

was not included in the exhibition, the chapter is relevant to other large-format Seljuq-era stucco, including the wall panel lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1929-60-1). One of the landmark objects on exhibit in “Court and Cosmos” was a collection of pages from the earliest known copy of *The Shahnama*, now held in the National Central Library of Florence (Ms. Magl Cl.III.24). Alessandro Sidoti and Mario Vitalone describe in detail the process of conserving the manuscript and stabilizing it for travel to New York and future study. Each of these chapters provides clear documentation of the conservation process for anyone wishing to work with these or comparable objects from the period.

Beyond their individual merits, the chapters of this volume create sustained discussions of architecture (chapters 4-9), hybrid cultural identities (chapters 9-11), manuscripts (chapters 11, 12 and 16), and decorative arts (chapters 13-16). Furthermore, there are important through-lines of practice, craft, method and the social landscape underlying the artistic materials featured in the exhibition. Thus, while few may read the volume in its entirety, there is merit in doing so; a testament to careful editing. However, while this is a handsomely produced book with full-color images of art objects, the maps and figures are at times completely unreadable. To give just one example, on the opening map of the Seljuq Empire (Figure 2.1), only the names of the largest regions can be read, and only if the reader already knows what to look for. The e-book format should allow for higher resolution images, but unfortunately that opportunity has not been taken.

The Seljuqs and their Successors offers something for anyone studying the Seljuq period, of which there are bound to be more given the high visibility of the Met exhibition. The editors, who also designed the exhibition, have curated the knowledge in this volume effectively, save a few questionable decisions, such as the single-chapter Part Two or the poor quality of non-object images. These minor points aside, the volume should help inspire further research in the many fields of inquiry it addresses.

doi:10.1017/irn.2021.61

A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East. Richard Foltz (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019). Pp. 256. \$35.95 paper. ISBN: 9781784539559

Reviewed by Gabrielle van den Berg, Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Leiden, Leiden, the Netherlands (g.r.van.den.berg@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

With *A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East*, Richard Foltz presents the first comprehensive overview of the history of the Tajiks in English, covering a very long time span: from pre-history to 2018. As Foltz informs his readers in the last part of the book, entitled “Excursus: Afghanistan at a Stone’s Throw,” he traveled to Badakhshan, Tajikistan, in the spring of 2018 and was sorely tempted to cross the river Panj to include Afghanistan in his own personal travel history. After all, he argues, book knowledge needs to be accompanied by lived personal experience, and not having visited the place where such a large number of Tajiks live (many more than in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan), gave him a distinct feeling of discomfort (pp. 192–93). This part of the book in particular demonstrates Foltz’s personal engagement with the topic of his monograph.

Foltz divides his *History of the Tajiks* into seven chapters plus an introduction, a short conclusion, and the aforementioned excursus. He dedicates his book to the Harvard Iranologist Richard Frye (1920–2014), whose work and vision inspired him to write it. In a certain sense Foltz regards his own work as a continuation of Frye’s *The Heritage of Central Asia*, but with a

focus on the history of the Tajiks.¹ For, he says, Frye meant to write a history of Tajikistan, but ended up producing a work far broader in scope, since he was “confronted with the conundrum that most of what could pass for Tajik history had in fact occurred outside the borders of the present-day republic” (p. xii). Inevitably, Foltz finds himself confronted with the same conundrum, so the first four chapters are, in a way, the history of Central Asia, with a focus on the role of the Tajiks.

As Foltz realizes all too well, “Tajik” is a problematic term: how and when should it be used, and for whom? In the introduction (“Who Are the Tajiks?”), he makes an admirable effort to provide a workable explanation for this designation. Foltz rightfully draws attention to the fluidity of the term from a historical perspective, but he often uses “Persian” and “Iranian,” which is somewhat confusing. No doubt, this also has to do with the very broad scope of the book, the major aim of which seems to be to write the people who today designate themselves as Tajiks into the rich history of Central and West Asia, which from today’s nation–state perspective should be regarded as shared history.

In chapter 1 Foltz focuses on prehistory. Here we read how the Aryans—the ancestors of today’s Tajiks, but also of present-day Iranians, Afghans, and many others—migrated south, west, and east in the second millennium BCE. This chapter is informative and fluidly written, and Foltz adds spice to his narrative by referring to numerous present-day connections with the past: he discusses the nomadic Aryans of the Eurasian steppe, the Oxus civilization, and the religion of Zarathustra, also referring to the popularity of the Zoroastrian religion in postindependence Tajikistan.

In chapter 2 Foltz moves on to the Sogdians and the Bactrians. This chapter, too, reads as an introduction to the general history of Central (and West) Asia. Like all other chapters of the book, it is divided into accessible sections on specific topics (e.g., Sogdian art, Central Asian Buddhism, Muslim invasions, Sogdians and Uyghurs). In this respect *A History of the Tajiks* could well serve as an introductory course book. In chapter 2 Foltz introduces his readership to “the emerging ‘Tajik’ identity,” with a brisk description of how this identity “evolved out of Sogdian and Bactrian” identity (p. 57), and how “Sogdian identity—like that of the heavily Buddhist Bactrians further south—progressively dissolved into the strictly Muslim character of the Tajiks” (p. 60).

This brings us to the third chapter of the book, devoted to the Muslim Samanids and the New Persian Renaissance. This is a pleasant version of the well-known story of the rise of the Samanid dynasty in the ninth century CE and the Samanids’ patronage of the New Persian language and literature. The overview is accompanied by poetic examples and references to the role the Samanid ruler Ismā’īl (d. 907) plays in present-day Tajik discourse. Remarkable in this chapter, and indeed throughout the book, is the paucity and unevenness of references. While reading, one notices some footnotes, to be sure, but there could, and should, be many more, as one would like to know more about Foltz’s source material. In chapter 3 Foltz’s slight bias toward the Tajiks’ historical role starts to appear. It may be just a matter of phrasing; for example, why would it be unfortunate that Fārābī cannot be counted as playing a part in the so-called Samanid Renaissance? (p. 76). What exactly is meant by “an ethnic Tajik” in the case of Avicenna, even in a discussion on his role in “modern nation–state thinking”? (p. 77). In the remainder of this chapter the reader is presented with succinct narratives on the rise of Sufism and the rise of the Turks. This section ends with Foltz’s general remark that “the Tajik people” would serve the Turkic rulers for the coming eight-and-a-half centuries. This comment is a transition to the subject of the next chapter, which summarizes the events of about nine centuries in thirty pages.

The perceived dichotomy between Turk and Tajik comprises much of chapter 4, entitled “Tajiks and Turks.” Here Foltz rightly draws attention to the problematic implications of these designations, although he also confirms them with statements such as “It is one of

¹ Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia: From Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1996).

the ironies of history that from the eleventh century and even up to the twentieth century, Turk-led governments from Anatolia to India would become the world's principal promoters of Iranian civilization, a process that began with Maḥmūd" (p. 85). Is "irony" appropriate here? Another example: "Bidil was not a Tajik, and never lived in Central Asia, but he remains quite well-known among the Tajiks of Central Asia today" (pp. 106–7). Of course, what counted in the seventeenth century, in Bidil's lifetime, and still counts today, is not Bidil's ethnicity, but his literary production in the cosmopolitan language of the age, Persian.² Foltz rightly points out in the next chapter that language and ethnicity as understood today did not play much of a role in the way people identified themselves in the pre-Soviet period (p. 117). This, however, is not always apparent from the way the book is written.

The Ghurids are designated by Foltz in chapter 4 as a Tajik dynasty (pp. 86, 90) and described as "in a certain sense the last independent Tajik state of the pre-modern period." Such labeling and framing of dynasties needs further discussion, even with the provision that Foltz includes. Another topic of chapter 4 is the growing importance of Sufism in the fourteenth century, which is dealt with rather briefly. In this context, Foltz mentions the commentaries of the famous Tajik nationalist historian Bobojon Ghafurov (1908–77) on the poetry of the Sufi poet Kamāl Khujandī (pp. 95–96). Original excursions like this one certainly add flavor to the sweeping general narrative about the successive dynasties that ruled over Central Asia.

Toward the end of this dense chapter Foltz addresses the bilingual nature of Central Asian urban society. He dwells on the production of private notebooks (*bayāz*), often containing poetry in both Turkish and Persian, and makes useful observations about content and readership (p. 111). On the same page Foltz refers to the disdain of Kazaks, Kara Kyrgyz, and Turkmen for the highly Persianized form of Turkish spoken by the settled population. Regrettably, there is no indication of a source, as too often the case in this work. Foltz also notes the development of what he calls the Tojikī dialect, which moves away from "standard" Persian. The use of the word "dialect" here, as well as in other places, is problematic. The Timurid-era poet Navā'ī, for example, is said by Foltz to write in "his native dialect, called Chaghatay or simply Turki" (p. 100). Why not use "language" in this case? The last two pages of chapter 4 are devoted to the Jadidist movement, which in the context of a book on the Tajiks seems precious little, as this movement played a crucial role in the period prior to the Soviet national delimitation in Central Asia.

Chapter 5 is about the Soviet period and the sad fate that befell the Tajiks in the process of national delimitation: the "loss" of Samarqand and Bukhara to Uzbekistan induces strong feelings to this day. Tajik intellectuals in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period lamented the broken cultural connection with Iran, brought about not just by international politics but also by the adoption of an adapted literary language and a new script in the Soviet period. It would be worthwhile to investigate the role of literature in Tajikistan beyond this particular trope, specifically as fostered by the literary and academic elite. It is hard to overestimate the role of literature and poetry in the Persian-speaking world, and Tajikistan, sovietization notwithstanding, is no exception. Unlike so many other works on Central Asia, Foltz pays due attention to literature and the role of literature, often considering social change through the lens of poetry, quoting examples from Tajik poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This chapter also addresses the many developments of the Soviet period, from the collectivization process to the treatment of religion in Soviet Tajikistan. Here Foltz notes the "decapitation of traditional Islamic scholarship" (p. 129) and the political and religious consequences of that policy when the Soviet Union fell apart. Tajikistan, as other Central Asian republics, became easy prey for "Wahhābī propaganda," (p. 129) a complicated phenomenon

² Compare this with editor Nile Green's brilliant analysis of Persian in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.64>.

that has strongly affected state policies in post-Soviet Central Asia. (This issue is revisited in chapter 6, “The Republic of Tajikistan.”) Foltz also pays due attention to the position of the Ismā`ilī population of Tajikistan (who live primarily in eastern Tajikistan, in the Pamir region or Badakhshan) and their engagement with the global Ismā`ilī community (this also is continued in chapter 6). Chapter 5 offers an overview of Soviet Tajik history and provides the reader with firsthand information on a wide range of topics.

Although he focuses on Tajikistan and the actors who played a role in its establishment and development, in chapter 5 Foltz also looks across the border, into the history of twentieth-century Afghanistan. Surprisingly, he does not refer at all to the valuable work of Artemy Kalinovsky on Tajikistan and the role of Soviet Central Asians during the war in Afghanistan (1979–89).

Foltz comes back to Afghanistan more specifically in chapter 7, “Tajiks beyond the Borders: Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, China and the Diaspora.” This title confirms the focus of *A History of the Tajiks* on the present-day republic of Tajikistan. Together with chapters 5 and 6 (the latter dealing with the complicated situation in post-Soviet Tajikistan), this is one of the best chapters of the book, offering a clear overview of the situation today, with a much-needed broader perspective.

In sum, with *A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East* (a rather puzzling subtitle) the reader is presented with both a bird’s eye view of the premodern history of the Tajiks and an in-depth history of Tajiks in the modern era, with a focus on Soviet and post-Soviet Tajikistan.

doi:10.1017/irn.2021.7