

### Book review: Hermann Kreutzmann: Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering Between Ancient and New Silkroads

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HERMANN KREUTZMANN, *Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering Between Ancient and New Silkroads*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020. 570 pages, 193 illustrations, 379 photos, 7 tables, € 98.00. ISBN 978-3-447-11369-4

*Hunza Matters* is the third volume of Hermann Kreutzmann's trilogy on High Asia (Volume 1: *Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia*, 2015; Volume 2: *Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploring and Espionage during and after the Great Game*, 2017). With this book, Kreutzmann comes full circle to the place where his career as a researcher on High Asia began, in 1984 with field research for his doctoral thesis in the Hunza Valley in the Karakoram of northern Pakistan. Over the course of 34 years, he has returned to Hunza together with his wife Sabine Felmy again and again, and produced a plethora of publications. Kreutzmann's field research has been paralleled by research in archives in Great Britain, Germany, Russia and Pakistan. Following his doctoral thesis *Hunza: ländliche Entwicklung im Karakorum* [*Hunza: Rural Development in the Karakoram*], published in 1989, *Hunza Matters* is his second single-authored book on this region.

In 2008, I concluded my review of Hermann Kreutzmann's edited volume *Karakoram in Transition: Culture, Development and Ecology in the Hunza Valley* (Oxford University Press, 2006) for *IQAS* 39(3–4) with the statement: "Since Hermann Kreutzmann is not only an excellent editor but also a prolific writer, one can but hope that his next go at the Hunza Valley may be a single-authored book." With the publication of *Hunza Matters*, this hope has been fulfilled.

Hunza and neighbouring Nagar were principalities in the Karakoram with multiple external relations and variable levels of dependence on larger powers until their integration into Pakistan in 1974. Since then, socioeconomic transformations have largely been driven 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.

Hermann Kreutzmann 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" (p. 363). To trace Hunza's role in the geopolitics of this region as well as its socioeconomic and political transformations through history are major objectives of this book, but not the only ones. While both Hunza and Nagar were able to retain some level of autonomy based on shifting allegiances with neighbouring powers, this ended when Great Britain secured control over Hunza in the course of the Hunza-Nagar campaign in 1891 as part of the

“Great Game”, i.e. the contest for supremacy in Central Asia, mainly between Great Britain and Russia. Under British overlordship, Hunza and Nagar were granted semi-autonomy, which came to an end when the two principalities were incorporated into Pakistan.

The book is organised around four perspectives: roads and infrastructure; environment and resources; actors and their arenas; and the creation of myths. The importance of infrastructural changes, concurrent with political changes and a major underlying factor of socioeconomic changes, is indicated by the fact that the perspective on roads and infrastructure precedes the other perspectives. The chapter “From Hunza Road to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” spans a period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, which began with several attempts by European actors to open up a road from British India and Kashmir to Kashgar in Xinjiang through Hunza: the so-called Hunza Road. Other notable attempts include the *Croisière Jaune*, a promotional tour through Eurasia for Citroën cars in 1931, which came to a premature end in the forbidding terrain of Hunza, and the construction of a motorable road through the Karakoram for supplying the troops of Chiang Kai-Shek in China, which did not evolve beyond the planning stage. It was left to the Soviets to pioneer the first motorable road in High Asia – the Pamir Highway – in 1940, and to the Chinese to build the Karakoram Highway in cooperation with Pakistan as a precursor to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In recognition of the extreme conditions in the Karakoram, the perspective on environment and resources puts mountain hazards before resource potential, starting out with a detailed description of the Atabad landslide of 2010, which inundated 20 km of the Karakoram Highway. The description features spectacular photographs, such as of the catastrophic event itself on p. 223, and is supplemented by a tabulation of hazardous events from 1894 to 2019 on pp. 226–244, which has been compiled from a variety of sources, including diaries, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) disaster records and observations by the author. The perspective then shifts to human diversity in the Karakoram, manifested in linguistic and denominational diversity, as an important factor underlying the complexities of land and resource use, one disregarded by observers blinded by the apparent backwardness of land use practices in the Karakoram. When the perspective finally shifts to resource use, it focuses on irrigated agriculture and animal husbandry as the main pillars of combined mountain agriculture, which characterises land use in this region. While in irrigated agriculture the emphasis has shifted from staple crops to high-value crops, especially potato and fruit, animal husbandry has experienced a decline that is partly due to a shortage of labour caused by the outmigration of young people for employment outside the valley.

The chapter “From Factors to Actors” provides a history of the Hunza valley from precolonial times to the abolition of Hunza State in 1974. Here, Hermann

Kreutzmann shows his abilities as a narrator of history and portrayer of its protagonists. I was particularly intrigued by his representation of “the outspoken quibbler” (p. 478) Reginald Schomberg, a British officer who frequently visited Hunza and whom Hermann Kreutzmann portrays with a mixture of fascination and disdain as a man who, as a solitary and expert traveller, had probably come into closer contact with the people of the region than any other foreigner at that time, but who was also more prejudiced against them than anyone else. Finally, the author refers briefly to myths promoted by Hunza’s rulers to prove the valley’s singular status, but also its rootedness in European history, e.g. the myth of descent from Alexander’s troops. In fact, he dedicates more space to the debunking of myths created by outsiders, especially the myth of longevity.

*Hunza Matters* is another exercise on Hermann Kreutzmann’s very own turf: to shed light on the importance of places located at the margins of or in the spaces between imperial powers and post-colonial states, and to trace the historical roots of current developments. In this case, one of the main objectives of the exercise is to show 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 emerged as the most important player.

The narrative maintains a pulsating rhythm: long and detailed descriptions alternate with compact syntheses such as the brilliant overview of the topics of mountain research (pp. 247–248). Highly condensed syntheses can be found even in the legends of illustrations and maps, such as the micro-essay on land use change in the Hunza Valley that serves as a legend to the illustration on p. 150, and the legend on p. 200 that provides a concise summary of the development of the Karakoram Highway. The attention to minute detail that marks the more descriptive passages of this book may strike those readers who do not share Kreutzmann’s deep affinity with Hunza as occasionally somewhat excessive, as when a listing of actors involved in the carpet-falcon exchange trade includes even the names of their hotels in Kashgar. This may be another expression 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” (p. 23). Direct quotes from colonial diaries or other sources sometimes run over several pages. Though lengthy, they help to generate a feeling of intimacy with the subject and with the place – one that, I feel, Hermann Kreutzmann wished to share with his readers and which a more concise and sparse presentation would have not been able to convey. In this sense, *Hunza Matters* is also a monument to the intense involvement of Hermann Kreutzmann and his wife Sabine Felmy with this valley.

Five pages of acknowledgements, starting with their hosts in Karimabad/Baltit, are testimony to this close connection.

The book is as lavishly endowed with maps and illustrations as the preceding two volumes. Maps include historical maps as well as maps designed by the author. A highlight is the beautiful reproductions of paintings by Aleksandr Yakovlev, who had accompanied the *Croisière Jaune* as the expedition painter: landscape paintings, accompanied by detailed legends explaining their geographical content, as well as portraits of notables or ordinary people. Another highlight is the photographs which include the first ever photographs taken in Hunza from 1886 and 1888, and which provide documentation of nearly every decade since the 1880s. *Hunza Matters* is not simply a summing up of earlier work and previous publications. These have been incorporated, of course, but new material has been added, especially from archival sources that have become accessible only very recently, and new observations are documented by photographs by the author from as recently as 2019.

Now that *Hunza Matters* has been published as the third volume of Hermann Kreutzmann's trilogy, I would like to reiterate my amazement, stated in my review of the first volume *Pamirian Crossroads* in *IQAS* 49, 2018, at the staggering achievement of not only one but three volumes written by the same author and published over a period of five years. *Hunza Matters* and its companion volumes stand out for this reason, but also for their rare combination of encyclopaedic scope with thematic as well as regional focus.

*Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt*

JONATHAN RIGG, *More than Rural: Textures of Thailand's Agrarian Transformation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. 300 pages, 14 figures, 1 map, USD 68.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-7659-3

In his new book, Jonathan Rigg, until recently Director of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore and now professor in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol, UK, presents insights from more than thirty years of research as a human geographer in rural Thailand.

The book sets out to solve the puzzle of why Thailand's stunning economic development and modernisation have not resulted in a thoroughgoing transformation of the countryside. The puzzle is epitomised by what Jonathan Rigg calls the persistence of the smallholder. One may even speak of proliferation, as the number of smallholder households has increased from 4.2 million in 1975 to 5.9 million in 2013. The persistence of the smallholder is paralleled