs, so I still have my doubts and reservations. If horse burials were a common attribute, why did other authors fail to recognize it? Accordingly, I do not take the parallels Érdy has proposed as valid evidence to support his conclusions about possible connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns. When it comes to the bronze cauldrons, more attempts have been done to classify and group the unearthed cauldrons and next, to trace the development of the vessels' shapes and patterns during the process of westward migration. Theories of six stages (Érdy, 1994; 1995; 2002) or five phases (Hayashi, 2014) have been adduced on the basis of the meagre quantity of Hunnic cauldrons. The problem with using cauldrons as evidence lies not so much in whether researchers believe in typological evolution or not, but in the consideration of whether a single archaeological object could be considered as a "marker" of a group and thus indicative of a migration. I think not, as I tend to believe that neither the Xiongnu nor the Huns were monolithic groups and that the material culture archaeologists have gathered and investigated is likely only tied to elite groups. Thus, a single object cannot represent an entire group, especially when this group may have contained a host of nomads of different origins. In summary, there is thus far no confirmed archaeological evidence that definitively establishes connections between the two peoples.

## Conclusion

To identify the Huns with the Xiongnu, numerous attempts have been made in exploring potential evidence from historical texts, linguistic corpus, human remains, and archaeological finds. In the meantime, the critics of the identification have also marshalled a strong case to oppose the identification theory. This thesis firstly examined the textual sources related to the Xiongnu in the East Asia and the Huns in Europe. As the pastoral nomads in antiquity did not keep the account of their own, at least not in written form, Chinese annals and Roman records are employed to present the “original” picture of the two peoples in the writings of contemporary authors. These accounts are the primary sources of this project, but they should be used with caution, since chroniclers of the sedentary civilizations of China and Rome inevitably tended to indulge their biases against these wandering “barbarians,” such as when describing their hideous physical appearances, their primitive lifestyles, and modes of production. Despite this, the written sources are critical for providing basic knowledge of the two groups and information that early orientalists in the eighteenth century used to speculate that the Huns were the descendants of the Northern Xiongnu who were defeated by Han China and subsequently disappeared from Chinese records after the end of the first century. In the 1890s, German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth made the utmost of Chinese texts in his attempt to prove the Xiongnu-Huns equation. His reasoning prevailed over the next half of century, but it was not flawless. I agree with other critics that Hirth committed both temporal and geographical errors in his argumentation. I conclude therefore that no confirmed and properly understood textual evidence supports the identification of the Huns with the Xiongnu.

Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the identification hypothesis was accepted or rejected mainly on linguistic stands. Linguists investigated both the

phonetic resemblance of the two ethnonyms and the languages the two peoples spoke. Though seemingly supported by the discovery of the Sogdian letters, the similarity of the two names was eventually attacked as “phonetically unsound” and deemed insufficient for definitively establishing actual connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns as ethnic groups, particularly since nomadic groups on the steppe frequently changed their names in accordance with varying political and ecological circumstances. Beyond that, considerable labour was committed to identifying and classifying the languages of the two groups based on scattered vocabulary words in the sources, including proper names and titles. Due to the scarcity of linguistic materials, linguistic classifications significantly varied from scholars to scholars. The Xiongnu language was variously classified as belonging to the Altaic, Iranian, and Yeniseic language families, while that of the Huns was deemed variously as belonging to the Altaic, Yeniseic, Indo-European, Uralic, or even unidentifiable language families, perhaps even more than one. I believe that even if we were able to specify the languages the two groups had spoken, it would still be of little use in arguing that the two peoples were one and the same. This is because as far as historians are concerned, peoples speaking the same language are not necessarily one ethnic group. Thus, I argue that linguistic angles in this debate have reached a dead end and will not yield any more probative evidence if they ever did.

Twentieth-century archaeological finds, particularly of human remains, have made it possible to explore the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu and the Huns. Physical anthropologists and geneticists have tried to determine biological disparities between the two groups by reconstructing their physical appearances with the help of written records or by comparing cranial measurements and analyzing genetic components from skeletons. Their research has shown that it is very likely that the Xiongnu had Asian ancestry while the Huns had an admixture

of both European and Asian origins. What is more, genetic studies have suggested that both were multi-ethnic groups. In summary, anthropological analysis has yet to adduce a definitive and conclusive substantiation of the identification. This is because certain difficulties exist, for instance the small sample size of the crania and skeletons, the poor condition and fragmented nature of known human remains, and the unidentifiable ethnicity of a burial site. I have also examined shared cultural customs such as face-cutting and cranial deformation, and these have failed to prove that the customs were practiced only by the Xiongnu and the Huns. Skeletal evidence demonstrates that both groups were genetically diverse, but it does not establish their shared identity.

In addition to human remains, grave goods such as physical objects the two peoples possessed and utilized, as well as mortuary rituals they performed, do deliver up some interesting information. This thesis has examined partial horse burials and cauldrons. Hungarian archaeologist Miklós Érdy studied parallels between the two groups' horse burials, particularly the placement of horse skulls, extremity bones, and occasionally horse gear. As this practice among the Xiongnu burials was observed only by Érdy, it cannot be considered one of the typical characteristics of Xiongnu material and ritual culture. Even the terms "Xiongnu archaeology/culture" and "Hunnic culture" themselves are debatable. Regarding bronze cauldrons, archaeologists had even higher expectations because cauldrons were regarded as the key feature of the Hunnic culture. Scholars attempted to trace the origin of the shape and patterns of the vessels back to the Xiongnu, and some hypothesized stages of motivic development of the cauldrons over the course of westward migration. The limitations of using cauldrons to infer that the Huns were descendants of Xiongnu lie in the question of whether a single variety of objects can represent entire groups. I tend to believe that cauldrons *per se* are not sufficient "markers" of

one culture and were probably common to several nomadic groups of various origins. They are, therefore, unable, *mutatis mutandis*, to support the identification.

Following my discussion in the introduction of what an ethnic group is, I would argue that the Xiongnu and the Huns were not one and the same people. For one, no conclusive evidence from either of the four regards (history, linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology) mentioned has been advanced to testify the Xiongnu-Huns equation. Further, as de la Vaissière has observed, language and race did not matter on the steppe as far as identity and allegiance were concerned, because nomads were constantly moving and intermingling with other groups out of practical imperatives. What is more, they could effortlessly change their names and ethnicities according to political and other circumstances. Countless examples can be found in the sources of how a group was subjugated and joined a more powerful confederation by changing its name. To be specific, when ethnic group A declares its allegiance to the shared culture of group B, they were willing to have their behaviour understood in terms of group B instead of group A. In so doing they certainly changed their ethnicities along with the alteration of their political allegiances. No certain connections between the Xiongnu and the Huns are known, let alone continual political allegiance. This is because no reliable records ever mentioned where the Northern Xiongnu went following 155 CE, or where the Huns came from before 370s CE. Two key centuries are thus completely unaccounted for. It is possible that the Northern Xiongnu indeed trekked west, but they evidently changed their ethnicity by amalgamating with other groups in the course of their migrations. Assuming that they reached the Volga in the 370s, in doing so were they still the original ethnic group of Northern Xiongnu? Did they continue thinking of themselves as Xiongnu? I very much doubt they did and thus do

not deem the Xiongnu and the Huns as members of one ethnic group, in whatever ever terms conceived.

Undeniably, there are certain limitations to this research. Due to different specializations and also to time constraints, I have been unable to analyze the linguistic or archaeological materials the way linguists and archaeologists do. Nevertheless, this does not affect my conclusion that the Huns cannot be identified with the Xiongnu. Perhaps it would be too bold for me to say that this centuries-old debate can now be closed, but it is nonetheless still true that way too much labour has been spent scrutinizing this subject without due consideration of what does and does not constitute an ethnic group. Perhaps more attention could be paid to the independent archaeological culture of the two groups in future research. However, in this research, archaeologists should avoid singling out archaeological features and using them make connections between the two groups.

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## Glossary

- Alans: 阿蘭, an Iranian nomadic pastoral people of antiquity, possibly related to Massagetae.
- A-lan-liao: 阿蘭聊, seen in the Chinese texts and considered as the same with Alans.
- Ban Gu (32-92 CE): 班固, a Chinese historian and the compiler of the *Hanshu*.
- Beishi* (The *History of the Northern Dynasties*): 北史, the official history of the Northern Wei, Western Wei, Eastern Wei, Northern Zhou, Northern Qi, and Sui dynasty from 386 to 618 CE, compiled by Li Dashi and his son, Li Yanshou.
- Bo-si: 波斯, known as Persia in the Western world until the mid-twentieth century.
- Chanyu: 單于, a title for nomadic supreme rulers primarily used by the Xiongnu.
- Chi: 尺, one traditional Chinese unit of length, the value of 1 *chi* varied between 23.09 and 24.3cm in the period of the Han dynasty.
- Cong-ling: 蔥嶺, the ancient Chinese name for Pamir Mountains.
- Cun: 寸, one traditional Chinese unit of length, 10 *cun* are equal to 1 *chi*.
- Da-yuan: 大宛, a state existed in Ferghana valley, mentioned by *Shiji* and later Chinese annals.
- Dingling: 丁零, an ancient people living in Siberia and gradually moved to Mongolia and northern China around the first century BCE.
- Fan Ye (398-445 CE): 范曄, a Chinese historian and the compiler of the *Hou Hanshu*.
- Goths: a Germanic people originally living in the north of the Danube in the period of the third to sixth century.
- Gu-zang: 姑臧, located in the present-day Gansu province, China, the capital city of Qian Liang and Hou Liang dynasties during the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439 CE).
- Hanshu* (The *Book of the Former Han*): 漢書, the official dynastic history of the Former Han from the first emperor in 206 BCE until the fall of Wang Mang in 23CE.
- Heqin: 和親, also known as marriage alliance, refers to the historical practice of Chinese emperors marrying princesses to rulers of neighbouring states.
- Hou Hanshu* (The *Book of the Later Han*): 後漢書, the official dynastic history of the Later Han period from 6 to 189 CE.

*Huainanzi* (The Writings of the Huainan Masters): 淮南子, an ancient Chinese text consisting of a collection of essays that resulted from a series of scholarly debates held at the court of Liu An, Prince of Huainan, sometime before 139 BCE.

Hu Hanye (r. 59- 31 BCE): 呼韓耶, one prominent Xiongnu chanyu.

Huns: a nomadic people dwelling in the western Eurasian steppe between the fourth and sixth century CE.

*Jinshu* (The Book of Jin): 晉書, the official dynastic history of the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE).

Jie: 羯, a (possibly Xiongnu) tribe of Northern China in the fourth century, known as one of the Five Barbarians during the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms.

Kangju: 康居, the Chinese name for an ancient kingdom in Central Asia from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE.

Li: 里, a traditional Chinese unit of distance, varying considerably over time but now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer (500 meters or 1,640 feet).

Luona: 洛那, another name for Da-yuan according to the *Weishu*.

Miaos: 苗, one ethnic group residing in the present-day southwestern China.

Ran Min: 冉閔, the only emperor of the short-lived state Ran Wei (350-352 CE).

Scythians: a nomadic group dominating the Pontic steppe from the seventh century BCE to the third century BCE.

Shanrong: 山戎, a collection of nomadic tribes living in Northern China during the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771-476 BCE).

*Shiji* (The Records of the Grand Historian): 史記, the history of from pre-historic Yellow Emperor to Emperor Wu of Han dynasty in the author's (Sima Qian) own time.

*Shisan zhou zhi* (Annals of the Thirteen Prefectures): 十三州志, a geographical treatise written by the Northern Wei period (386-534 CE) scholar Kan Yin in c. 430 CE.

Sima Qian (c. 145- 86 BCE): 司馬遷, a Chinese historian, the father of Chinese historiography, and the author of *Shiji*.

Slavs: a host of peoples speaking the various Slavic languages spread in the central and western Eurasian steppe from the early sixth century.

Su-te (Sogdia, Suk-Tak): 粟特, an ancient civilization existing from the sixth century BCE to the eleventh century CE.

Su-(y)i: 粟弋, another name for Su-te with a variant, Li-(y)i 栗弋.

*Tongdian*: 通典, a Chinese institutional history and encyclopedia text covering a panoply of topics from high antiquity through the year 756.

Wei Shou(506-572 CE): 魏收, a Chinese historian and the author of the *Weishu*.

*Weishu* (The *Book of Wei*): 魏書, the history of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei from 386 to 550 CE.

Wen-na-sha: 溫那沙, another name for Yan-cai according to the *Weishu*.

Wuhuan: 烏桓, a Proto-Mongolic nomadic group living in the northern China from the end of the third century BCE to the beginning of the third century CE.

Wusun: 烏孫, an Indo-European semi-nomadic people mentioned in Chinese records from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE.

Xianbei: 鮮卑, an ancient nomadic people residing in the eastern Eurasian steppe from the end of the third century BCE to the beginning of the third century CE.

Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu, Hiung-nu): 匈奴, a tribal confederation of nomadic peoples living in the eastern Eurasian Steppe from the third century BCE to the end of the first century CE.

Xiutu: 休屠, one royal Xiongnu family.

Yan-cai (An-ts'ai): 奄蔡, the Chinese name of an ancient nomadic state centered near the Aral Sea during the Han dynasty period (206 BCE- 220 CE).

Yueban: 悅般, the name used by Chinese historians for remnants of the Northern Xiongnu based on the accounts of *Weishu*.

Yuezhi: 月氏, an ancient people living in the northern China and migrating westward after being defeated by the Xiongnu in the second century BCE.

Zhang Qian (d. c. 114 BCE): 張騫, a Chinese diplomat and an Imperial envoy to the central Asia in the late second century BCE.

*Zhoushu* (The *Book of Zhou*): 周書, the official history of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou from 535 to 581 CE.