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All of the following book notices have been written by Daniel C. Waugh.


This large format volume with its excellent illustrations (most in color) inaugurates a new publication series by the Early Buddhist Manuscript Project at the University of Washington, complementing the now well-known ongoing series of text volumes. The goal here is to broaden the study of the Gandharan material by contextualizing the manuscript finds on a broader canvas.

David Jongeward of the University of Toronto has written the first three chapters and compiled the tabulation of the reliquaries in the appendix. He explains the significance of the reliquaries (which, as he points out, too often have been relegated to a minor place in exhibitions of Gandharan art), discusses Gandharan sculptural images of the last days of the Buddha relevant to contextualizing them, and surveys the reliquaries, of which more than four hundred examples are represented here. Elizabeth Errington’s contribution is to describe the important collection of them in the British Museum. Richard Salomon analyzes the inscriptions that are on some 10 percent of them. He approach is a systematic formulaic analysis, which produces very interesting insights into the societies and thought world of the individuals who commissioned the reliquaries. Stefan Baums provides a catalog of all the inscriptions with updated readings and translations.

A number of the reliquaries are well known — for example, the exquisite gold one from the Bimaran stupa 2, which decorates the title page here and is, granted, exceptional. The most common material from which they are formed is stone, usually carefully carved and polished. Many of these are little known, scattered in collections in Pakistan and accessed there with the generously acknowledged assistance of Abdul Samad. A large number of the reliquaries are now in Japan, and many which are now properly described and published here are in various private collections around the world. Over time undoubtedly more will be added to this corpus, but now there is a classification scheme into which they can easily be inserted. To have all the currently known inscriptions properly published and translated in this one volume is also of lasting value.

Two reliquaries from Bimaran stupa 2 in Afghanistan, the inscriptions on the steatite one recording the “donation of Sivaraksita, son of Mujavada.” Collection of the British Museum, 1900.0209.1 and 1880.27, respectively Nos. 353 and 332 in this tabulation. Photos © 2009 Daniel C. Waugh
I have but sampled this elegantly produced, large-format volume which is another installment in the informally constituted Yale University Press series of books encompassing large portions of the arts of China. The chronological range is from the beginnings of silk production through the Qing. The subject matter ranges from techniques of production to discussion of artistic motifs. One of the virtues of the book is to devote attention to excavated contexts, which are so important for dating and establishing regional patterns of use.

This is very much a product of Chinese scholarship. The editor, Dieter Kuhn, contributes an introductory overview chapter, which helps compensate for the traditional and, alas, artificial, organization of the subsequent material by dynasty. Zhao Feng, who is probably the best known of the other authors to those who do not read Chinese, has written three chapters spanning from the Sui to the Yuan. Since a good many of the subjects here undoubtedly are controversial — for example, the question of the chronology of the development of technically advanced looms — one must expect that other experts might wish for some different interpretations.

The volume is supplied with chronological tables, excellent maps, a very helpful glossary of textile terms (both Chinese and English), index, notes and bibliography. The numerous high-quality illustrations include primarily color photos of the silks but also a drawings to explain looms, weaves or patterns. A great many of the examples are famous and familiar pieces, but there are others which I have seen here for the first time.

This volume should find a place on many shelves (as it already has on mine) as a basic reference work for years to come.


It is not uncommon nowadays for academic journals to devote a whole issue to a single theme, but rare are the cases such as that where the result is a volume of lasting importance that will be consulted over and over. Three workshops, the first in 2007, brought together contributors to the project and shaped the results, which means that this is genuinely a team effort. The guiding lights for the undertaking, Helen Wang, Valerie Hansen and Rong Xinjiang, and all the other distinguished contributors have not only provided answers to questions students of the Silk Roads have long had about what actually was the role of silk, where did it end up and how was it used once it got there, but provided an invaluable reference tool about textile terminology, changing values and different sorts, price equivalents, and much more. The focus is on the period of the Tang Dynasty (618–906), under which textiles (not just silk) were one of three major currencies (the others being coins and grain), and where, as the articles show, the relative importance of them might vary over time and space. The Tang found it impossible to supply sufficient coins even if coins tended for the most part to be the money of account. One of the great virtues of this collection is to bring together in both Chinese and in English translation a lot of the relevant source evidence. As Eric Trombert documents in his splendid concluding essay, by around the 11th century, silk had ceased to be an important currency along the “Silk Road.”

I shall merely list the articles below and not attempt to summarize them. For those whose libraries have online subscriptions, the journal will be readily available, the online version including in color the photos of the various kinds of textiles illustrating Feng Zhao and Le Wang’s contributions. Copies of individual articles may purchased (or rented) via: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid =JRA&volumeId=23&seriesId=3&issueId=02>, and information about purchasing the entire volume may be found at <journals@cambridge.org>. Unfortunately, some wallets may be too slim to afford it. The volume deserves to be made available at no cost to all and anyone who would use it.

Contents:

- Introductory materials (Sarah Ansari, Helen Wang, Valerie Hansen).
- Helen Wang. “Textiles as Money on the Silk Road?”
- Angela Sheng. “Determining the Value of Textiles in the Tang Dynasty In Memory of Professor Denis Twitchett (1925-2006).”
- Chang Xu. “Managing a Multicurrency System in Tang China: The View from the Centre.”
- Masahiro Arakawa. “The Transportation of Tax Textiles to the North-West as part of the Tang-Dynasty Military Shipment System.”
- Binhua Wang. “A Study of the Tang Dynasty Tax Textiles (Youngdiao Bu) from Turfan.”
- Valerie Hansen and Rong Xinjiang. “How the Residents of Turfan used Textiles as Money, 273–796 CE”
- Qing Duan. “Were Textiles used as Money in Khotan in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries?”
- Eric Trombert. “The Demise of Silk on the Silk Road: Textiles as Money at Dunhuang from the Late Eighth Century to the Thirteenth Century.”
- Feng Zhao and Le Wang. “Glossary of Textile Terminology (Based on the Documents from Dunhuang and Turfan).”
Moshchevaia Balka, the archaeological site which is the focus of this book, occupies an important place in histories of the Silk Roads that look for evidence in Western Eurasia about the early transcontinental trade. For it was here, in an obscure mountain valley of the northwestern Caucasus that a striking array of silk textiles were found along with some fragments of Chinese writing, all dating, it seems, to the 8th–9th centuries CE. The site has been associated with the Alans, who were also important in the steppe zone north of the Black Sea. While bits and pieces from the burials at Moshchevaia Balka were collected (without any precise archaeological documentation) starting over a century ago, and the site was much looted in more recent times, it was only with the gathering of much of that material in the Oriental Department of the Hermitage and then in the late 1960s and early 1970s the proper excavation of what remained that the real significance of the material became clear.

Its study has been most closely associated with the author of this book, a textile specialist who has worked at the Hermitage for more than half a century and here summarizes her long study of Moshchevaia Balka in the twilight of a productive career. Apart from many articles relating to the material, she has published a short Russian exhibit catalog (Kavkaz na Shelkovom puti [The Caucasus on the Silk Road] [1992] and a longer catalog in German (Die Gräber der Moschewaja Balka: Frühmittelalterliche Funde an der nordkaukasischen Seidenstrasse [München: Edition Maris, 1996]). The latter, which is still in print, is important, in that it contains formal descriptions of all the textiles and many of the other finds, illustrated with 72 black-and-white and 16 color plates (a total of 228 separate images).

As Ierusalimskaia explains, the new volume in Russian reviewed here is complementary to the German one but does not simply replace it. She notes that the new volume organizes the material differently and incorporates a lot of new material from research over the ten years since the publication of the German volume. In fact, a comparison of the two texts reveals relatively little that is new — much is a word-for-word replication of the earlier volume. While she does refer to more recently published literature, some on important finds elsewhere in the Caucasus that show Moshchevaia Balka to be far from unique, it is not clear she has accepted the implications of some of that research which might force reconsideration of earlier conclusions she had reached. A proper review of the current volume must be left to specialists on textiles and the archaeology of the Caucasus.

That said, we can be very grateful for this beautifully produced book, which offers a good introduction to Moshchevaia Balka and the history of its study and highlights by detailed description many of the most interesting artefacts. Its extensive illustration incorporates many of the valuable black-and-white drawings that had earlier appeared in the German volume, but then goes well beyond what is there. Here we find some images of the current galleries in the Hermitage containing the material, including “reconstructions” of the garments mounted on mannequins, and extensive, often very detailed, color illustration of the finds, images superior to the black-and-white ones in the German volume.

The artefacts include some metal and wooden objects, where, interestingly, it seems for the most part only damaged or partial ones (not those which still would have been functional) were placed in the graves, presumably to represent symbolically the real implements or vessels. One of the more intriguing finds is a glass shard probably from a pitcher, which has a fragment of a Hebrew inscription on it. There are a good many small, rather crudely carved wooden boxes that she argues probably were containers for amulets.

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The textiles are largely small fragments, though there is one spectacular tunic of silk (probably Syro-Byzantine)
with pearl roundels, each containing an image of a sen-
murw. Ierusalsimsakaia argues that in the first instance the
imported silks were payments made in small pieces (in an
economy that did not use coin) to the local authorities (Al-
ans) who collected duties from those wishing to transport
their goods across the passes. The particular route was one
that opened as an alternative to others that for one reason or
another had been blocked. The way that the small pieces of
silk were used to decorate garments (often, it seems, with-
out any particular concern for the integrity of the designs
and not just on garments of the elite) suggests to her (oddly,
I think) that the local population may not have appreciated
the high monetary value of the textiles. Her analysis often
leaves open the provenance of some of the pieces. Clearly
some of the silk is of Byzantine origin, some “provincial”
but some also likely from elite workshops of the capital.
There also is silk produced, it seems, in Sogdiana or even
farther east, in China. She suggests that Byzantine silks may
well have influenced the designs of ones produced in Sog-
diana. Presumably further analysis when new techniques of
provenancing textiles have been applied will make greater
precision possible.

Her final section deals with the evidence regarding the ap-
parent presence of a Chinese traveler (merchant?), who left a
fragmentary piece of painted silk (apparently part of a Bud-
hist image, though it shows only a rider passing through
mountains), another fragment with a sutra text, and part of
a page of what she (and the China specialists she has con-
sulted) considers to be a travel diary recording expenditures
for wheat. Of course there is nothing here which otherwise
identifies the owner or connects him with the silks found in
the burials of what would seem to be the local inhabitants.
While we have other evidence about the probable presence
of Sogdians on the Black Sea, we must be cautious about
drawing sweeping conclusions concerning long-distance
travel and exchange, however important and interesting
this and other material from the Caucasus may be.

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Vsevolod Sergeevich Taskin (1917–1995) earned an envi-
able reputation as a prolific translator of Chinese histori-
cal sources into Russian. As A. N. Khokhlov explains in
his informative biographical tribute to Taskin at the end of
this book, Taskin’s road to becoming one of the most distin-
guished Russian China specialists was a long and eventful
one. He was born in Transbaikalia, and his family re-located
to Harbin in Manchuria, along with the many other Rus-
sians who emigrated there following the Bolshevik Revolu-
tion, swelling the large community of Russians who were
employed on the Chinese-Eastern Railway that had been
built under the tsars. The young Taskin acquired excellent
Chinese and worked in various capacities as a translator,
along the way (after the Japanese takeover of Manchuria)
also acquiring Japanese. With the Chinese Communist as-
sumption of power, Taskin and his family left, first set-
tling in Kazakhstan and then in the mid-1950s ending up
in Moscow, where in 1957 he joined the staff of the Institute
of Chinese Studies. In 1968, he defended his kandidat (Ph.D.
equivalent) dissertation on the Chinese sources for the his-
tory of the Xiongnu, whose publication in two volumes (Ma-
teraly po istorii Siunnu [po kitaiskim istochnikam]. Moscow,
1968, 1973) continues to be cited in most of the Russian work
on the Xiongnu. Over the years, his other annotated transla-
tions included (with R. V. Viatkin) Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 Shiji 史記, Ye Longli’s 萊隆禮 Qidan guo zhi 契丹國志, and eventu-
ally the four volumes on sources on the “northern nomads”
(vols. 1-3 published in 1989, 1990 and 1992), culminating in
this posthumously published final volume of that series.

This volume, not quite complete at Taskin’s death, has
been edited from his typescript dated 1994, much of the
work of checking against the Chinese sources having been
done by G.S. Popova and M. Iu. Ul’ianov, with the result
under the overall editorship of S. V. Dmitriev. It contains
Taskin’s historical introduction focusing on the activity of
Fu Jian 房健, the founder of the Former Qin/Di kingdom,
translations from Fang Xuanling’s 房玄齡 Jinshu [His-
tory of the Jin Dynasty], Chs. 112–119, extensive notes, a
bibliography mainly of Chinese sources (authors and titles
given in Cyrillic transcription, with Russian translations of
the titles), an index (the names and terms in both transcrip-
tion and Chinese characters), and a one-page guide to the
terms for measurements of length, volume and weight.

Since none of Taskin’s earlier translations are in print, but
given the fact that they are so frequently cited in the Russian
literature, having a reprint of all of them would be a great
boon.


This annotated translation of the account of Xuanzang’s
journey to India, Great Tang Records on the Western Regions
(Da Tang xiyu ji 大唐西域記), is the first complete one into
Russian. The translation is based on the Beijing edition of
1955, but also takes into account variant readings of the text
Buddhist Electronic Text Association’s Chinese Electronic
Tripitaka Collection, 1996.

Alexandrova provides an introduction to Xuanzang’s
life and journey, discussing among other things the genre
of the text, stereotypical aspects of its geographic descrip-
tions and its reception. Rather than repeat some details, she
refers readers to her previously published articles and book
Put‘ i tekst. Kitaiske palomniki v Indii [Journey and text. Chi-
nese pilgrims in India] (2008). Her explanatory annotation
occupies over 70 pages, with Chinese (and, where relevant,
Sanskrit) equivalents for terms, place names, etc. The notes range from simple definitions of terms to longer discussions of the possible identification of locations. Her bibliography includes standard literature and earlier translations in French and English (but not that by Li Rongxi published in 1996). There are indexes of personal names, geographic and ethnographic names, terms, and plants, in each case, as appropriate, with the Chinese and Sanskrit equivalents provided in parentheses. Two maps provide a clear indication of Xuanzang’s route once he had left Central China, and there is a brief summary in English.

I have not attempted to compare her translation with those available in English, nor am I able to check against the original Chinese. The book is nicely produced and should be of great value for those who can read Russian.


I was led to this book by an article in *Saudi-Aramco World*, which continues to be a wonderful source of material for general readers, educators and their students (Richard Covington and Peter Sanders, “The Celestial Stone,” in the March/April 2013 issue, pp. 24–36). Searight was obviously one of their main sources for their introduction to the history (early and modern) of the production, trade in and uses for the striking blue stone whose main source has always been a remote region in what is now northeastern Afghanistan. Artefacts incorporating lapis lazuli (either as stones or when powdered to make paint) have been found all over the Afro-Eurasian world going back thousands of years and provide some of the best evidence for the antiquity of long-distance trade well antedating the opening of the “Silk Roads.”

In often gushing and rambling prose larded with abrupt digressions, Searight, a travel professional and journalist who also holds an M.A. in Islamic Art, relates her passion for the stone, which led her to follow it to its sources and to visit the locations where the art incorporating it may be seen. She obviously has done her homework and seems to know everything about production, processing, art and craft techniques and more. For the early history, one source which she credits is Georgina Herrmann’s unpublished Oxford DPhil thesis (“The source, distribution, history and use of lapis lazuli in Western Asia from the earliest times to the end of the Seleucid period,” 1966), which I now am anxious to read, especially in that it includes exploration of the sources of lapis in Afghanistan in an era when it was still possible to travel safely there.

Searight has negotiated with lapis dealers in the dusty markets of South Asia, visited museums that hold some of the most elegant and famous pieces that were fashioned into jewelry and other objects that embodied great wealth, power and religious authority (think King Tut or the treasures of Ur), and visited sites whose murals incorporated lapis into pigments (think the Buddhist caves at Kizil or Orthodox churches in Turkey or the Balkans). While the images are small, the many color illustrations in her book are of high quality and are suggestive of ways one might well follow the “celestial stone” along its paths, if wanting to illustrate for students the extent of long-distance communication in the pre-modern age.
This exquisite, large format volume is one of the most inspiring books to enter my personal library in many a year. I suppose my reaction in the first instance is personal, in that in 2010 I had a chance to visit many of the sites included here. Had I been able to study this volume ahead of time, I would have gone better prepared. Now as I read through the book I find many of my lingering misconceptions about what I saw being corrected, and I can barely wait for an opportunity to return.

As the photographer, Georg Gerster writes in his “Afterword” (p. 183): For those who might ask “Why, for Heaven’s sake, continually see the Below from Above?” I can only respond with a very pedestrian answer: one sees “more” from above than on the ground. In particular, this “more” in aerial views of archaeological digs frequently advanced the understanding of a site: what can only be observed piecemeal on the ground suddenly comes together to form a unified whole.

In the first instance, yes, we have the superb color photographs by Gerster — known as the preeminent master of aerial photography for archaeology — taken between April 1976 and May 1978. Their sharpness might suggest he used a large-format camera, but in fact he was shooting 35 mm Kodachrome slides. The photos document landscapes and sites which now, some three decades later, may have changed in important regards; his images in turn can be compared with those of the pioneer of aerial photography in Iran in the 1930s, Erich F. Schmidt (published in 1940 as Flights Over Ancient Cities of Iran). For almost any of the archaeological sites, the pictures provide a contextualizing perspective that simply cannot be obtained from the ground where one often (as, for example, in the cases of Bishapur and Firuzabad) has difficulty distinguishing the basic contours of what sprawls over seemingly flat terrain. Not the least of the wonders here are the ways the photos illuminate the rich and varied landscapes, helping us to understand the relationship between settlement and water supplies.

The book offers much more than photos though, as each of the sections has substantial introductory and explanatory text written by some of the most eminent archaeologists who have worked in Iran. They have interspersed with the photos some reconstruction drawings and site plans which help the reader then identify specific items in the photos. The volume can serve as an updated introduction to Iran’s rich history starting back in prehistoric times and the history of discovery and excavation down to and including very recent re-thinking about sites that earlier had been mis-identified or mis-interpreted. Apart from historic settlements and monumental structures, there are interesting discussions of the qanat system of underground water channels, and a concluding chapter bringing together information about vernacular architecture. The good selected bibliography will guide the reader to explore in more depth, as surely she or he will be inspired to do.

To illustrate Gerster’s point about the value of aerial views, compare the images here. The top one was taken (by Daniel Waugh) in 2010 from roughly the middle of the now somewhat overgrown site of the one-time Sasanian capital of Bishapur in Iran, looking in the same direction as Gerster’s aerial photo (p. 88), which not only reveals the city’s remains but provides an excellent sense of its relationship to the landscape. The Shapur River emerges from the Tang-e Chogan gorge, at the mouth of which on the cliffs is an important set of rock reliefs celebrating Sasanian victories.

This volume completes Cohen’s ambitious trilogy, which began in the West and now ends in Central Asia and India.* Reviewers (quoted on the dust jacket) have understandably lavished praise on the previous volumes: “a major piece of scholarship”; “standard reference work”; “monumental compendium.” Surely they will not be disappointed in this concluding installment.

As Cohen explains in his preface (p. xiii), he has “taken note of places for which there is evidence for the presence or the possible presence of Greeks or Macedonians.” In other words, colonies that are well documented are included, but so also are locations where there is a reasonable presumption of a Hellenistic presence. After brief chapters explaining the sources and providing an overview, the bulk of the book moves geographically roughly from West to East, each settlement introduced with a concise history, followed by what in effect is a bibliographical essay on highlighted subjects that may include location, name, topography or city planning, fortifications, coins… Many of these “bibliographical” entries are substantial discussions of controversial issues, informed not only by his reading of the literature and sources but also by personal communications with other eminent scholars. There are ten appendices (Founders; Settlements… attributed to Alexander; Toponyms…etc.), a substantial bibliography, an index and several well-drawn maps.

In short, Cohen’s volumes have to be the first stop for many kinds of explorations of the history, archaeology, numismatics, geography (…) of the Hellenistic world. Of course, any enterprise such as this fixes the knowledge at the terminus ante quem of the final revisions and publication date. Apart from checking ongoing reference databases, one might wish for an online version of Cohen’s magnum opus, where it would require a team of scholars to build on the foundations he has laid singlehandedly.

* The earlier volumes are: The Hellenistic Settlements in Europe, the Islands, and Asia Minor (1995) and The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa (2006), both published by University of California Press.


It would be easy to miss this very informative book, since the publications sponsored by the Aga Khan’s Central Asian University are not widely known, and its orientation for a popular audience might well mean academic publications would not give it the time of day. The author is an experienced archaeologist, who did his graduate work at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and has been leading excavations in Kyrgyzstan since 1987. He is currently a professor at the Kyrgyz-Turkish University “Manas.” His publications include three books and dozens of articles, one of the books (cited frequently here) on the barrows of the medieval nomads in the Tian-Shan.

Apart from his sponsorship of the University of Central Asia, with campuses in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that emphasize professional training, the Aga Khan has been a strong advocate for the preservation of and education in the cultural history of the region. This book is part of that effort, intended to educate a general audience in the early history and culture and encourage the development of public awareness of the need to protect archaeological and historical sites. Clearly the author is very well informed about the results of a broad range of archaeological work not only in Kyrgyzstan but also well beyond its borders. If some of the work being published in Central Asia has had an unfortunate tendency to focus on that which is confined to the boundaries of the modern state (even if they rarely correspond to any historical boundaries), that criticism does not apply here. Tabaldyev is very careful to indicate where there are interpretive disputes, comfortably draws parallels from farther afield, and explicitly warns against falling into the trap of assuming one can identify the ethnicity of ancient peoples from their archaeological remains.

What we get then is a nicely presented general introduction, accessible to the archaeologist and non-archaeologist alike, sketching in several largely chronologically arranged chapters various periods for which archaeological evidence has been found, starting well back in prehistoric times. Each chapter has illustrations — drawings of excavations and artifacts and then a section of quite decent color photographs. At the end of each chapter is a short section of notes with full citations of work the author explicitly discusses, even if these listings by no means encompass all that one might really wish to consult for a given topic. There is a glossary of important terms at the end of the book.

Some chapters, especially in the second half of the book have syncretic or topical content. For example, one contains primarily excerpted quotations from Mahmud Kashgari’s famous dictionary — the selection including words pertaining to aspects of daily life common amongst the Kyrgyz and any passages in which he explicitly refers to the Kyrgyz. There is a chapter which brings together the rich array of archaeological sites around Lake Son-Kul (not far from the Torugart Pass), an area that was and even today is important for its summer pastures and for its location on important trade routes. One of the sites in that area to which he devotes a chapter is Tash Rabat, where the imposing stone edifice in a valley north of the lake has been the subject of much debate by scholars concerning its real purpose. Tabaldyev cautiously comes down on the side of its having been a stopping place for caravans, even if the form of the architecture does not resemble that of the ordinary caravansary.

Another chapter discusses the importance of food rituals, juxtaposing evidence from burials with a discussion of the ones that still prevail in important social gatherings where the cuts of meat are hierarchically apportioned to the guests. While the author invokes the epic “Manas” and often provides interesting details from ethnographic field work, he
is careful not to assume one can necessarily read back from such material to interpret the archaeological record. He notes how the advent of Islam changed some of the cultural traditions (for example, rituals about burial). Even though conservative Muslim leaders in Kyrgyzstan today are battling against the persistence of customs which they deem “un-Islamic,” one gets the sense that Tabaldyev is quite comfortable with the idea that such traditions still have a place as part of the national heritage.

Those who track carefully the rich archaeological literature on these areas of Central Asia will probably find little new here, the possible exception being results of some of the excavations of the most recent decade. Here one is introduced to Wusun and Turkic graves, Runic inscriptions (some recently discovered), petroglyphs, mazars and much more. I would imagine that for most readers this nicely presented survey will be hugely informative and open the doors to further exploration of regions where, as the author readily admits, there is as yet so much work yet to be done to document the early history.


Presented merely as a large format album, this volume might be dismissed as simply yet another of the endless stream of publications drawing on the famous collection of Scythian gold in the Hermitage. Alekseev, who has published on a major excavation of a Scythian site writes a nice introduction on the history, art and discoveries; each artefact is provided with a descriptive paragraph. What makes this volume different and worth having though are the remarkably detailed close-up color photographs, almost all of them taken by V. S. Terebenin and stunningly reproduced. Since one assumes handling the objects and examining them with a magnifier is out of the question, as the summary blurb about the book indicates, these images indeed will have to be “useful even for specialists.”


It is difficult to keep up with the flood of publications out of Kazakhstan these days on the history of the Dasht-i Kypchak and especially that of the northwestern part of the Mongol Empire commonly called the “Golden Horde.” The author’s path to scholarly distinction began in the pedagogical institute of his hometown Semei (formerly Semipalatinsk) in Kazakhstan. He defended his kandidat (Ph.D. equivalent) dissertation in 2003 in the Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology (now located in Astana). The revised dissertation is now appearing in print thanks to the Sh. Mardzhan Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, which has a Center for Studies of the History of the Golden Horde.

As the author indicates, the “ethnopolitical” history of the eastern regions of Kypchak Steppe under the Mongols is quite controversial, given the cryptic and sometimes contradictory information in the written sources. Readers who tend to think of the Golden Horde only in connection with its rule over Russia and Ukraine should remember that its territories extended far to the east into Central Asia. Its history can be understood only by taking into account the complicated relations between its eastern and western parts.

The main chapter headings are:
1. Historiography and primary sources.
2. The conquest of the Dasht-i Kypchak and creation of the Ulus of Jöchi.
4. The khans and oglany of the left wing of the Ulus of Jöchi in the 13th century.
5. The “dark age” of the rulers of the Horde.
6. Urus Khan and his khanate.
7. The khans of the Eastern Dasht-i Kypchak at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century.

Other reviewers will have to comment on whether his careful examination of this history yields any surprises. Suffice it to say that he has read closely all the primary sources and juxtaposes the key passages in them that merit close analysis. His coverage of the secondary literature is impressive: not only the literature in Russian, Tatar and Kazakh, but also Western scholarship (Allsen, Golden and others), with which he actively engages. Uskenbai’s book merits a careful reading.


This large-format, generously illustrated volume contains a great deal that may be new to those interested in the medieval history of southern Kazakhstan, and, fortunately for those who do not read the Russian, it includes a several-page summary in English.* It is intended to complement an earlier volume which laid out some of the historical background and planning for the excavations reported here (K.M. Baipakov, E. A. Smagulov, Srednevekovyj Sauran [Medieval Sauran], Almaty, 2005). To some degree both volumes are part of a campaign by the archaeologists and their supporters to have what they are now terming the “Sauran Archaeological Complex” declared a protected archaeological park.

While medieval written sources mentioned Sauran among the important cities of the region, until modern times, there was no clear idea of what exactly was its location (or locations, as it turns out). Excavation in remains of a walled Sauran, close to the Syr-Darya River (reported in the earlier book) did not contain layers antedating the 14th century, even though an older city of that name was attested. Further archaeological survey and now the excavations of
the most recent decade at Karatobe, a few km southeast of Sauran have demonstrated Karatobe to have been the older city, whose residential quarters showed developed city planning, and continuity of settlement down into the 14th century, at which point it was abandoned in favor of the smaller walled site closer to the river. Moreover, the survey of the larger region demonstrated a wider settlement zone and uncovered very interesting evidence about the larger agricultural region and its irrigation systems.

The largest part of this book focuses on the excavations of the residential areas in Karatobe, with significant results even if so far only for a fraction of the total area of the city center. There is detailed discussion of the structure of the houses, heated by tandoors and with masonry “sofas” along the walls of many of the rooms. The housing types are similar to those excavated at Otrar, one of the better known medieval cities of southern Kazakhstan. The author traces the development of this architecture back to much earlier forms in Central Asia and suggests it originated in the adaptation of forms of nomadic dwellings on carts to sedentary life. Other analogies here that are of interest are with the cities of the Volga region of the Mongol Golden Horde, although there the residential quarters had more of an open plan.

Following the discussion of the architecture is a well-illustrated review of the artefacts recovered in these recent excavations — metal wares, ceramics, some glass, coins, etc. Given that this evidence is still rather fragmentary and in need of supplementing from additional excavation, to a considerable degree the material is presented as a descriptive catalog, leaving broad conclusions for some future time. The richly illustrated examples of ceramics (presented in color photos) will certainly be useful for scholars who cannot read the details. Determining whether there was a distinctive local ceramic production is a task for future analysis. The coins too are shown in good color images and properly described in tabular form, but they are relatively few and largely mixed chronologically in the disturbed strata of the excavation, making it difficult to use them for precise dating.

In some ways the most interesting parts of the book are in the introductory chapters, the section on water supply and irrigation especially compelling for its story of how the previously unanticipated large extent of the underground karez system has now been documented for this region.* The important interpretive themes established in the early part of the book (but not fully developed in the analysis of the detailed evidence later) concern perceptions about nomadism and sedentarism, where the author and many of his colleagues now come down firmly against the idea that the two were antithetical and argue instead that in Central Asia (certainly in these regions of Kazakhstan) there is much more of a syncretism of both. To speak of “marginality” of the economy (as sedentary authors and Eurocentric scholars have tended to do with reference to a nomadism) is simply wrong. There is every evidence from the region of Sauran that socio-economic developments there were not vastly different from those in other regions of Asia that earlier generations of scholars have declared to be more “civilized.”

Building on this idea is the summary of evidence regarding one of the critical questions that any study focusing on material of the 12th-15th centuries would need to answer: what was the impact of the Mongol invasions? Citing evidence from Termez and Otrar, both of which have been extensively excavated, Smagulov states in no uncertain terms that the archaeology at these important cities has turned up no evidence whatsoever to demonstrate catastrophic destruction at the time of the Mongol invasion in ca. 1220. In other words, the oft-cited account by Ata-Malik Juvayni that justifies Chinggis Khan’s decision to attack the territories the Khwarezm Shah, unleashing rivers of blood when he destroyed Otrar, comes under question. In the absence of archaeological evidence then, three interpretive possibilities present themselves: 1. that the invasion was not as
catastrophic as assumed and/or did not affect residential areas; 2. that the medieval authors writing about the invasion hugely exaggerated its impact; or 3. that archaeology is incapable of turning up evidence to identify the layers that can be associated with a catastrophic invasion. The author dismisses this third possibility, which then leaves us needing to take seriously the need to reassess the impact of the Mongol invasions. One might add here as an aside (this is not in Smagulov’s account), that ongoing research about the fate of Baghdad at the hands of Hülegu a generation later is raising similar doubts about the extent to which we should believe the written accounts.

There seems so far to be nothing in the excavations of the Sauran complex that would support a picture of destructive invasion by the Mongols. What we do have here then is evidence to begin to write the history of one of the many important cities in Central Asia which flourished under Mongol rule. That is not to say that the Mongols did not have an impact. At least one element of traditional architecture, the presence of domestic altars in many of the dwellings, seems to have died out in the Mongol period. The author argues, granted speculatively, that this may have been due to the more widespread adoption of Islam under Mongol rule and thus the disappearance of pre-Islamic local cults (not necessarily vestiges of Zoroastrianism). That there seems to be at least a brief hiatus in development of the city around the end of the third quarter of the 13th century might be connected with the Mongols, not on account of the initial invasion of half a century earlier, but on account of the internecine wars that resulted in new incursions. When the residents of “old” Sauran eventually moved in the 14th century to the town’s newer location, possibly that can be associated with a catastrophic invasion. The author dismisses this third possibility, which then leaves us needing to take seriously the need to reassess the impact of the Mongol invasions. One might add here as an aside (this is not in Smagulov’s account), that ongoing research about the fate of Baghdad at the hands of Hülegu a generation later is raising similar doubts about the extent to which we should believe the written accounts.

In sum, there is much in this book to encourage further reading in the very extensive and excellent archaeological literature of recent years that has been appearing in Central Asia and questioning many of the old assumptions about its medieval history.

Notes

** For a detailed discussion of the research on the karez system, with good illustrations, see Renato Sala and Jean Marc Deom, “The 261 Karez of the Sauran Region (Middle Syrdarya),” *Transoxiana* 13 (August 2008), on-line at <http://www.transoxiana.org/13/sala_deom-karez_sauran.php>.
it in a school in the Isfahan suburb of New Julfa concerning which little documentation has been preserved (Edmund Herzig had previously examined the records there kept in the New Savior Monastery). Yet a copy of a key textbook published in the late 17th century has survived (at the Bodleian), with its overview of markets, prices and goods across Eurasia and its concentrated lessons in accounting methods which were highly sophisticated and obligatory to master for those who signed the *commenda* contracts.

The subject here is the Armenian networks linked to New Julfa, where the merchants of Old Julfa were forcibly resettled by Safavid Shah Abbas I at the beginning of the 17th century. As has been well documented by Herzig, Rudolph Matthee, Ina Baghdiantz McCabe and others, while already established in the Persian silk trade, the Armenians then assumed a key role in managing it for the Safavid government. The accepted wisdom in dealing with the Armenian merchant communities, which were to be found all across Eurasia, has been to describe them as a "diapora," a designation which Aslanian argues is inaccurate, in that it misrepresents some of the features of how they operated and fails to provide an analytical framework in which to explore the dynamics of how they functioned. He prefers instead a networking model of what he terms "circulation societies," a scheme developed under inspiration from Fernand Braudel, Claude Markovits and Francesca Trivellato, among others.

Important features of the Armenian network include the way that it was so closely tied to the "home office" in New Julfa, the use of *commenda* arrangements as the legal mechanisms connecting those who financed the trade from the center and their agents who were responsible for its operation in far-flung locales, and the crucial importance of well-developed communications networks. Invoking analyses of "social capital," Aslanian devotes considerable attention to the way trust and reputation were established, without which the functioning of these networks would have been impossible, even though there also were formal institutional mechanisms that could adjudicate if contracts were broken.

Aslanian strongly disagrees with those (such as McCabe), who have argued there was something like a unified Armenian "company" (analogous to the European joint stock companies) in the 17th century. These were family firms, managed in patriarchal fashion, whose employees were mostly recruited from within the closely knit society of New Julfa. He also disagrees with McCabe (and others) as to when the decline of the New Julfan merchants set in, arguing that they still Prospered down to the middle of the 18th century, when the Afghan conqueror of Persia, Nadir Shah, finally set upon them and effectively decimated New Julfa. Even though there were several far-flung geographic circuits of the Armenian trade, the crucial one, focused around the Indian Ocean world suffered irretrievably with the decline of both the Safavid and Mughal empires. With the decimation of New Julfa, no center emerged to take its place.

In his concluding chapter, Aslanian compares the Armenian network with those of the Indian Multani merchants and of the Sephardic Jews, a comparison which highlights a good many similarities but also significant differences. Such comparison then raises interesting larger questions which, I think, might be asked about earlier periods and other communities that were involved in the Eurasian trade historically, even if it may well be the documentary base for studying those earlier periods is too thin to provide satisfactory answers. Might we, for example, find something in the analytical approach here that would give us new insights into the Sogdian or early Muslim trade networks? At very least, by considering the often rich detail here about the scale of the Armenians' trade and the impressive itineraries followed by the Armenian agents (see esp. pp. 140-43), we may wish to reconsider the question of when to write the end to the history of the Silk Roads. We now can develop a much more nuanced idea than ever before about such topics as the consequences of European expansion into Asia, the interrelationship between maritime and overland routes, and the relationship between central nodes and their peripheries.

Those interested in pre-modern communication, where the modes of travel in many ways changed so little over many centuries, will find a lot that is useful here, especially in Aslanian's tabulation of travel times, routes and agents for commercial correspondence across the world in which the Armenian agents operated (pp. 106-08, 112-17).


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