Review Article

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Peter Golden’s scholarship has long defined the gold standard in the study of the Turks of Central Asia and has given him a commanding position in Central Asian studies generally. The two volumes under review epitomize his contributions, both to fundamental research in the study of the early Turkic peoples of Central Asia and to addressing a broader, non-specialist audience consisting largely of students.

The scholarship on the Turks of Central Asia, especially for pre-modern periods, has historically been heavily philological in orientation and has shown little regard for communicating its findings to non-initiates. If one of the foundational weaknesses of the old, scholarly Orientalism was the assumption that knowledge of specific languages was all it took to write about any subject documented in those languages, without systematic disciplinary formation relevant to whatever subject that might be, then the study of the early Turkic peoples was an intellectual ghetto even by general Orientalist standards. To a great extent, the scholars in the field built the walls of that ghetto by their own works. Ideally, the extraordinary internationalization of the scholarship, which was practiced nearly all over Eurasia and North America, might have created a more open communications network, in which scholars not only addressed one another but also enabled a wider public to appreciate the significance of Turkish culture and history for all humankind. If anything, the incompatibility of political systems and the inequalities of academic systems and standards
compounded the insularity of the field. The name ‘Turkology’, which some adepts applied to the field, signified its marginality in relation to the major disciplines of the human sciences. Overcoming these problems is still a work in progress, even for scholars who recognize that there is a problem. For any given scholar to emerge from this background not only in full command of the armamentaria of the field, but also with expert knowledge of how scholars in history or other disciplines ask and seek to answer the questions that guide their research, is still unusual. Probably no one has done this better or more prolifically than Peter Golden.

His *Turks and Khazars* rewards the expert reader with a remarkably broad and thorough scrutiny of many of the key topics and issues of the pre-Mongol period. The scholarship is extraordinary, both for its simultaneous control of detail, including linguistic evidence from Slavic and Caucasian languages to Chinese, and for the clarity of focus on large questions in the study of the early Turkic peoples.

The first of eleven articles examines the origins and expansion of the Turks, from the linguistic evidence on proto-Turkic through the history of the Türk Empire and on to modern times. The second article opens the question of the Turkic origin myths, focusing on a Qarachay Nart tale of descent from a wolf. The third study, on ‘The Türk Imperial Tradition’, performs the major service of analyzing the evidence on early Turkic political culture, evidence that is much harder to assemble than that on the better-documented Chinggisid era. The fourth study examines the sometimes astonishing ‘Nomadic Linguistic Impact’ on pre-Chinggisid Rus’ and Georgia. The fifth study follows this inquiry with a study of nomads in Rus’ and Georgia in the same period and their influence on the institutions of those entities. The fifth study examines the ‘Terminology of Slavery and Servitude’, relating this issue to wider questions about the uses of slavery in this period. The seventh study, on the *comitatus* in Medieval Eurasia, opens one of the subjects on which Golden’s scholarship has been the most enlightening to historians: the processes of retinue-formation that enabled empire-builders to establish dominance over kinship societies, which generally resisted subordination to states. This study emphasizes the Khazars, and the four final studies in the volume all focus specifically on the Khazars. The eighth and ninth articles address Turkic slave soldiers (*ghulams*) of the Khazar period in the service of the caliphate. The tenth article clarifies the question of the ‘Khazar Sacral Kingship’ and its relationship to other forms, including the dual kingships of earlier Turkic states. The eleventh article studies the Khazars’ conversion to Judaism.

In addressing topics such as slavery or retinue-formation, Golden draws readily on the work of scholars in other disciplines. His mode of operation, however, is philological. For those who can crack the code, it can be thrilling