



Book review: *Pamirian Crossroads/ Wakhan Quadrangle/Hunza Matters*

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Kreutzmann, H.: Pamirian Crossroads. Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 559 pp., ISBN 978-3-447-10449-4, EUR 98.00, 2015.

Kreutzmann, H.: Wakhan Quadrangle. Exploration and espionage during and after the Great Game, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 282 pp., ISBN 978-3-447-10812-6, EUR 58.00, 2017.

Kreutzmann, H.: Hunza Matters. Bordering and ordering between ancient and new Silk Roads, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 570 pp., ISBN 978-3-447-11369-4, EUR 98.00, 2020.

The books to be reviewed here form a trilogy that is likely to become the capstone of Hermann Kreutzmann's career as a scholar of High Asia. For more than 40 years, Hermann Kreutzmann – from the beginning up to the present in the company of his wife Sabine Felmy – has focused his attention on High Asia and especially on the “Pamirian Knot” at the junction of the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Tian Shan. Maps that show the dense network of routes that he explored in High Asia between 1977 and 2015 and between 2016 and 2019 are included with each volume. The combination of empirical research in the field and documentary research in archives and libraries in London, Delhi, Islamabad, St. Petersburg and Berlin is a hallmark of this trilogy, manifested in the juxtaposition of visual material – maps, graphs, photographs – from the field and from the archives.

The overriding theme of the three volumes is to put “the peripheral space between major players into the centre of attention” (*Hunza Matters*:23) and to trace the historical roots of current developments. Hermann Kreutzmann drives home

the point that “peripheral” does not equal “isolated”, and that the lives of people in remote areas or on the periphery of states are influenced by forces or events that originate far away geographically or that have their origins deep in the historic past. This is one reason why he accords so much space to the period of the “Great Game” – the contest for supremacy in Central Asia in the 19th and early 20th century mainly between Russia and the British Empire – which resulted in the drawing of boundaries that continue to shape the geopolitical realities of this region.

Pamirian Crossroads has the broadest geographical sweep of the three volumes. It is set in the border areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Tajikistan and focusses on the Kirghiz and Wakhi ethno-linguistic groups in the Pamirs and Wakhan as representatives of the two most prominent livelihoods in this region: mobile pastoralism and sedentary farming. It becomes clear, however, that the two lifestyles are not neatly separated from each other and that mobility is a defining feature of life for all people in this region. The central theme of this volume is to show how, in spite of a relatively homogeneous ecological setting, living conditions of the Kirghiz and Wakhi vary in these four different peripheries as a result of historical processes and of divergent political realities.

Wakhan Quadrangle zooms in on the Wakhan and explores the peripheries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and China – the four corners of the Wakhan Quadrangle – on a smaller scale. Among the themes explored in this volume is how knowledge was generated during the period of the Great Game for scientific and political purposes on an interface of exploration and espionage. Hermann Kreutzmann focusses here on the role of “native explorers”, whom he prefers to call “indigenous intermediaries”, who were trained by European actors to collect information on routes as well as other strate-

gic information that would have been inaccessible to European agents. With few exceptions, these travellers received far less recognition than their employers. Hermann Kreutzmann brings to the attention of his readers an indigenous intermediary who was even more thoroughly ignored than others, to the point that no image of him was found to exist: Munshi Abdul Rahim, who produced an extensive report of a journey to Badakhshan and Wakhan in the winter of 1879–1880. The reproduction of a copy of the printed report that was made available by the Library of Congress in Washington is – literally – the centrepiece of *Wakhan Quadrangle*, which Hermann Kreutzmann wrote mainly for the purpose of embedding Munshi Abdul Rahim's report into historical context. The report and Hermann Kreutzmann's commentary on its main topics are supplemented by a sequel on historical events and political developments after the journey of Munshi Abdul Rahim as well as on contemporary life in the Wakhan.

With the final volume of this trilogy, *Hunza Matters*, Hermann Kreutzmann comes full circle to the place where his career as a researcher in High Asia began in 1984: the Hunza Valley. He writes of the Hunza Valley that it “has acquired a prominence in international relations that is hardly explainable from its position in early periods and in comparison to other regions in the Hindukush and Karakoram” (*Hunza Matters*:363). Hunza and neighbouring Nagar were principalities in the Karakoram with multiple external relations and variable levels of dependence on larger powers, especially on China, until their integration into Pakistan. Since then, socioeconomic transformations have been driven largely by the establishment of major road and communication systems in extremely difficult terrain and under shifting political constellations. This started in 1978 with the inauguration of the Karakoram Highway and continues today with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor as part of China's “New Silk Road” or Belt and Road Initiative. Taking up in *Hunza Matters* his favourite theme of tracing historical influences on regional entities at the margins of larger powers, Hermann Kreutzmann shows how Hunza mattered during the Great Game and its aftermath and how it continues to matter due to its pivotal location and historical linkages in the “New Great Game” over infrastructure development and political influence in High Asia, in which its former ally China has now emerged as the most important player.

The broad strokes by which the content of the three volumes has been presented here conceal rather than highlight the wealth of material that each one of them contains. Interspersed with large thematic blocks are more narrowly focused studies of, for instance, the Atabad landslide of 2010 at the Karakoram Highway, or portraits of intriguing personalities such as that of the controversial British officer Reginald Schomberg, a frequent visitor of the Hunza Valley.

One of the outstanding characteristics of these books is the loving care and meticulousness with which they have been produced. Each chapter is followed by endnotes, and

each map or illustration is accompanied by a detailed legend. Some of these legends are stand-alone micro-essays, sometimes of considerable length and supported by references. Each book ends with a glossary in up to 20 languages that also contains toponyms and their previous transliterations and usages.

The books are lavishly endowed with maps, diagrams and illustrations. The maps, both those designed by the author and beautifully reproduced historical maps, are a central feature of these volumes. The major part of the historical maps is from the Pamir Archive Collection, compiled by the Swiss cartographer Markus Hauser and recently acquired by the University of Central Asia. Another outstanding feature is the historical photographs, some dating back to the late 19th century and some published for the first time. A special highlight of the third volume *Hunza Matters* is the paintings by Aleksandr Yakovlev who had accompanied the “Croisière Jaune” – a promotional tour through Eurasia for Citroën cars in 1931 – as an expedition painter. The volume features his landscape paintings, whose geographical content is explained in detailed legends, as well as portraits of notables and ordinary people.

Hermann Kreutzmann defies established categories of academic writing. In the foreword to *Pamirian Crossroads* he describes this work as a “conspectus”, a term that suggests a synoptic approach that is also characteristic of the other volumes. They can be read as a consecutive narrative, mined for information like an encyclopedia or simply enjoyed as magnificent picture books. The narrative maintains a pulsating rhythm: long and detailed descriptions alternate with compact syntheses. The attention to minute detail that marks the more descriptive passages of these books may strike those readers who do not share Hermann Kreutzmann's affinity with the region as somewhat excessive. This is a notable characteristic especially of *Hunza Matters*, which contains direct quotes from colonial diaries or other sources that sometimes run over several pages. This can be seen as a manifestation of Hermann Kreutzmann's “desire to make accessible to interested readers some selections of the valuable existing resource material gathered from a variety of scattered sources” (*Hunza Matters*:23) and of his wish to share with his readers a feeling of intimacy with the subject which a more sparse, and concise presentation would have not been able to convey.

The value of a repository of knowledge on this region lies also in the fact that it can serve as a benchmark against which one can gauge the influence of current and impending geopolitical shifts such as those engendered by the competing hegemonial aspirations of China and Russia.

The trilogy addresses a wide range of readers with an interest in High Asia or Central Asia, but most notably geographers, historians, anthropologists, agronomists, political and social scientists and all those concerned with development issues.

The trilogy stands out for the fact that it has been written by a single author and published over a period of five years. The rule of the day is that syntheses as comprehensive and complex as this are generally published as edited volumes containing the contributions of many authors. That Hermann Kreutzmann has taken upon himself the staggering task of writing and compiling these volumes on his own commands respect, to say the least.