

## FORUM: REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

KREUTZMANN, H.: *Pamirian Crossroads*. Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia. 559 pp., 313 ill., 15 diagrams, 122 maps and 25 tables. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2015, € 98,-

As a school leaver who spent a gap year in the Chitral district of northern Pakistan between September 1995 and August 1996, one of the most stimulating and enduring aspect of my experiences was coming into contact with characters not only from the part of Pakistan in which I was based but also the broader region. There was a friendship struck up with a Pashtun-speaking Seyyid man from the Afghan province of Kunar who ran a gun-cleaning shop in the village. There was the agricultural labourer from the Afghan district of Shughnan in neighbouring Badakhshan who went by the name of Sardar, and was frequently called upon to play his flute for gatherings of local Chitral villagers. And there were the groups of ethnically Wakhi agricultural labourers who stayed in the village bazaars' murky teahouses, and often discussed the difficulties faced by their families who were living under mujahidin rule in Afghanistan's Wakhan corridor. But it was not only outsiders who drew attention to the complex world in which the village in which I stayed was a part. One of my students in the school in which I taught was the son of a notable figure from the cluster of houses on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border that form the settlement of Baroghil. The longer I stayed in Chitral it also became increasingly clear how many of the people I spent time and thought of as being Chitrali were the decedents of people from across the national boundaries of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan. One of my closest friends thus told me of his in-laws' relations from Wakhan, and took me to hamlet after hamlet in which people who had migrated from there to Chitral.

Hermann Kreutzmann's latest book is a study of the social, economic, political and demographic dynamics of the 'Pamirian Crossroads' – a mountainous region in Central Asia that cuts across the territories of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and China. A detailed and highly nuanced study of this most complex of regions, *Pamirian Crossroads* offers a unique window into understanding the interactions between people from different parts of the region, as well as the empires and wider worlds that have shaped their fortunes, both today and

over history. *Pamirian Crossroads* is made up of nine central chapters organised around key research themes: the chapters are flanked by a substantial 'Avant-propos' and a concluding epilogue. The book is based on three decades of experience in conducting active fieldwork across these locales, including a remarkable visit to the Wakhan corridor in Afghanistan in 1999 during which Kreutzmann was able to observe conditions of life in Afghanistan's most remote region. As importantly, the study brings into its analysis of the region a careful and critical reading of a wide range of archival sources located in London, Delhi, Islamabad, St Petersburg and Berlin. The combination of both in-depth fieldwork conducted over many years and detailed knowledge of archival material adds to the text's value as a central resource for inter-disciplinary scholarship on this and other mountainous regions.

In population terms, the study focuses in particular on two ethno-linguistic communities important in the region (the Kirghiz and Wakhi), but its scope is far broader. Through the careful analysis of a wide range of data – from colonial archives to the maps and journals of travellers and explorers to the development reports of NGOs and government ministries active across the region, Kreutzmann embeds his consideration of these two communities in a consideration of the historical shifting dynamics of the wider worlds they also inhabit. The book is richly illustrated, including dozens of beautifully reproduced and annotated maps, sketches and photographs, including many from the author's own collection.

A remarkable range of empirical material is presented in the book; the empirical material is also neatly presented in neatly defined sub-sections. Indeed, such sub-sections could be very helpfully deployed in the use of the book as a teaching resource. One of my favourite such sections is that concerning the built environment of the Pamirs (p. 167–176) in which the structure of Wakhi houses and Kirghiz yurts are discussed in the text as well as being evocatively illustrated in photos and detailed ground plans designed by the author. Similarly, the inclusion of excerpts of important historical documents (such as one concerning the relationship between Afghanistan and Badakhshan as revealed in a report by a local notable) both provide fascinating detail while also offering a helpful resource in encouraging students of

geography, anthropology and related disciplines interested in the contemporary period in how to think about quarrying such sources for relevance.

The themes covered in the book are far too many to recount with any accuracy in a review such as this. I will however briefly flag two aspects of the book that will insure it makes a novel and impressive contribution to this study of this and other mountainous region for years to come. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, across the pages Kreutzmann sheds critical light on the importance of the exercise of power and control to the experiences of the region's people and their collective and individual fortunes over the long run. The book dismisses any lingering temptation there might be to treat the peoples and cultures of regions such as the Pamirs as being heirs to the archaic hangovers of previous generations that have been carefully preserved by years of remoteness. Rather, we see through the book's pages the intense interactions between the region and the outside world and the dynamic ways in which its people have responded, adapted and addressed the changing scenarios they have faced. Secondly, the book's analysis of a wealth of domains of life in the region – ranging from the identity categories people inhabit to the forms of authority important in the organisation of their societies to the role played by mobility as a political and

economic strategy – is both historical and contextual. Collective and personal identities shift as people move across the region and to far flung settles of exile beyond. Differences within communities over which category of person should hold office and authority are aired and discussed. Processes of boundary making and enforcement lead to significant ruptures in economic activity, transforming contexts that for example were once trans-regional trading hubs into cul-de-sacs in which populations need to find new ways of eking out a living.

The texts interdisciplinarity, accessible style, organisational clarity, and impressive visual impact will insure that it will be read not only by scholars of this and other mountain region but the informed public more generally. Indeed, the critical insights offered in the chapter 'Aspects and prospects' on the contrasting ways in which Afghanistan, the Soviet Union and in later periods Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan have sought to integrate parts of the region into their nation-state should be required reading for policy makers. The author's deep understanding of and affection for the region shine across every page of the book: I have no doubt that this study will also be a deep source of pride to the inhabitants of this most complex and fascinating of regions.

MAGNUS MARSDEN