Preface

By posing the question, "What is beyond the river?" Andreas Wilde sets out to shed light on the regional history of Mā Warā al-Nahr or Transoxania. Up to now, little is known about the political and social developments in Bukhara prior to the Russian conquest in 1868. On the basis of hitherto unstudied primary materials, mostly in Persian, the author explores the dynamics of power determining the political process in Transoxania during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His rich analysis of local chronicles provides insights into patterns of court patronage and their articulation in gift giving and mediation. The venues for lateral and upward mobility are mapped against the larger tapestry of the fall of the Tuqay-Timurid rulers and the rise of the Manghit Uzbek elite. While Nadir Shah's intervention from 1740 to 1747 hastened a reconfiguration of regional allegiances, the rules of the game essentially remained the same.

Andreas Wilde's work shows that notions of a clear-cut territorial or administrative hierarchy do not capture the complexities of the Bukharan patterns of governance. The production and crystallization of power on the local level is brought into focus by petitions addressed to the Amir of Bukhara. This second group of primary sources gives insights into those aspects of rule generally not touched upon in the chronicles. The mechanisms at work on the lower rungs of the patronage system round off the image of the political process as a balancing act involving multifarious actors and overlapping religious, economic and military networks. With his multiplex approaches to Manghit rule and its representation, Andreas Wilde demonstrates the enmeshed gaps and continuities, real and constructed, which governed the contact between the capital and the "periphery." From the royal perspective, intervention in rural affairs was contingent upon and mediated by local leaders. From the local perspective, loyalties likewise rested with individuals rather than institutions, be it the state or the ruling dynasty. At the same time, all agents adhered to common rules of conduct bred by notions of prestige and patronage.

This intriguing book enhances our knowledge in two important ways. By means of a clear and consistent methodological approach, Andreas Wilde opens up the political landscape of Central Asia and skillfully illustrates the

complex dynamics of local history. His text-based approach laced with numerous quotations conveys a vivid impression of the Persian chronicles as works of art that yield much more than hard and dry facts on the politics of the day. What is more, we come to appreciate the socio-political context, which the authors of chronicles and petitions seek to depict and idealize. Given the wealth and detail of materials presented, this work is a must read for all scholars dealing with early modern Central Asia, historiography and the history of mentalities.

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November 2015