

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Christoph Baumer.** *The History of Central Asia. Vol. 4. The Age of Decline and Revival.* Trans. Christopher W. Reid. London: I.B. Tauris, 2018.

Baumer's coffee table-sized book is very much in line with the preceding three volumes—lavishly illustrated with succinct yet sufficiently detailed prose narrating the history of Central Asia. In this volume, Baumer resumes his history of Central Asia at approximately 1500 with the rise of the Uzbek Khanate and ends the volume with a review of the region (including Mongolia and Xinjiang) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He reaches roughly November 2016 (p. 292). Covering approximately 516 years of such a vast and complex region of Central Asia in only 298 pages of narrative is no small feat. Fortunately, Baumer does it very well.

When the book is opened, a color map of Central Asia in 1907 welcomes the reader on the inner front paper. The major empires and states of the day are delineated by colored borders: the Russian Empire, the Chinese Empire (a point to be addressed later), the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, British India are all present along with the border states of Nepal, and Bhutan.

While copious maps are included throughout the book (a total of nine), as this map begins the book, it is easily found so that the reader always has a map available for perusal. A similar map of Central Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century concludes the book as well. A comparison of the two maps dramatically shows the changes across a century of time. In my opinion, a book can never have too many maps and the placement of these is well conceived.

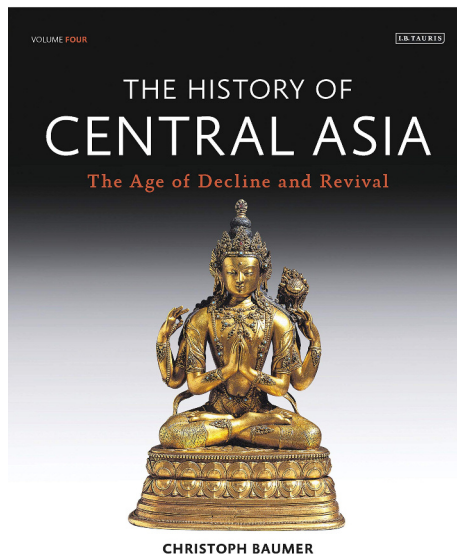
The book is organized into 10 chapters with most containing two or more sections, some of which are further divided. As is too frequent with books intended for a more popular market, endnotes are used rather than footnotes. Baumer is assiduous in his citations and uses a wide array of primary

sources and secondary sources. While all of the works are in western languages, he does not shy away from using primary sources translated into English, German, French, or Russian. While Baumer may not have mastered the languages of the region, this book is not a simple narrative history but a thoughtful work with analysis and as the author moves ever closer to the present, he critiques and comments on policies implemented by various actors.

The first chapter, “The Descendants of Genghis Khanids,” begins with the Uzbek Khanate and covers its two major dynasties—the Abu'l Khayrids and the Togha-Timurids or Astarkahanids. From there he explores the khanates that evolved around Khiva and in Moghulistan as well as the rise of the Naqshbandi Khwajas. The final section covers the successors of the Golden Horde, including Sibir and the Nogais. Baumer's talent for succinctly demonstrating the complexity of politics, religion, diplomacy, and warfare are on display in this chapter. Yet, while he is often insightful, he sometimes misses the mark. For instance, when discussing the decline of the Uzbek Khanates he focuses on trade and maintains the idea that the rise of European

sea routes undermined the caravan routes to Bukhara and other cities (p. 14). Yet, in the previous sentence, he discussed the rampant civil wars among the Uzbeks, but does not connect how this and the resulting break down in law and order might affect the caravan routes and trade in general.

From there he explores the rise of the Mughal Dynasty in India and Afghanistan in chapter 2, “The Descendants of the Timurids.” Overall, this is a very good summary of Mughal history and Baumer does not shy away from aspects that often do not appear in general narratives such as the Timurid Babur's alliance with the Safavids and that he even declared himself their vassal. Still, as with the Uzbeks, at times Baumer adheres to traditional in-



terpretations. For instance, when discussing Portugal's and the East India Company's intrusion into India, he states that the Mughals defeated the Portuguese, but then never truly explains why the Portuguese and EIC were permitted to remain. He simply states that the Mughals were a land empire and could not compete at sea. Some attention to how the Mughals benefitted from the European presence should have been addressed. Furthermore, the Mughal army could have certainly taken any stronghold prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The third chapter is "A Reorganisation of Geography: North Central Asia Becomes a Periphery." Here, Baumer explores the post-Yuan world but with most of the focus on the expansion of the Russian and Qing empires. Again, Baumer uses some outdated scholarship in stating that the Buddhism was used to pacify the Mongols (p. 71), but ignoring that the Buddhist Mongols continued to raid and threaten both the Ming and Qing empires. He is correct in that the encouragement of Buddhism was useful after the Qing took control of Mongolia (p. 76), but the earlier periods less so. Still, Baumer aptly discusses the overall situation in the region, but with groups on the periphery such as the Kalmyks and Kazakhs.

"Afghanistan until 1837 and the Khanates of Central Asia until the Russian Conquest" is the topic of Chapter 4. Afghanistan probably receives the most overall attention in this volume. Considering the fact that most readers will have heard of Afghanistan more than the Khanate of Kokand or even Uzbekistan, one cannot fault Baumer's decision here. He also handles its history adroitly without oversimplifying it. Furthermore, he connects the history of Afghanistan appropriately to the broader history of Central Asia and South Asia. For instance, when discussing the Afghan invasion of the Mughal Empire as well as their defeats of the Marathas, Baumer links this to the eventual rise of the Sikhs as well as opening the door for the East India Company's domination of India (p. 106).

In Chapter 5, the reader joins "The Great Game." The chapter is suitably subtitled as "Central Asia as a Pivot of Russian and British Expansion Policy." This chapter covers roughly 1837 until 1907. The Great Game is possibly the most studied or published period of Central Asia history. Yet, somehow, Baumer finds a way to add to that. For

instance, his perspective is not overly Anglo-centric. Nor does he overly glamorize the ability of the Russian or British military power vis-à-vis local powers. Furthermore, he links expansion by both powers to wider events, such as Russia being unchallenged partially due to Britain's involvement in the Sudan and other parts of its empire. History does not happen in a vacuum. Furthermore, he ties the success of Russia to railroads and discusses how this fuels Britain's expansion of railroads in India. My only criticism of this section regards his handling of Tibet, particularly as it lacks an explanation of why it appears to operate independently of the Qing Empire. Baumer provides no context here. To be fair, most works on the Great Game make the same omission.

In Chapter 6, the author provides a short coverage of World War I and ties to Central Asia, but focuses on Central Asia, the between world wars, which is also the chapter's subtitle. Chapter 6's primary title is "The Drive for Sovereignty." Here, Baumer examines not only Central Asia, but also Afghanistan, Xinjiang, and Mongolia. In most accounts of World War I, Central Asia is overlooked. It was not a front but still played an interesting role during the war. Baumer's coverage is adequate and well done. Better still is his explanation of the effects of World War I and World War II on Central Asia in its entire region. As with the other chapters, he remains brief but poignant in his coverage. While scholars of the region are unlikely to learn anything new, a novice will learn much and this serves as a good starting point for further study. This section also has a wonderful map of the Aral Sea showing how Soviet policies affected it from 1960 to 2016 in approximately twelve-year increments. As always, Baumer uses maps effectively.

Afghanistan once again steps into the spotlight in Chapter 7 in "A Multilateral Great Game in Afghanistan, 1978-92." In this chapter, Baumer provides a lucid breakdown of events leading up to the Soviet-Afghan war along with a concise overview of all of the players involved for the past 40 years. Afghanistan demonstrates a reluctance to leave the stage in Chapter 8, "Afghanistan Forces the Three Major powers to Engage in a Joint Struggle against Islamic Extremism." The title, despite the lack of eloquence or pithiness, aptly describes the chapter. Here, Baumer provides good and valid criticism of

U.S. actions after the 2001 invasion. Baumer provides praise where warranted, but also cogently exposes the duplicity of Pakistan and the painful or perhaps willful ignorance of the United States in regards to Pakistan's support of the Taliban as well as Pakistan's support of Islamic extremists as a wild-card versus India. He also lists the external reasons for the continued unsatisfactory conditions of Afghanistan, thus once again placing the region in a larger context.

Chapter 9, "The New Independence of Central Asian States," takes the reader from 1990 to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author includes not only the former Soviet Republics, but also Mongolia as well as regions that did not achieve independence, such as Xinjiang and republics within the Russian Federation. Baumer's coverage of Mongolia in Chapter 7 was a bit lackluster compared to other regions. For instance, he skips from the submission of the Khalkha to the Qing in 1691 to 1911. The omission of 200 years of history is disconcerting, but he redeems himself in his coverage since independence. While he rightfully notes the successful transition to a nascent democracy, Baumer also provides a nice summary of the horrible conditions that international organization created in Mongolia during the 1990s. While well meaning, they were often poorly conceived or executed, which also makes Mongolia's achievement the more remarkable. While this chapter provides brief political and historical overviews, Baumer tends to focus more heavily on economic matters in this chapter.

The tenth and final chapter is titled "Outlook." As the title implies, the author looks forward to the future and it is a proper way to conclude this four-volume series. Baumer is not overly optimistic in his assessment, yet his assessment is not bleak, simply pragmatic. He notes that one of the challenges for the former Soviet republics is how they handle the growing religiosity among their population without pushing the moderate Muslims into the arms of Islamic extremism. He also notes that western countries that advocate an abrupt transition to democracy must be wary, as it can be through democratic institutions that religious extremists can subvert democracy to gain power. The biggest issue, which still remains the elephant in the room, is the stability of Afghanistan. Connected to this, Baumer also brings in another ele-

ment that receives less attention—Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, which has contributed so much to it. Finally, he concludes with economic hurdles, particularly the logistics of being landlocked in a global economy.

The book also includes an appendix of the major ruling dynasties. The fact that he also included his sources for the charts is highly appreciated as it does assist in explaining some of the transliterations of names and other matters. There is nothing egregious in any of these, but as those who study Central Asia know, every name often has multiple spellings. This is an extremely useful resource and one that this reviewer will consult frequently. The index is also divided into concepts, names, and places.

There are a few issues with the book, although minor. When discussing the Battle of the Ugra River (1480), Baumer mentions that King Casimir IV of Poland-Lithuania left Ahmad Khan of the Great Horde in a lurch, but neglects to say that Casimir IV had been intercepted by Muscovy's Crimean allies (p. 37). While he refers to the Al-tishahr (Six Cities) of Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Aksu, Kucha, and Turfan, he also mentions that they are sometimes referred to as the Yetishahr, but he never names the seventh city (p. 49). The largest issue is Baumer's inability to distinguish between the Qing Empire and China. It should be noted that he is not alone, but in a work that covers the history of Central Asia, I would desire the recognition that the Qing was most certainly not a Chinese Empire like the Ming, but one in which the ruling elite were non-Han, and that well over 50% of the territory was not historical Chinese territory. China and the Qing Empire should not be conflated as the same place. Despite this, these issues do not detract from the overall quality of the book.

In conclusion, this is highly recommended book. Like the previous three volumes, Baumer's final volume to *The History of Central Asia* provides an excellent introduction to the past five hundred years of Central Asian history. Its lavish illustrations and use of maps as well as the high-quality production will make this (and the entire set) an excellent addition to anyone's library.

- Timothy May