

The global turn

of societies, and many were much crueller. The steppe restoration typifies what historians call the global turn, a larger project of shifting histories away from nation-states and colonialist defamation and toward the peoples and processes that have knotted us together. It's a survey of shadows.

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And so it goes. Contrary to the claim that the Scythians and the Xiongnu “were primitive and isolated,” Sattin writes, “we know from burials that their leaders dressed in Chinese silk robes trimmed with cheetah fur, sat on Persian carpets, used Roman glass and had a taste for Greek gold and silver jewellery.” Harl similarly assures us that the nomads who conquered Hellenic cities “quickly appreciated” the high Greek culture they encountered. It's all well meant, but, like the historiography of yore, these passages reinforce a hierarchy of civilizations, in which the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and the Chinese stand at the apex. The way you cease to be barbaric is by trading with these people or embracing their culture, and not through carrying on your own traditions.

The new global history has created

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