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Book Review



Hermann Kreutzmann, *Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering between Ancient and New Silk Roads*, Wiesbaden: “Harrassowitz”, 2020.—570 pp.

Following in the footsteps of its equally impressive predecessors “Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploration and Espionage during and after the Great Game” (2017) and “Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia” (2015), Hermann Kreutzmann’s latest monograph is his third (and hopefully not last) coffee-table sized volume dealing with a geographical region, which, although still largely unknown to most scholars, is rapidly moving into the limelight of Eurasian politics and economics. What instantly captures even the most sophisticated bibliophile’s attention is the book’s beautiful illustrations, many of which are carefully reproduced old photographs and maps, immediately inviting one to leaf through it and lose oneself in its gorgeous design. The initial pleasure is further enhanced by the realisation that despite its opulent and thus somehow non-academic appearance, the book turns out to be a veritable treasure trove of unique scientific material and outstanding scholarly knowledge. This gratifying discovery should come as no surprise, as H. Kreutzmann, distinguished member of the Culture-Area Karakoram Project and long-standing Director of the Centre for Development Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, has dedicated more than 30 years of his life to the study of the cultural and geographical environment of the people inhabiting Northern Pakistan’s famous Hunza valley. While his tireless investigations are reflected in dozens of monographs and specialised articles, the present publication, which not only summarises his previous research but also enhances it with new insights, can be regarded as a résumé of the author’s longstanding scientific engagement in the Karakoram mountains, his academic legacy to the benefit of experts and students alike. As a more comprehensive examination, which this extraordinary monograph certainly deserves, would inevitably exceed the space allotted to this review, I shall limit myself to a brief overview of its main chapters.

The book commences with a short *avant-propos*, in which the author, alongside some vividly written personal notes (pp. 10–17) and a generous acknowledgement of the contributions of his local collaborators and academic colleagues (pp. 31–35), presents us with thought-provoking reflections on the changes, which knowledge-production relating to the region now covered by Northern Pakistan has undergone over the last 150 years (pp. 18–23).

This is followed by an intricate introduction in which H. Kreutzmann reflects on the Hunza valley and its surroundings as an “area between bordering and ordering” (pp. 43–48) and familiarises us with the concept of modernisation strategies serving as instruments for access, control, and exchange (pp. 48–53).

Only after this does the author move his now well-prepared reader to the remaining more than 500 pages of the book’s main part, dividing it into four separate sections, each of which set to investigate the Hunza valley and its people (and, whenever necessary, also their geographical neighbours) from a different perspective.

The first section, “From Hunza Road to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”, (pp. 59–222), which is the book’s longest and of special interest considering contemporary China’s ever-increasing economic influence on Pakistan and beyond, provides us with a detailed examination of Hunza’s infrastructural integration into its wider geographical surroundings, starting from the modernisation of access roads during colonial times until the second phase of the Chinese-Pakistani Karakoram Highway Improvement Project.

The next section is dedicated to the valley’s resources (pp. 223–362), both in terms of natural capital, like farmland, pasture and water, and human beings. While drawing our attention to the latter, the author focuses on issues related to settlement patterns, population growth and labour migration, as well as on the people’s affiliations in terms of language and religion.

Section 3, “From Factors to Actors—Karakoram Configurations” (pp. 363–476), investigates the complex relationship of Hunza’s early elites with the British colonial power and the place taken by their heirs within the administrative and political system of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In addition to this, the author provides us with a detailed and highly engaging analysis of the valley’s religious, cultural and economic ties with the Aga Khan, Imam of the Nizari Isma’ili Shi’as.

In the fourth and final section (pp. 477–504), H. Kreutzmann revisits origins and backgrounds of several popular myths (e.g., the descent of the valley’s population from soldiers of Alexander the Great, the existence of Hunza-typical longevity, the occupation of Hunza by Chinese military) that, for more than a century, have engaged the imagination of the wider public, only to serve the political and/or financial aims of their popularisers.

Following a brief epilogue, outlining the hopes and fears of the people of Hunza and surroundings regarding their economic and political future, the volume concludes with a short glossary, a comprehensive bibliography and a detailed index.

To sum it up: Hermann Kreutzmann's book (also available in digital format) is a true marvel, which succeeds combining first-rate scientific insights with beautifully reproduced maps, photographs and other illustrations, enhancing academic study with a dimension of aesthetic pleasure. It is a milestone on the way towards a better understanding of mountain societies, and a must-read for anybody interested in the past and the present of the people of Northern Pakistan.

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