

A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East. By Richard Foltz. London: I.B. Tauris. 2019. 256 pp. doi: 10.22679/avs.2022.7.1.009

Richard Foltz in his *A History of Tajiks: Iranians of the East* looks at the long history of today's Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. Political, cultural-historical, linguistic, and religious narratives are intricately interwoven in his monograph, which complements Richard Frye's invaluable *Bukhara: The Medieval Achievement*. The author draws upon his profound expertise in a variety of disciplines, but the linguistic aspect comes to the fore and functions as the main organizing principle. The most important contribution of the work is to put the history of the Tajiks into a broader Iranian cultural-historical and linguistic context. In the absence of a comprehensive work on this vast topic, scholars needed to obtain historical knowledge about the Tajiks piecemeal. This niche is filled by this synthesis, which blends diverse linguistic and methodological approaches. Foltz brings considerable clarity to his discussions making it an ideal introductory work for undergraduates and for general readers. The author's vivid experiences scattered throughout the work make the reading experience more captivating and informative. The monograph is divided into the following broad, inter-related units: pre-Islamic history, Islamic period, and Soviet era.

The first chapter surveys the pre-historic cultures of the region and focuses on the Sintashta culture and on the Bactria-Margiana Archeological Complex (BMAC). Today's Chelyabinsk Oblast in Russia was home to the Sintashta culture characterized by two technological advantages: the domestication of horses and metallurgy. The examination of BMAC is rather religion oriented and it mentions that 19th-century Parsi-European scholarly discussions were crucial in the reshaping of Zoroastrianism as a monotheistic religion. However, the statement that Zarathustra's "hymns were not originally understood as Divine Revelation" engages with Marin Haug's 19th century *Urtext*-driven philological perspective (p. 27). This approach fails to consider the significance of post-Islamic Persian and Gujarati compositions on Zarathustra's miracles (*mu'jizāt*) that were regarded as proofs of his prophethood. The same chapter treats the fertility and vegetation goddess of BMAC whose "later Sogdian incarnation was Nanai", which allows the author to bridge BMAC with his following chapter on the history of Sogdians. (p. 24). Before and during the early Islamic period the stereotypically shrewd and cunning middle-men of Silk Road trade were the Sogdians. This religiously and culturally diverse Eastern Iranian-speaking group maintained lucrative relations with China, the Byzantine Empire, and the Arabs. The Abbasids increasingly relied on Sogdian guards, which foreshadowed the subsequent employment of Turkic soldiers, such as the Ghaznavids, who eventually carved out their independent empire. During the early Islamic period, the intermediary position of the Sogdians was absorbed by the Tajiks whose culture was progressively Islamicized.

The second thematic unit is also divided into two parts. Chapter III focuses on the history of the Samanids, while chapter IV charts the history of the Tajiks from the Ghaznavid period up until the October Revolution. The 10-11th century Persian revival during which a number of poets and historians burgeoned serves as the narrative framework for discussing

the history of the Samanids who came to play a prominent role in 20th and 21st-century Central Asian cultural and memory politics. In comparison with other works on the period, this monograph provides a coherent and readable, although at times schematic overview. Chapter IV, which draws from the author's 1998 *Mughal India and Central Asia*, discusses the symbiotic relationship between Turks and Tajiks. Due to the tremendous chronological scope of the chapter (c. 1000-1918), it is the most cumbersome part of the book. The historically fluid notion of Sart, designating 18th century Central Asians bilingual in Turki and Tajik, only appears once in this chapter (p. 106). Elucidating the different interpretations of this notion in the context of the 1897 Russian and 1926 Soviet censuses would have afforded an opportunity to continue the integration of Tajiks into an Iranian cultural-historical framework and to link chapter IV with the next one.

The final unit of the work tracks the Soviet and Post-Soviet history of Tajiks, while Chapter VII concentrates on their co-ethnics living in today's Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, China, and Russia. Chapter V contrasts the diverse pre-Soviet Central Asian religion, location, and profession-based modes of identification with the language-oriented Stalinist national delimitation strategy, which aimed at maximizing linguistic differences to create separate ethnic categories (p. 116-7). The creation of Soviet Tajikistan without the culturally pivotal cities of Samarkand and Bukhara and the Uzbek re-appropriation of polymaths such as Bīrūnī or Khwārazmī are also discussed in this chapter (p. 144). The history of the Republic of Tajikistan (Chapter VI) with its focus on the rehabilitation of the sway of Samanids for crafting a new national identity under the presidentship of Emomali Rahmon is highly thought-provoking. It connects Chapter III and VI and highlights the implicit geopolitical significance of the evocation of the sprawling Samanid empire, which encompassed the current Uzbek cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Finally, the book examines the extended application of the term Tajik to the mostly Wakhi and Sarikoli-speaking residents of China's Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County. This also draws a full circle between the introductory conceptual discussion on the term Tajik and its contemporary usage.

Foltz's monograph on the history of the Tajiks against the backdrop of Iranian cultural history fills an important gap. It traverses chronological and area studies boundaries and connects Chinese, South Asian, Central Asian, and Soviet histories, similar to his masterful *The Religions of the Silk Road*. However, the blending of Afghan and Transoxianan histories deserves to be further elaborated. Additional maps could greatly enhance the intelligibility of certain parts. A detailed study on the impact of Soviet cultural dynamics and textual production on Tajik cultural history, which is only briefly discussed, greatly deserves to be brought to light. In the past years, we have witnessed a renewed interest in the field of Persianate studies and this work is a vitally important contribution to this growing body of literature. This protean book reorients the predominantly Iran-focused discussions and will stimulate further dialogue between scholars of Central Asia, Iranian, Persianate and Soviet Studies.

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