

Book review: Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia

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Kreutzmann, H.: Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi environmental resource use practices, social organization and of High Asia, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 559 pp., cultural identities. ISBN 978-3447104494, EUR 98.00, 2015.

The volume's explanatory emphasis on relations of contact in conditions of peripherality is no longer uncommon in scholarship on Pamirian or other mountain communities (thanks in part to the author's own earlier work); therefore, what makes this book important is less the novelty of its central argument than the astonishing specificity, nuance, historical depth, and geographical and ethnographic detail Kreutzmann musters to support it. Indeed, Pamirian Crossroads is so packed with information, so extensive in its coverage, and so diligent in following empirical and analytical threads that it would not be inaccurate to describe it as a historical atlas or regional encyclopedia of Pamirian Central Asia, into which the central narrative arc described above is slowly and carefully woven. Evidently, this is the author's intention, given the book's many photos, maps, tables and diagrams, its extensive glossary and painstaking referencing of sources, and the organization of its main text into short chapters, themselves comprised of numerous brief sub-sections. The volume includes more than 130 maps, 50 of which Kreutzmann designed himself to depict various spatial distributions and interactions ranging, for example, from the routes followed by imperial explorers, to the location of every permanent settlement in the Panj and Wakhan valleys, to the escape routes followed by particular groups of Wakhi and Kirghiz during specific periods of political turmoil. The remaining 70-plus maps are beautifully reproduced from reports, notes and publications prepared over the centuries by spies, explorers and surveyors, and they cover a temporal span from the late 17th century to the present. These are complemented by sketches, paintings and photographs from the same sources, as well as by photos and diagrams produced by the author over the course of his 35-year research association with the region.

The photographs of contemporary photojournalists Monika Bulaj and Matthieu Paley are also featured. An alternative reading strategy would be to treat the book like a reference work, and browse or search its contents according to purpose. This too is challenging, because maps and illustrations are carefully described in a lengthy caption and tables are not listed in the table of contents, and chapter headings are better suited for a linear or continuous reading than for targeted searching according to topic or keyword. The book's lengthy index is helpful but insufficient to overcome these difficulties. My worry is that this design will encourage some readers to treat it like a coffee table book (it is beautiful enough), browsed mainly for its eye-catching and informative illustrations, rather than studied for the important arguments it develops, or systematically searched for specific parts of the evidence assembled to demonstrate the extent, nature and significance of Pamirian peoples' relations with outsiders over time.

The author is keenly aware that the historical materials on which the book depends are both rich sources of empirical information and ideologically freighted artifacts of competing British, Russian, Chinese and Afghan imperialist enterprises. Accordingly, his treatment of present-day circumstances is comprehensive, authoritative, and delightfully close-to-the-ground. The explorers', spies' and administrators' cartographic and narrative portraits of 10 Pamirian locations, is especially noteworthy – for Kirghiz and Wakhi populations, without in most cases adjudicating the facticity of their accounts. In this way Pamirian Crossroads has much to offer anyone interested in Pamirian Central Asia, including English-speaking Kirghiz and Wakhi scholars and historians, who are sure to welcome the volume as an important reference work and as a sympathetic treatment of their communities. The book is densely so richly illustrated that even those without English language skills will find much to engage them. Pamirian Crossroads care has been taken with each of these modes of representation, resulting in an empirically rich and beautifully designed volume: a labour of love. My only criticism of the work is that notwithstanding its rich content and elegant design, I had difficulty finding an effective way to read the book. Its central argument, developed essay-style in the main narrative, is sufficiently nuanced to deserve sustained attention, but I found myself continually distracted by the fascinating maps, tables and illustrations that populate almost every page. These come at a cost of readability aside, I am awed by the scope, comprehensiveness and rigour of this work, and I am eager to read its two companion volumes. One of these, entitled *Afghan Quadrangle: Exploration and Espionage During and After the Great Game* has already been published; the other, focusing mainly on Gilgit-Baltistan's Hunza Valley, is in preparation.

or over the course of the volume. Sometimes two halves of a paragraph are separated by several pages of maps or photos, which further disrupts the narrative flow. As a result the book's meta-argument is harder to discern and follow than ideally it would be. A more explicit summary of the argument in the opening chapters and occasional updates throughout the book on the progress of its development would be helpful.

While the somewhat misleading book title and the ambiguity about what is Pamirian is irritating, this book might stimulate further debates and challenge those who are less ethnicity focused and interested in regional issues. Regarding the book's appearance, the negligent publisher would do well to improve the layout in such expensive books so that the minuscule illustrations and black-and-white reprints from colorful and larger historical maps could be read and fulfil their function of augmenting the text and enhancing understanding of the setting. Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz. Google Scholar. Type. Book Reviews Inner Asia. Information. The Journal of Asian Studies, Volume 63, Issue 3, August 2004, pp. 795 - 796. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911804001925>[Opens in a new window]. Copyright. Copyright © Association for Asian Studies 2004. Access options. Get access to the full version of this content by using one of the access options below. Your email address will be used in order to notify you when your comment has been reviewed by the moderator and in case the author(s) of the article or the moderator need to contact you directly. Please enter a valid email address. Occupation Please enter your occupation. Pamirian Crossroads. Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia. wakhan001-203.indd 3. 2015 Harrassowitz Verlag Wiesbaden. Exploring the crossroads 69 Asia and Europe a widening gap 70 Production of knowledge 71 From Fergana, Kabul and Kashgar to the Pamirs 72 Pamir and Wakhan approach to the highlands 82 Consolidating knowledge and playing the game 89 Grombchevsky and Younghusband: two individuals. driven by equal interests representing rival powers 92 The Gilgit Mission and Wakhan 96 Shrinking blank spaces and mapped desires 100 Individual travellers on high ground 105 Change of interests from individual traveller to scientific expedition 112 Gazetteers and handbooks for practice 114. Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia [Kreutzmann], with a photo supplement Glimpses of the Pamirian Crossroads. 173. Akademicheskaiia arkheologiia na beregakh Nevy. All physical mailings concerning the journal (this includes books for review) should be sent to the editor at his postal address: Daniel Waugh, Department of History, Box 353560, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195 USA. It is advisable to send him an e-mail as well, informing him of any postings to that address. High Asia. David Butz. Department of Geography & Tourism Studies, Brock University, St. Catharines, L2S 3A1, Canada. Correspondence to: David Butz (dbutz@brocku.ca). Published: 3 November 2017. Kreutzmann, H.: Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi. of High Asia, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 559 pp., ISBN 978-3447104494, EUR 98.00, 2015. This engrossing and remarkably informative volume analyses the changing implications of relations with neighbours, rulers and invaders for two cultural groups Wakhi and Kirghiz who together occupy the high-altitude plateaus and valleys of the s