

partake in the violence of the Opium War, it did capitalise on the trading opportunities that resulted from the forced opening of more Chinese ports.<sup>2</sup>

The extensive appendices and reproductions of primary material referred to in the main text round out a volume that makes numerous important contributions to the history of global knowledge. Combining the qualities of biography, intellectual history, and the study of cross-cultural exchange, it will prove immensely valuable to scholars working in a variety of fields.

doi:10.1017/S1356186322000232

## **The Arts and Crafts of the Hunza Valley in Pakistan. Living Traditions in the Karakoram**

**By Jürgen Wasim Frembgen. 110 pp. Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2017.**

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This volume by Jürgen Wasim Frembgen is dedicated to the material culture of Hunza and Nager, two formerly independent kingdoms that lie on opposite banks of the Hunza river, in the midst of the Karakoram mountains. Although they became part of Pakistan in 1947–1948, they survived as states within the larger Pakistani polity until 1974 and 1972 respectively. Since little literature exists on the subject, the book does an excellent job of filling a lamentable gap in the knowledge of the cultures of the Karakoram.

The traditional arts and crafts of the area are described by the author, supported by a selection of the 479 pieces of the Hunza/Nager collection of the Museum Fünf Kontinente (formerly Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde) of Munich, where Frembgen was a senior curator until his recent retirement. The great bulk of the collection was procured between 1990 and 1994 by Frembgen himself, who conducted long-term fieldwork in the area on an annual basis from 1981 to 2004.

The book opens with an introduction consisting of an ethnographic overview that gives a quite exhaustive, though forcibly synthetic, account of the human geography, the prevailing political systems, the economy, the various Islamic confessions and their expansion, the ethnic groups settled in the valley, and the different languages spoken by them. A brief account follows of the origins of the collection and of the author's fieldwork.

Frembgen then broaches the central topic of the book, which he treats in 14 chapters, each dedicated to a particular art or craft, starting from the most refined, like that of the silversmiths, the silk workers, the embroiderers, to the more ordinary, like basketry or calabash making as well as weaving, woodcarving, carpentry, leatherwork, the forging

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<sup>2</sup> Yeung's reference to George Washington's early vision for American relations with foreign nations—while 'extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible' (p. 342)—serves as an interesting counterpart to the governing principles of Qing foreign policy.

of weapons, and the creation of musical instruments. Each craft is described with great accuracy, starting with the materials used, the different techniques employed, and the different types of products. The objects from the museum collection are presented as examples of the various crafts, and they are described in detail, including their origin, their name in the local language (also found in the Glossary), and, in the footnotes, their exact measurements as well as the names of the most renowned artisans producing them at the time of the author's fieldwork.

Of particular interest are the two chapters on architecture and woodcarving, true arts in which the Hunza/Nager artisans reached peaks of excellence. In the beautiful photographs we are shown traditional buildings like royal forts, private houses, mosques, and Shia assembly halls with rich decorations in which Frembgen discerns ancient pre-Islamic motifs harking back, in some cases, to Buddhist times and even further to the Indus civilisation, as well as more recent Islamic influences from Kashmir, Badakhshan, or neighbouring Baltistan.

Frembgen, the reader discovers, is very sensitive not only to tradition but also to innovation. He reports novelties such as the introduction of the art of knotting carpets in the mid-1980s, and he is also careful to take into account the role of fashion, like the embroidery of female caps, modified in the course of time and now fallen into disuse. He is equally accurate in highlighting external influences and in showing how the border between 'autochthonous' and 'imported' is often blurred: we learn, for example, that the form of some jewels is reminiscent of similar jewellery from the Middle East and Central Asia, while others are reminders of shapes found among the Tajiks of Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

On the whole, the objective of the publication is certainly not only to present the museum collection, but to increase our understanding of Hunza/Nager society through the analysis of its material production. Thus we learn hitherto-unsuspected details about the aristocracy and the royal elite. We find out, for example, that members of the royal family not only encouraged local crafts, but were at times skilled craftsmen themselves who made wooden objects like water pipes, spoons, and musical instruments. At the same time, they were the main beneficiaries of the work of the specialised artisans, as well as of the external trade that provided luxury items like gold-embroidered coats, silk fabrics, and knotted carpets. An impressive photograph in the volume shows the son of the Nager ruler in royal attire, clad in shining silk and wearing a gold-plated crown; in another we see the ruler of Hunza, sceptre in hand, wearing a gold-embroidered gown and a precious aigrette on his cap.

At the other end of the social ladder, we learn about the status of artisans and their economic arrangements with their clients. While woodcarvers and carpenters enjoyed a fair degree of social consideration, this was not the case for weavers who, in recent times, have largely left their old profession for the more respected one of mechanic or carpenter. The Dom blacksmiths, who form a discriminated-against caste-like group and are confined in separate villages, definitely fare worse. Even lower is the position of the leatherworkers who, as in many parts of South Asia, are stigmatised because of their daily contact with hides.

Such social discrimination has certainly not helped the preservation of traditional crafts, already highly endangered by the process of modernisation. Frembgen informs us that his interlocutors often belonged to the last generation of craftsmen, and he duly registers the dwindling of the old practices and the increasing disappearance of traditional products, like locally made leather footwear, wooden and grass sandals, and wooden household utensils. Particularly dismaying is the reported demolition of many old wooden mosques, which are generally replaced by concrete ones.

In the face of such changes, Frembgen's research acquires a double value. Soon it will not only be an important ethnographic documentation, but also a precious historical one. His text is rigorous and very informative, and lavishly illustrated with high-quality photographs, to the point that we may regard these as a worthy accomplishment in the category of visual anthropology. The volume will remain as a tribute, if not to a disappearing world, then certainly to a changing world; to a way of life—as is the case today with most traditional cultures—that has to reinvent itself in the face of the challenges posed by modernisation, possibly without forsaking its past.

doi:10.1017/S1356186322000281

## **Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire**

**By Faisal H. Husain. x, 264 pp. New York, Oxford University Press, 2021.**

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In *Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire*, Faisal Husain offers a political, social, and environmental history of the region surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers roughly between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Husain suggests that the conquests of Sultan Süleyman I brought integrity, stability, and institutional control across the region, which had never been ruled by Istanbul in its long political history. Following the conquests, these rivers inevitably became Ottoman and sultanic because they were controlled by a centralised political elite sharing a common culture. In contrast to current historical scholarship's tendency to treat the Tigris and Euphrates in isolation, *Rivers of the Sultan* adopts an inclusive and unifying perspective for the rivers and the region surrounding them.

The book consists of three parts as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The first part, 'The Amphibious State', details the construction and maintenance of Ottoman sovereignty both on land and water in the eastern frontier. Husain shows that the operation of fortresses and shipyards on these rivers could only be achieved by a stable unifying political order, capable of fiscal control and of garnering the goodwill of its subjects. In turn, fortresses and shipyards contributed to strengthening Ottoman power in the region.

In the first chapter, 'Fortresses', the author analyses the establishment of an Ottoman administrative and military presence in the region, enabled by the effective use of river transportation. The supply of provisions and arms from Aleppo, Diyarbakır, and Mosul to the fortresses of Baghdad and Basra, thanks to the availability of seaports, docks, rafts, and bridges, stabilised Ottoman authority in this volatile frontier. Husain also discusses Ottoman use of the *kelek*, 'an ancient raft made of timber and brushwood bundles laid upon inflated goat and sheep skins' (p. 28). This unique method of transportation,