



## **Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering Between Ancient and New Silk Roads. By Hermann Kreutzmann**

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## Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering Between Ancient and New Silk Roads. By Hermann Kreutzmann

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“Hunza Matters” is not only the title of the book, it could also be the author’s research motto. Hermann Kreutzmann first visited the small high mountain region of Hunza in northern Pakistan more than 40 years ago, and since then he has returned countless times to his scientific and emotional home for extended fieldwork. The reason why Hunza is highly relevant for the geographical analysis of a high mountain region becomes evident from reading the demanding but fluently written text. *Hunza Matters* is the third part of a trilogy that started with *Pamirian Crossroads* (Kreutzmann 2015; reviewed by Madeleine Reeves in 2017) and continued with *The Wakhan Triangle* (Kreutzmann 2017; reviewed by Marcus Nüsser in 2019). The 3 volumes together are the magnum opus, the scholar’s lifework, into which many further investigations are incorporated; the bibliography lists more than 70 titles with Kreutzmann’s sole or coauthorship. The order of the 3 volumes is probably not accidental: the Pamir was the last research area, farthest distant from Hunza, which became accessible only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and which the author first visited after he had made the Wakhan and—across borders—the Wakhi people the subject of his habilitation thesis (Kreutzmann 1996). Now he returns spatially to the starting point of his research: Hunza was the subject of his PhD dissertation (Kreutzmann 1989).

The structure of this remarkable volume adopts a fourfold approach. First comes accessibility and the development of transport and trade access. This ranges from the simplest mule tracks to the transnationally important Karakoram Highway or Pak–China Friendship Highway, which the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative now claims to be part of the New Silk Road. This development is recounted in an extremely multifaceted way, with the extensive use of historical sources ensuring the authenticity of the statements. The second approach is based on a very broad concept of resources, which also includes the negative side—mountain hazards as a threat to the use of resources—and thus underlines the fragility of transport development and any kind of use. From the point of view of geographical

development research, the concept of resources extends to the general basis of peoples’ lives, namely, soil for agriculture, grazing potentials for pastoralism, and water for irrigation purposes, with an emphasis on legal norms and informal regulations. The population is considered in its independent adaptation to natural conditions across all ethnolinguistic and religious differences. Increased mobility opportunities resulting from road construction appear as a phenomenon of modernization. How regional elites and populations organize development and resource use is dealt with in the third part, which focuses on the actors. In addition to the permanent dominance of traditional elites, companies and professionals appear as new groups in social advancement. A brief fourth section is devoted to the myths surrounding Hunza, which make it clear that there are narratives shaping the space beyond spatial development and development control; this section demythologizes such narratives. These 4 approaches incorporate an extraordinary variety of topics, encompassing aspects of natural geography as well as ethnolinguistics or development theory, and testify to a very broad understanding, which Kreutzmann knowledgeably presents to the reader. He does not want to just present “a geography of Hunza,” but rather to make understandable the development of a high mountain region under its own dynamics and external influences.

Therefore the presentation consistently argues on 2 scales. On the one hand, small-scale, local processes in the former microstates of Hunza and Nagar are depicted; on the other hand, development is integrated into a broad geopolitical context. The Great Game of the 19th century, the secular competition between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for control of Central Asia, is just as important as the role of China. Exploration and espionage, intrigue and discovery play a role, and some research expeditions with natural history and ethnographic objectives appear in a completely different light. The fact that even Russia extended its interest to Hunza is shown by the example of the Pole A. Grąbczewski in the 1880s (large parts of Poland belonged to the Russian Empire at that time). When surveying the area, even after the borders between the empires had been negotiated, there was a British–Russian cooperation which ended only with the Russian Revolution in 1917. Joint railway projects did not get beyond preliminary considerations. Competition was renewed in the 1930s, when the aim was to influence Xinjiang.

The text of this opulent volume is characterized by an enormous historical depth, which is drawn from archival sources of various provenance and a widely scattered literature. The political-geographical analysis also makes it clear that even a remote region is not unaffected by the competition of great powers and by globalization. Thus, the book also represents the (Europe-centered) history of the development of Hunza.

Like the other 2 volumes of the trilogy, this one also impresses with its high editorial quality and the aesthetics of an excellent layout. Nowhere does one have the impression of “lead deserts,” as a wealth of illustrations complements

the text. Map excerpts from historical maps use regional examples—a deliberate side effect—and trace developments in cartography; and the author's own maps and historical and current visual material complete the text. The impressive quality of the author's older photographs takes the reader on a visual journey through space and time. However, legends are missing from some excerpts from older maps. Perhaps not necessarily expected in a scientific publication is the reproduction of the wonderful paintings by Alexander Yakovlev from the 1930s, which are realistic enough to depict space, but at the same time impressionistic enough to reflect moods. The appendix includes a glossary, which does justice to the ethnic and linguistic diversity and facilitates understanding of the toponyms; an explanation of toponyms; an extensive bibliography, which does not lack current publications, but proves that the author has also extensively reviewed older literature; as well as a detailed index.

The present volume is not the processing of an extensive card index of observations, quotations, and records from 4 decades of research. "Hunza matters": the title of the book is

its program. For Kreutzmann, Hunza is the paradigm of an ancient high mountain region, which reveals structures and processes that can be transferred to other areas. Hunza also stands for the continuity of self-determined persistence in a region faced by colonial influence and geopolitical rivalries. And Hunza is the constantly motivating object of an explorer who pursues all contexts with lasting empathy without leaving the sobriety of objective representation.

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