

## **Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploration and Espionage During and After the Great Game. By Hermann Kreutzmann**

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## Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploration and Espionage During and After the Great Game. By Hermann Kreutzmann

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Afghanistan's present-day boundary includes the Wakhan Corridor, an odd appendage in the northeast of the country that juts out to border Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. Wedged between the Central Asian mountain ranges of the Pamir, Hindu Kush, and Karakoram, the salient is more than 300 km long and varies in width between approximately 15 and 65 km. Physical challenges and poor infrastructure meet political insecurity in this remote mountain landscape. The Wakhan region provides a striking example of the persistence of colonial influence, as well as a harsh environment challenging the resilience of local mountain populations. Until the present day, the Wakhan remains a geopolitical pivot and area of competing strategic interests. It also provides an arena for intrigue, espionage, and geopolitical rivalry. This is the main thematic focus of *Wakhan Quadrangle*.

Hermann Kreutzmann's monograph on the *Wakhan Quadrangle* is the second part of a series with *Pamirian Crossroads* (Kreutzmann 2015) as the first volume. Not only the same format and style but also some illustrative details show the connectedness of the 2 books. The avant-propos of *Wakhan Quadrangle* comes with a photograph showing 2 men together with some transport animals and a wide mountain landscape and the Hindu Kush in the background, taken only moments apart from a photograph in *Pamirian Crossroads* (Kreutzmann 2015, p 430). Drawing on his outstanding fieldwork experience in High Asia over 40 years, coupled with a deep affection for the region and a passion for collating and analyzing archival material, Hermann Kreutzmann has produced a masterpiece of historical geography and historically informed borderland studies. One of the first maps in the book provides an overview of his own extensive travels in the region between 1977 and 2016 (p 14). He visited all parts of the broader region and crossed the remote passes of Baroghil and Irshad-e-Win. The forthcoming third volume in the series will focus on Hunza, where the author started his impressive mountain research career.

The book can be divided into 3 broad parts. The first consists of an extended introductory chapter, followed by a more detailed examination of the logic of colonial exploration and its evolution during the Great Game ("Missions with an aim"). The author identifies the overlooked role of "indigenous intermediaries," individuals trained by the British who were key to the colonial project, taking the first steps in the collection and production of geographical knowledge. This sets the stage for the second part, where the case of one such explorer is taken up in detail. To do this, Hermann Kreutzmann reproduces the entire report by Munshi Abdul Rahim, a forgotten indigenous explorer who was sidelined in British historical accounts. The Munshi served the British Raj as a "political" traveler and prepared a comprehensive report of his journey to Badakhshan and Wakhan in winter 1879/1880 for the British Foreign Office. This was printed some years later in an English translation, and a reprint in facsimile forms the centerpiece of *Wakhan Quadrangle*. Under the headings "Sequel" and "Postscript," the third part of the book provides an account of trade, mobility, migration, and settlement in the frontier region, along with a historically informed narration of the shifting power constellation within and around Wakhan Quadrangle. It further contains rich information on contemporary socioeconomic conditions of Wakhi diaspora communities in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. All chapters are followed by endnotes, including citations. The book also includes a glossary of vernacular terms, a bibliography with a list of archival collections and maps, and an index.

The Wakhan adjoins, and has historically been shaped by, influences from Bokhara (Russian Turkestan), Sarikol (East Turkestan, China), Kashmir (British India), and Badakhshan (Afghanistan). The cartographers' gaze reduced the lived spaces and trade corridors of local communities into 2-dimensional geometric perspectives such as triangles (Kreutzmann 1998) and quadrangles, reshaping complex mountain topographies and power constellations. Kreutzmann's main achievement is to foreground the subjective social spaces inhabited by local mountain communities during and after the Great Game.

The book relies upon an impressive variety and richness of visual material, including 34 historical photographs, 38 portraits, 64 historical maps, 23 landscape sketches, and cartoons and other graphical material. Furthermore, Kreutzmann provides 76 of his own photographs from numerous field visits between 1977 and 2016 as well as 30 maps of his own. The impressive set of historical maps demonstrates the diversity, importance, and centrality of classical cartography to the colonial project. It can also be read as a historical timeline of cartographic representations and styles. In this context, the integration of selected satellite imagery would have been useful in extending this timeline to modern geospatial representations. Likewise, the compilation and collation of diverse historical photographs is stunning. Examples include photographs taken by George Michael Giles during the Gilgit Mission (Lockhart and

Woodthorpe 1889), showing forts between Gilgit and Mastuj (p 50) and the Baroghil Pass (p 88) and Dorah Pass (p 113) in the peripheries of Chitral. For some examples, repeat photography would have been useful; however, Kreutzmann has missed the opportunity, afforded by his repeated visits, to illustrate processes of change in the broader region by presenting matched photographs. His own photographs of Chitral Town from 1981 and 1991 (pp 209–210), placed in the section “Routes across the Hindukush, Pamirs, Karakoram and Himalaya,” hint in this direction. The author’s concentration and reliance on his own research makes him—in rare cases—lose sight of other contemporary studies in the region of Chitral where photographic material was used (eg Nüsser 2001). On a more general level, Kreutzmann juxtaposes the flowing text with his own photographs and captions in a very effective and convincing way, for example in the sections “Topics covered and highlighted in Munshi Abdul Rahim’s report” (pp 101–142), “Adaptation in new abodes – mobility, migration and integration” (pp 227–235), and “Cross-boundary communication and exchange” (pp 236–238). The way in which he does this can be characterized as a rediscovery of colonized landscapes after a century.

Key themes covered in *Wakhan Quadrangle* are: the role of indigenous intermediaries in organizing intelligence collection for the British Raj during the Great Game; and the history, migration, and livelihoods of mountain communities. Disguised as traders, pilgrims, or lamas, and trained to explore covertly using their linguistic skills and familiarity with cultural practices, those who conducted spying activities for the Raj aimed to gain political and nonpolitical information and knowledge. While some indigenous explorers—such as Nain Singh from Kumaon, who became famous as the Pundit—received attention in colonial records, most local service providers in surveying efforts remained nameless subalterns in imperial hierarchies and endeavors. Munshi Abdul Rahim was secretly commissioned by the first British political agent in Gilgit, John Biddulph, to record routes, topographical information, and military details. In addition, the Munshi’s report offers early original information on local economies, land-use

patterns, cultural practices, local chronologies, and dependencies.

This report was written during a crucial period for Wakhan that resulted in the division of the formerly independent principality, leading to forced migration of a large proportion of the local population. This episode in the power-related competition between Great Britain and tsarist Russia and the fortunes of the Wakhi people in the modern nation states of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan, the topic of the author’s habilitation monograph (Kreutzmann 1996), is the subject of a thorough examination. The distinction between exploration, reconnaissance, and espionage from colonial times to the present day is certainly not easy to make.

To cut a long story short: The book is not only a rich source of largely neglected historical material but it also provides extensive and painstaking analyses of actors and development processes in a remote and geopolitically sensitive mountain region of Central Asia. The impressive collection and compilation of maps, photographs, documents, drawings, and portraits, combined with a thorough written text, is a work of remarkable scholarship and a major contribution to untangling the complex geometry of the quadrangle. Together with *Pamirian Crossroads* and the forthcoming volume, Kreutzmann has indeed produced a book series for the scientific coffee table (however, only for robust ones). The high production standard has done justice to the content. The book is highly relevant for historical and political geography, borderland studies, and the readers of *Mountain Research and Development*.

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