**TERMINOLOGY**

**Eurasia** is a geographical term. It means “the continent of *Europe-and-Asia*”, that is, one large unbroken stretch of land, like *Africa, South America, North America, Australia,* and *Antarctica.* The word *Eurasia* thus does not refer to some vague sub-region between Europe and Asia (and the word *Eurasian* does not refer to a mixture of Europeans and Asians). Eurasia means the whole Eurasian continent, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. As far as physical geography is concerned, “Europe” is not actually a continent at all, nor is “Asia”. They are both parts of one and the same physical continent, *Eurasia*, one entire continent that includes all of Europe and all of Asia.

**Central Eurasia** is the huge world region surrounded by Europe on the west, the Near East on the southwest, South Asia and Southeast Asia on the south, East Asia in the east, and the Arctic in the north. From earliest Antiquity down to early Modern times, Central Eurasia had a complex mixture of animal husbandry, agriculture, and urban cultures dominated by steppe zone animal herders and great Central Asian cities. Today ‘Central Eurasia’ still exists, but unlike ‘(Western) Europe’, ‘(East) Asia’, etc., schoolchildren are not taught about it, and most scholars seem not to have learned anything about the region. Central Eurasia today includes independent Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, as well as autonomous East Turkistan (“Xinjiang”), Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Kalmykia, Ossetia, Tatarstan, Bashkortistan, Sakha (“Yakutia”), and other realms and peoples, such as the far-ranging Evenki, all with their own fascinating languages and cultures, most of which are seriously endangered today.
Central Asia is the partly urbanized, largely agricultural region in the southern center of Central Eurasia. It includes what is now northeastern Iran, almost all of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Tarim Basin region of East Turkistan (now Chinese Xinjiang ‘New Territory’). Most of Central Asia is very dry and depends on irrigation to be habitable. It is under much stress today because of human-caused climatic change.

The Silk Road is a modern romantic term for the premodern lands in between the civilization of East Asia and the civilization of Europe. Some reference is made to the existence of cities in Central Asia along the way, so as a result, the term has been used to refer to urbanized Central Asia without mentioning it. Other than for the romance (which I cheerfully approve of), the term is imprecise and best avoided.¹

Media is the name of a specific geographical region in Antiquity. In the earliest records it was extremely fragmented, with dozens of independent chiefdoms and many different languages, mostly non-Indo-European. The people of Media at that time are referred to as Medians in this book. During the period of Scythian rule, the Medians shifted linguistically and culturally to Scythian and thus became a united people. The traditional term for their Scythian dialect is Median. The sources do not distinguish between the early and later people of Media, calling them all Mādā or the equivalent, i.e., ‘Medes’, but in this book I usually refer to the new people, after their Scythian creolization and unification, as Scytho-Medes. I have attempted to make the distinction as clear as possible.

Early Zoroastrianism is the term used in this book specifically for the system of thought presented in the Old Avestan collection of Gāthās ‘Hymns’ or ‘Songs’ of Zoroaster, as well as in the inscriptions of Darius I ‘the Great’, whose Behistun Inscription (dated ca. 519 BC) is the earliest actually attested source on any variety of Zoroastrianism.

¹ See Endnote 1.
I follow Mary Boyce in taking the *Gāthās* to formally include only the parts in verse, thus excluding the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*,\(^2\) which is written in Old Avestan, but in prose, not verse. It is now often included among the *Gāthās*, but besides being in prose it includes much distinctive later content that should not be projected back onto the system in the *Gāthās*. Early Zoroastrianism is to be distinguished from the religious system that evidently preceded it, Early Mazdaism, as well as from all later forms of Zoroastrianism.

**Iranic vs. Iranian**: See Transcriptions and Conventions.
