

the farmer that he will find no buyer at Macclesfield. This turns out true, and when the farmer returns the old man is waiting. He touches a rock with his stick and splits it open, “And behind the rock there’s some iron gates” (p. 763). The man escorts them down into the hill where knights lie “all asleep with their heads each against a white horse, except one” (p. 763). The white mare is taken in exchange for treasure, but when the farmer returns next day for more, the iron gates are not to be found. What the essay goes on to show is that every detail in the story has precise meaning that maps both onto the historical topography of the Edge and to royal inauguration rituals that go back at least to the first millennium and arguably over 4000 years. The Edge is where mining, magic and memory meet.

*The story of Alderley*, then, is less a book than a kind of library that centres on one place, but does so in ways that illuminate and interact with themes of continental span. As with all libraries, it is not just a storehouse but a place for new study. At the end of his editorial preamble, John Prag reflects on 20 years’ obsession with the work, and hopes that his wife will be pleased to see it done. Mrs Prag should not hold her breath. Epic as this work is, it is hard to imagine it as being anything other than the prelude to something yet greater.

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CLAUDIA CHANG. *Rethinking prehistoric Central Asia: shepherds, farmers, and nomads*. 2018. Abingdon & New York: Routledge; 978-1-138-73708-2 £105.



Less than three years after the Soviet Union collapsed, Claudia Chang seized the opportunity to transition her research into Central Asia. At the time, only a select handful of European or American archaeologists had ever worked in the region—a *terra incognita* for anyone trained outside the Soviet tradition. Diving in both feet first, she moved her family to Almaty in Kazakhstan from 1994–1995 to develop collaborations with local scholars and gain access to the new archaeological frontier. The frontier was, however, far from unexplored; Claudia Chang has spent the past 20 years grappling with the archaeological legacy of Tsarist ideologies and Soviet-period scholarship, alongside the archaeological data she has unearthed herself. Early on in her research it became clear that unilinear evolution models and Marxist theoretical frameworks were not sufficient to interpret the prehistory of Central Asia. Chang was also quick to recognise that the traditional historical narratives of highly specialised Iron Age nomads did not hold up to scientific scrutiny. Furthermore, as she points out from the beginning of this book, the archaeological tradition in this part of the world was largely focused on burial mounds, rock art and medieval urban centres. This book summarises Chang’s attempts to wade through an immense body of Russian literature, and to introduce modern methodological approaches, a novel repertoire of questions and an American scholarly tradition. To this end, she not only pioneered a new frontier, she opened the iron curtains for the scholars who would follow her path.

This book goes beyond simply summarising 20 years of scholarly investigation, it presents a new way of looking at the archaeological record of eastern Kazakhstan. Chang notes in her Preface that the only way to revise the field properly is through a paradigm shift (p. xv). In many ways, her career’s research, as laid out in this book, has been a series of revisionary approaches to the archaeological record. While other scholars were focused on burial mounds, she was systematically excavating occupation sites. Likewise, Chang employed scientific methods to illustrate that people in eastern Kazakhstan from the late first millennium BC to the early first millennium AD had a complex and diverse economy. This view goes against convention, as the archaeological

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and historical traditions in this part of the world remain focused on a nomad-based economic model. Ultimately, she argues that though there are trappings of nomadic political systems visible in the archaeological record, the broader economy was based on a mixed agro-pastoral system. She also points out that the roughly 1000 identified burial mounds on the Talgar alluvial fan represent a small segment of society. These political elites were supported by communities of farmers and craft workers.

Arguably the greatest contribution to come from Chang's excavations at first-millennium BC settlement sites on the Talgar alluvial fan was the identification of these craft workers, farmers and herders. The historical narratives for this time period in Central Asia have been overshadowed by depictions of warrior nomads, hindering any realistic understanding of Central Asian prehistory. Chang and her team of scientific specialists have identified sedentary occupation sites with evidence of ceramic and textile production. They have also demonstrated the existence of a complex farming system utilising irrigation canals and several different grain crops. The archaeological data also show that animals were raised for secondary products, transport and meat. In this book, Chang shows that the different segments of society articulated into an economic and social system that exemplified a broader region of Central Asia. She envisions a decentralised state, with a large lower-class population of craftsmen, farmers and transhumant herders, who supported a political elite through tribute. This view of Central Asian prehistory is supported by scientific data and 20 years of excavation. Chang is quick to credit earlier scholars, such as Akishev in the 1960s and 1970s, for recognising the important role of farming in the economy in south-eastern Kazakhstan during the Iron Age. Nonetheless, and despite Akishev's contributions to the field, archaeological scholarship has focused on a largely romanticised nomadic population of horse-riding warriors.

Throughout the volume, Chang grapples with questions relating to the nature of political systems and how the peoples of the Talgar fan juggled differential labour needs and scheduling demands. She supports her view of Central Asian prehistory through detailed descriptions of her excavations and a series of analyses by scientific specialists, who collaborated with her over the past two decades. Chang and her colleagues have systematically

excavated the sites of Tuzusai, Taldy Bulak 2 and Tseganka 8; these excavations are laid out in Chapter 3 of this volume. In Chapter 4, she explores evidence for social hierarchies, inequality and an Iron Age demographic shift. Ultimately, these data transition into a discussion of changing social orders and the formation of Inner Asian tribal confederacies (states, empires or polities); Chang draws on world-systems theory to interpret social interactions on a broad scale (Chapter 5). By quantifying the numbers of kurgans on neighbouring alluvial fans throughout the region, she clearly illustrates that the phenomena she describes on the Talgar fan are not unique and were part of a larger population. In the final chapter of this volume, she endeavours to fit the Talgar data into the larger social arena of Inner Asia, while also moulding a new paradigm for archaeology in this part of the world. She argues "that the Iron Age Talgar folk of Semirech'ye were part of a nomadic confederacy tied to a religious cult spread across a vast territory" (p. 124). The arguments that Chang lays out in *Rethinking prehistoric Central Asia* call for a new look at Inner Asian prehistory, one that emphasises the diversity in cultural practices and archaeological remains.

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HARVEY WEISS (ed.). *Megadrought and collapse: from early agriculture to Angkor*. 2017. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-932919-9 £47.99.



This volume marks yet another contribution to the books on collapse that have appeared in the last few years. Yet it differs importantly from many of these in that it is, at least in its packaging, unashamedly deterministic when it comes to climate change and collapse. In Weiss's Introduction to the book, for example, he argues that evidence for megadroughts, severe droughts occurring on multi-decadal or centennial scales, has come to challenge multi-causal and more socially based explanations of many past collapses. These episodes were "impossible to predict and impossible to withstand" (p. 1). His own chapter, which revisits Early Bronze Age