

Central Eurasian Studies

The Rus, Khazars, and Bulgars: Ambition and Competition in the Heart of Central Eurasia, 8th-13th Centuries

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Three kaganates—the Rus, the Khazar, and the Bulgar—vied for political and economic influence in the heart of Central Eurasia during the 500 years preceding the grand unification of the region by Mongols and their allies. Representing the last, spectacular bloom and power of pastoral nomadism, the Mongol Empire swept up Central Eurasia, wrecking in the process numerous state formations, including that of the Bulgars and Rus. Before then, from the Dnepr River eastward beyond the Caspian Sea, and from Crimea and the Caucasus northward to the Gulf of Finland, Lake Ladoga, and the upper reaches of the Volga River, the three kaganates emerged to create the earliest extensive urban cultures in this large region. With urbanization came commercialization and the development of long-distance trade routes and their necessary markets; following the merchants came institutionalized religion with their attendant cultures that drew upon the rich store of Christian, Judaic, and Islamic traditions.