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B. A. Litvinsky, Zhang Guang-da, R. Shabani Samghabadi, eds. *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III: The Crossroads of Civilizations: A.D. 250 to 750.* Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996. 568 pp. 300FF (cloth), ISBN 978-92-3-103211-0.

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Central Asia: The Crossroads of Civilizations

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This review is divided into three sections: 1) Background and General Assessment, 2) Summary of Contents, and 3) Final Assessment, including a comparison with other English language works.

1. Background and General Assessment

As proclaimed in its Constitution, one of the purposes of UNESCO is to develop and to increase communication between peoples. In response to this mandate, a universal history, UNESCO's *History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind*, was published in 1968. Plans were then drawn to prepare a series of regional multi-volume histories of Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Islamic culture. The initial project, *General History of Africa*, was completed in the early 1970s, and in 1976 the United Nations authorized UNESCO to proceed with the volumes on Central Asia. However, as the membership of the United Nations expanded, so did the geographic and cultural area comprising Central Asia. In its initial stage, the coverage was to include Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, and portions of the Soviet Union. Mongolia and China later joined the United Nations and the scope of the project was enlarged to include the cultures of Mongolia and the western regions of China. Some delays in implementing this project were due, in part, to the political and civil strife in Afghanistan. The so-called "collapse" of the Soviet Union has not been detrimental to the project; the former Soviet Central Asian republics have continued to participate in the effort.

The volume reviewed here, although carrying a publication date of 1996, only recently became available in the United States, and is the third volume in a compelling and significant series entitled *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia.* The series is projected to be comprehensive and to include six volumes covering the prehistory and history of the region, from the initial evidence of human occupation to the present day. This volume joins its two renowned predecessors: *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume I: The Dawn of Civilization: Earliest Times to 700 B.C.*, edited by A. H. Dani and A. M. Masson (535 pp.) and published in 1992; and *Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250*, edited by Janos Harmatta, B. J. Puri, and G. F. Etemadi (573 pp.) and issued in 1994. The fourth volume is designed to span the period from A.D. 750 to the end of the fifteenth century.

A distinguished international team of archaeologists, prehistorians, art historians, ethnographers, historians, and museum curators, among others, was assembled to synthesize the history of this vast region from 700/500,000 years ago to the present. They have consulted a voluminous literature published in many languages, or in obscure locations, and often in small press runs. *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III: The Crossroads of Civilizations: A.D. 250 to 750* has twenty-four contributors and seven collaborating specialists from a dozen countries; four are from Afghanistan, two from India, four from the Islamic Republic of Iran, two from Pakistan, three from the People's Republic of China, eleven from the Russian Federation (two of whom are now deceased), and two from Tajikistan, with one each from France, Hungary, and the United States of America. All of these authors are respected scholars in Central Asian studies of international stature and include, for example, K. Chakrabarti, A. H. Dani, Ph. Gignoux, J. Harmatta, B. I. Marshak, E. E. Nerazik, Denis Sinor, A. Tafazzoli, and Wang Yao. The contributors employ, cite, and often synthesize a wealth of source materials, including archaeological reports (among them some unpublished documents or ma-

terials unavailable in the west), petroglyphic inscriptions, murals, numismatics, written documents ranging from those composed by Latin authors to ones written by Indian scholars and Chinese monks, contemporary legal texts, eulogies, etc. Information is also provided by the nineteem original and sixteen current members of the International Scientific Committee and four members of the Reading Committee which oversaw the final editing. The latter include A. D. H. Bivar, Richard N. Frye, Janos Harmatta, and Denis Sinor.

This is not a treatise for the meek or the casual reader. It is packed with information and bibliographic citations and, therefore, serves as an excellent reference work. The detail and complexity vary from chapter to chapter, but the educated layperson can also benefit from using this masterful work. The book is a multi-stage and multi-tiered cultural synthesis covering a vast region encompasing multiple social and political forms and philosophies–as well as a variety of religions, sects, and hybrids of these–and the emergence of feudal and pastoral nomadic state-level societies among autocratic and oligarchic kingdoms and nation-states. The geographic vastness and cultural dynamics of the centuries included in this book make it a superb reference work for the serious scholar.

Eurasia, the combined land mass of Europe and Asia, is a physiogeographic concept, while Inner Asia includes Central Asia, Siberia and non-sedentary peoples inhabiting the area from China into contemporary Eastern Europe. Spatially, the UNESCO volume on Central Asia by necessity touches upon an enormous region from Eastern Europe, Belarus, and Ukraine on the west to the Chinese provinces of Sinkiang, Xingang, and Quinghai on the east, Mongola to the northeast, Siberia to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the south. However, the main focus is on southern Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Persia/Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India. This "heartland" of Eurasia was the region from which movements of peoples helped to shape much of the ancient and medieval world. Likewise, the frontiers of Central Asia have shifted from age to age, varying according to the balance of power between the indigenous populations and those of the sedentary civilizations of Southwest Asia, the Asian Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia.

Chronologically, the book encompasses the period from the third to the eighth century A.D., a time of complex political events, warring dynasties, ethnic migrations, social and economic reforms, and cultural upheaval and resurgence. The UNESCO series and authors of Volume III use consistently B.C. and A.D. terminology rather than B.C.E. and C.E. The specific period A.D. 250 through 750 was an era when powerful empires such as Sasanian Iran (224-651) and T'ang China (618-907) influenced smaller polities and witnessed the rise (and, sometimes, the fall) of lesser states and kingdoms. Nomadic migrations and the evolution of steppe empires such as the Hsiung-nu, Hephthalite (the Red and White Huns), and Turks took place during this era. In addition to multi-ethnic populations, sociopolitical systems (some with caste systems and slavery, others semi-feudal in character), and major religious traditions (shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) arose and declined, or spread. With the Arab conquest of Iran and Middle Asia and the Islamization of a major portion of Central Asia, fundamental changes occurred not only to religious systems but also to the sociopolitical fabric of societies, to their secular and religious arts and crafts, and to their commercial enterprises. Overland trade networks such as the "Silk Road" (forms of which existed in prehistoric times well before C.E.) and the sea routes not only played roles in the dissemination of goods and services, but also religious and political ideologies, and the spread of cultural and scientific heritage.

2. Summary of Contents

I shall next summarize the salient points made in each chapter and then assess the volume in light of other sources published in English. The prefactory essay, "Description of the project" (pp. 11-13), is by M. S. Asimov, President of the International Scientific Committee, who outlines the history of this regional project, reports on the two previously published and three anticipated volumes, and details the structure of the current volume. Chapter One, "Historical introduction" (B. A. Litvinsky and Zhang Guang-da), is a masterful overview in which the Sasanians; Guptas; Sui, Wei, and T'ang dynasties; five oasis states; the ecological setting; nomadic societies; and the Hsiung-nu and the Huns are characterized briefly. The "Silk Route," the network of land and sea routes from the Yellow Sea to the Mediterranean and from the south Urals to the Indian Ocean, is viewed as a conduit of peoples, material culture, and ideas. The authors state correctly that "the area was an ethnic melting pot, sometimes simmering quietly and at other times erupting; the reciprocal influence and intermingling of cultures was equally intense" (p. 33).

Chapter Two, "Sasanian Iran–economy, society, arts and crafts" (N. N. Chegini and A. V. Nikitin), provides a well-documented review of Sasanian political history,

sociopolitical similarities to the Parthians who preceeded them, political administration, royal cities (Bishapur and Ctesiphon), the fiscal reforms of Khursrau I, the irrigation agriculture economy, numismatics, the army (organization, strategy, tactics, and armaments), cities and fortifications, court and religious architecture, and arts and crafts (especially stone carving, ceramics, glass, weaving, and silver metallurgy). Notably, Roman prisoners of war were enlisted to build dams and bridges, while Achaemenid, Roman, and Parthian models of architectural style were appropriated, as was the adoption of the technique of "proclamatory art," used to emphasize divine kingship. Chapter Three, "Sasanian Iran–intellectual life" (A. Tafazzoli and A. L. Khromov), reviews Sasanian secular literature, including epic poetry, tales, legends, political tracts, and religious texts. Middle Persian (Pahlavi) language, Manichaean script, and Parthian (Pahlavanig) language characteristics are also considered. The authors also document cultural borrowings and influences, science and philosophy, court chronicles, and religious organization (Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism). Chapter Four, "The Kushano-Sasanian kingdom" (A. H. Dani and B. A. Litvinsky), details state organization and administration, socioeconomic characteristics and commerce, religious faiths, and languages and scripts, including the Brahmi alphabet. However, in the main, this chapter deals with cities and architecture, including cultural edifices and monasteries, architectural styles, and major arts and crafts such as ceramics, metal working, and armament manufacture.

Chapter Five, "The Kidarite kingdom in Central Asia" (E. V. Zeimal), recounts the origin, rise, and history of the nomadic Kidarites (called Chionites by Latin authors, Huna by others) who occupied northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and their conquest of Gandhara and Kashmir. Wars between the Indian Guptas and Huna, the Sasanian conquest of Bactria, and Hephthalite invasions are also emphasized. Kidarite socieconomic, political, monetary, commercial, and ideological characteristics are surveyed, and the author states that the Kiderites considered themselves to be the heirs of the Kushan kings and adopted Kushan heritage and traits. Chapter Six, "The Hephthalite Empire" (B. A. Litvinsky), begins with an assessment of the theories of Hephthalite origins, their early political and military history, and their conquests in Gandhara and northern India. Litvinsky also documents Hephthalite sociopolitical structure and administration, the toleration of multiple religions (Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Christianity), and the practice of polyandry. The Bactrian language (derived from Greek) was the "official" language, but a half-dozen other languages coexisted. Urban settlements (Balkh was the largest town), agricultural villages, and nomadic pastoralism are also reviewed. The author also recounts the monumental Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, located in central Afghanistan, and ceramics and metallurgy, among other crafts.

Chapter Seven, "Eastern Kushans, Kidarites in Gandhara and Kashmir, and Later Hephthalites" (A. H. Dani, B. A. Litvinsky, and M. H. Samir Safi), covers the later history of three complex states. Numismatics, Chinese pilgrim accounts by Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang, and Persian geographies are among the sources used to document the loss of international trade routes by the Kushans and Kidarites, and the latter state's transition from a satrapy political administration to a semi-feudal system which included slavery and the absorption of the caste system is addressed. A review of later Hephthalite history finds the Huns split into Red and White groups, and acting as a buffer between Turk kagans located to the north and Sasanian Iran to the south. The Khalaj of western Turkestan were the political successors of the Hephthalites and are thought by some historians to be the present-day Pashto-speaking Ghilzai tribe of Afghanistan. Fortified urban centers and life in Tokharistan (the former Bactria, and composed of northern Afghanistan, southern Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) are also considered.

Chapter Eight, "The Gupta kingdom" (K. Chakrabarti), documents the origin, political history, socioeconomics, decentralized political administration, religious system (Puranic Hinduism), literature, science, art, and architecture of the Guptas of northwest India. The author concludes that "Gupta culture was essentially indigenous in character and set the norms for subsequent developments [in the region]" (p. 206). The Guptas politically unified the Ganges valley and modified the traditional caste system (varna) based upon "colour and race" to a system founded on occupation. Chakrabarti documents overland and sea trade, the nature of Indian "feudalism," two sects of Hinduism, Classical Sanskrit literature (poetry, drama, and theater), scientific accomplishments (significant among them mathematics, astronomy, and the study of animal diseases), and arts and crafts (particularly embroidery, brocade, and muslin).

Chapter Nine, "Khwarizem" (E. E. Nirazik and P. G. Bulgakov), traces the history and culture, reviews sociopolitical characteristics, and presents some information on the art, architecture, religion, and language of Khwarizem (Chorasmia). The fourth through sixth centuries C.E. began with the decline of the Kushan Empire

and Hephthalite conflicts with Sasanians and ended with the Arab conquest of the entire region. The authors employ numismatics, epigraphy, archaeological data, and Arab historical accounts in their essay. The sites of Toprak-kala (a fortified royal residence) and the settlement of Kulyk-kala (41 ha in area), commerce to the Aral and Caspian seas, fire worship and the evidence for ossuaries, and the use of an Eastern Iranian language with writing based on Aramaic script are considered. Religious beliefs including Zoroastrianism and coexisting local cults are also documented. The Arab conquest began in 693 but was not successful until 712, and the authors recount Abu Raihan al-Biruni's Chronology of Khwarizem's culture history written ca. C.E. 1000-1003.

Chapter Ten, "Sogdiana" (B. I. Marshak and N. N. Negmatov), covers the third through eighth centuries and is divided into two parts: Sughid and adjacent regions, and Ustrushana, Ferghana, Chach, and Ilak. The authors use accounts by Chinese travelers, Byzantine authors, archaeological data, and Sogdian sources in their synthesis. Sogdians are characterized as irrigation agriculturalists and silk traders, their city of Afrasiab is described, while heterogeneous cultural elements (Byzantine, Iranian, Turk, and Chinese), multiple religious orientations, and literature and scripts are recounted. The second part of the chapter includes a summary of the secession of Ustrushana from the Sogdian federation and documents its sociopolitical structure, subsistence activities, considerable mining and metallurgy, pottery manufacture, commerce, architecture, the Kala-i Kahkala palace, and a local form of Zoroastrian religion. Ustrushanian culture was independent, traditional, technologically complex, and "in the forefront of Central Asian cultural traditions" and closely related to Sogdian culture, but with its own identity (p. 273). The "troubled" political history of Ferghana, located on the main trans-Asian trade route, saw Turks in the north and Arabs in south prior to conquest by the Turks in 739. The archaeological remains in Chach and Ilak (the Tashkent region), polities with histories similar to Ferghana, are also reviewed.

Chapter Eleven, "The city-states of the Tarim basin" (Zhang Guang-da), is the best and most detailed short assessment of this 1,600 km-long area that I have seen in the English language. The chapter covers the third through eighth centuries, when powerful city-states occupied this crucial trans-Asian region, and begins with an analysis of geography and climate, peoples and languages, social life and economy, and a review of administrative systems. The complex political history, caravan-trade commerce, religion (with pre-Zoroastrian beliefs and two schools of Buddhism coexisting), and art and architecture are also summarized. The area saw the rise of the Saka (descendants of the Achaemenid Persians) and irrigation agriculture, combined with stock breeding and craft production, the latter including work in jade, turquoise, lapis, coral, ivory, and pearls. The author writes that Tarim Basin culture was a "peculiar syncretism of various heterogeneous civilizations" (p. 298)–for example, Gandharan style mixed with Iranian, Hellenistic, Bactrian, and Buddhist elements. The political history saw annexation by the Wei dynasty, incursion by the Juan-juan, Kushan influence, the separation of the Chinese into north and south centers of influence, invasion by the Western Turks, and T'ang dynastic consolidation. In Chapter Twelve, "Kocho (Kao-ch'ang)" (Zhang Guang-da), the author documents a 50,144 km square strategically-located area, the Turfan Depression, located in the T'ien Shan region. Control was exercised by the Han (60 B.C.-A.D. 200), Wei (220-265) and Western Chin (265-316) prior to the establishment of the Kocho Prefecture (327-460) and Kolcho Kingdom (460-640), ending with T'ang dynasty control. The administrative system, commercial activities, and cultural and religious heterogeneity are reviewed. By 840, the Uighur Empire of Mongolia was overthrown by the Kyrgyz, and fifteen defeated tribes fled to the west and settled, in the main, in the Turfan Basin.

Chapter Thirteen, "Northern nomads" (L. R. Kyzlasov), is a review of the first five centuries C.E., when tribes of various origins inhabited the Eurasian steppes from the Caspian Sea to the Great Wall of China. These tribes included seminomadic herdsmen, stockbreeder-farmers, or agriculturalists who kept cattle. Kyzlasov employs written Chinese chronicles and archaeological evidence in his essays on the K'ang-chu (an oases-oriented state-level society in the Syr-Darya area), the Western Huns, the Hsien-pi of the Amur River area, the Juan-juan (a Mongolian empire-state, C.E. 402-555), the Turks who occupied Mongolia (552-745), and two militaristic tribes–the T'ieh-le and Kao-chu. Chapter Fourteen, "The Turk Empire" (D. Sinor and S. G. Klyashtorby), is a detailed essay in which the First (553-682) and the Second Turk Empires (682-745) are reviewed. The Turk nomadic empire bordered on three major sedentary civilizations–China, Iran, and Byzantium. The authors review the indigenous historical documents, ethnogenesis of the Eastern and Western Turks, Turk economics and political history. Initially, the Turks were pastoral nomads who also mined and processed iron, but gradually assumed control of segments of the overland trade routes and dominated the silk trade. The T'ang were able to play one Turk ruler against another, but the Turkic empire resurged

in 682, organized into three tribal groups composed of thirty-one tribes, routed the Mongolian Uighurs, and established imperial ties with China. However, the fall of the Second Turk Empire left a political vacuum in the steppe until the Uighurs again came into power in 744. The Arab conquest began in 739, and in 751 a Chinese army was defeated by Arab and Turk forces.

Chapter Fifteen, "The Western Regions (Hsi-yu) under the T'ang Empire and the kingdom of Tibet" (Mu Shun-ying and Wang Yao), presents a summary of the political history and culture of the western portion of the T'ang Empire (618- 907), and an analysis of the eastward and westward expansion of the Tibetan kingdom resulting in the invasion of China in 755. The Tibetans and Eastern Turks combined unsuccessfully to challenge the T'ang from 663 to 692. The author also discusses the spread of Buddhism and the construction of monasteries and temples, the archaeological evidence for Tibetan crafts (epecially for textile and paper manufacture, and iron working), animal husbandry emphasizing the yak, and the introduction of Tibetan script and grammar. Chapter Sixteen, "Tokharistan and Gandhara under Western Turk rule (650-750)" (J. Harmatta and B. A. Litvinsky), commences with a review of the history of the region in which the importance of the silk trade is documented. Numismatic data, Chinese encyclopaedia entries, epigraphy, and ethnolinguistic analyses provide primary sources for the chapter. The polities of Tokharistan (with its capital located at Balkh), Kapisa-Gandhara, and Zabulistan are documented, and Harmatta writes that the latter two "stood as islands in the sea of Arab predatory raids" (p. 383), while Seistan, Tokharistan, Transoxiana, and the Sind came under Arab rule during the eighth century. Litvinsky documents the languages, literature, coinage, art, and architecture of the region. He considers the multiracial kingdom of Kabul Shahis, the New Persian (parsi-i-dari) language, origins of the Tajiks and their language, and the Afghan Pashto, Nuristani, and Dardic languages.

Chapter Seventeen, "Religions and religious movements–I" (Ph. Gignoux and B. A. Litvinsky), documents Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Among the former, rituals, sects, deities, and regional variations are considered; in the latter, the concept of dualism, social criticism, worship, literature, and art (including illuminated manuscripts) are discussed. Merv became the center of Manichaeism in the east where it coexisted with Buddhism. Chapter Eighteen, "Religions and religious movements–II" (B. A. Litvinsky and M. I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya), considers Christianity and Buddhism, among other religions. Christian communities in Parthia and the Sasanian Empire are reported, and the spread of Christianity into Turkic areas of Central Asia are reviewed, as is the rise of Nestorianism, Shiva, and "local" religions in Iran and Mongolia. An excellent essay on the rise and spread of Buddhism into Central Asia concludes this chapter. Among the topics elaborated upon are the written sources, inscriptions, and regional texts (emphasizing East Turkestan, Bactria/Tokharistan, the Merv oasis, Semirechye/Kyrgyzstan, Kapisa/Afghanistan, Gandhara, and Nagarahara [Hadda/Jalalabad]), Sanskrit manuscripts and translations, and the systems and schools of Buddhism. The analyses of the manuscripts provides significant insights into paleography and linguistic peculiarities.

Chapter Nineteen, "The Arab conquest" (B. A. Litkinsky, A. H. Jalilov, and A. I. Kolesnikov), provides a summary of the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula, ensuing conquests and subjugation, and Islamic expansion into Central Asia. The initial section of the chapter details the first Arab invasion of Iran (C.E. 633), and the conquests of Syria and Iraq (636), Khuzistan (642), Seistan/Drangiana (650- 651), and Khurasan (651). The latter marked the death of the monarch Yazgird III and the end of the Sasanian Empire. Although the Arabs took the cities of Herat, Merv, and Balkh, local peoples continued their rebellions against the Arabs. Nonetheless, by 651 Islam had spread eastward to the Sind and into northern Afghanistan. Arab incursions into Transoxiana in the year 673 began as raids that ultimately led to military campaigns in Bukhara (705-706) and Samarkand (712), and a political consolidation of the region. Central Asian peoples continued to rebel against the Umayyads (ca. 720-750), and the successor Abbasids and local nobles (750-810). Kolesnikov concludes that the Sassanian Empire fell because of the Byzantine wars (C.E. 604-628), civil war in Iran, and economic collapse. He also characterizes the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the Islamization process, regional administration in the conquerored territories, and the final conquests (Tabaristan, Dailam, Zabul, Kabul, Gandhara, Ghur, and the Sind).

The final essay, Chapter Twenty, "Central Asia, the cross roads of civilizations" (B. A. Litvinsky and Zhang Guang-da), is an overview of the "interactions and multilateral cultural exchanges between all the great civilizations standing at the crossroads of Central Asia during the period from the third to the eighth century" (p. 473). The authors' synthesis employs literary acounts and archaeological data and discusses Sasanian Iran, social diversity, economic complexity and coinage, types of communities, ceremonial buildings, urban planning,

craft specialization, and religion and writing. Nomadic and seminomadic herders occupied the steppes; agricultural villages supported "towns" (composed of the town proper, its citadel, and suburbs) which were also craft centers for the production of ceramics, metal goods, textiles, and leather. Likewise, these towns were foci for the fine arts (music, dance, and theater) and the graphic arts. By the eighth century, the city of Merv is estimated to have had a population of 60,000. The authors also point out the syncretism between Islam and Buddhism as seen in early Sufism, and they conclude that "Central Asian civilization from the third to the eighth century, or rather the structure of Central Asian civilizations of that period, was the basis of many of the fundamental principles of Islamic civilization in later centuries" (p. 490).

3. Final Assessment

This highly specialized volume is superbly illustrated (170 figures) and well-documented (1,032 footnotes and forty-nine pages of "Bibliography and References" containing 1,175 entries to the primary and major secondary literature). The seven maps, often with detailed insets, are themselves an indispensible resource, while very useful thirteen-page double-column index is, in the main, devoted to proper nouns. The work is comprehensive for the period C.E. 250-750 and provides an up-to-date synthesis of the Eurasian heartland, Central Asia. A single volume treatment, *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) edited by Denis Sinor, remains as a significant contribution to Central Asian studies, covering the larger area of Inner Asia from the earliest times to the thirteenth century. There are also parallels with some of the chapters in F. R. Allchin and N. Hammond's edited work, *The Archaeology of Afghanistan: From Earliest Times to the Timurid Period* (London: Academic Press, 1978). One volume seminal for its era, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), is displaced by these more recent works and by the first three UNESCO volumes. There is a very minor overlap with some materials in *Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in the Early Iron Age* (edited by Jeannine Davis-Kimball, Vladimir A. Bashilov, and Leonid T. Yablonsky; Berkeley: Zinat Press, 1995), which covers components of the Late Bronze Age and the whole of the Early Iron Age to ca. A.D. 400 [see the review in *American Journal of Archaeology* 101:407-408 (1997)]. Therefore, Volume III, with its subtitle *The Crossroads of Civilizations*, fills a significant chronological gap in the literature on Central Asia.

A preceeding volume in the UNESCO series, *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume II: The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250* (edited by J. Harmatta, B. N. Puri, and G. F. Etemandi, 1994), covers in a more comprehensive manner topics also detailed by Fredrik T. Hiebert in *Origins of Bronze Age Oasis Civilization in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, American School of Prehistoric Research Bulletin 42, 1994) [see the review in *American Journal of Archaeology* 100:182-183 (1996)]. Likewise, it provides a more up-to-date treatment than the chapters in Philip L. Kohl's edited volume, *The Bronze Age Civilization of Central Asia: Recent Soviet Discoveries* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1981). Volume II also replaces several of the now dated Ancient Peoples and Places series, including V. M. Masson and V. I. Sarianidi's general work, *Central Asia: Turkmenia before the Achaemenids* (New York: Praeger, 1972), Tamara Talbot Rice's *The Scythians,* (New York: Praeger, 3rd ed. 1961), and Tadeuz Sulimirski's *The Sarmatians* (New York: Praeger, 1970), as well as R. Rolle's *Die Welt der Skythen* (Munich, 1980), translated as *The World of the Scythians*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). These works, important contributions for their time, have been eclipsed by the UNESCO series.

Specialists on Central Asia often have a difficult time keeping up with the current literature, so that the volumes in this series will become a benchmark for many years to come, much as the *Cambridge Ancient History,* 18 vols. (1954-1989), and *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols. (1983-1997), have become the standard references against which future research and syntheses will be measured. The six volumes of the UNESCO *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* will become a landmark for this major geocultural region as, for example, the seven-volume *The Handbook of South American Indians* (Julian H. Steward, editor; Washington: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 143, 1946-1959) and *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Robert Wauchope, general editor; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964-1976) with sixteen original volumes and five supplemental volumes (1981-1992), the latter edited by Bricker and Edmonson, have for specialists in New World archaeology and ethnography.

Litvinsky and his colleagues are to be commended for preparing this indispensible synthesis and reference work for the crucial period C.E. 250-750 and for employing a variety of source materials, including archaeological data and written accounts in this essential work that will serve for many years as a benchmark for this era of Central Asian prehistory and history. I believe that it would be difficult to have a truly balanced perspective

of Eastern European, Southwest Asian, or Far Eastern history without having read appropriate chapters from this especially valuable summary and resource. In some ways Central Asia is similar to a theatrical stage which through time witnessed significant synchronic and diachronic changes as the polities, political and/or military leaders, and religious beliefs entered, played their roles, and remained or exited the scene.

This is a compelling work in an invaluable series and is recommended to all scholars whose interests include any portions of Eurasia.

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