

Book Reviews

Old World Archeology

Central Asia. Palaeolithic Beginnings to the Iron Age. PHILIP L. KOHL, with contributions from H.-P. Francfort and J.-C. Gardin. Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris, 1984. 313 pp., illus. Paper, 190 F. Synthèse, no. 14.

In the last 10 to 15 years a few accounts of Central Asian archeology have appeared in the English-language literature, but none have the breadth or scope of Philip Kohl's *Central Asia*. In a single volume Kohl has covered the complete prehistoric record from the earliest Stone Age sites in southern Tadzhikistan (more than 200,000 years ago) up to the early Iron Age (of just over 1000 B.C.). In this study Central Asia includes large areas of present-day republics of the Soviet Union: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tadzhikistan. An enormous range of prehistoric cultural phenomena can be studied in Central Asia: the effects of climatic change on surface hydrology and settlement pattern in an arid environment, the evolving relations since the early Neolithic between settled and nomadic populations, the effects of trade and access to various minerals on the development of complex society (the main source of lapis lazuli lies on the southern periphery of Central Asia in Afghanistan), and the domestication of a number of plants and animals, to name only a few examples. Hence a number of readers will find the book valuable because it touches on many topics that currently are receiving much attention elsewhere.

The book is divided into 20 short chapters which are each focused on a particular culture or period from the Central Asian sequence. Thus, anyone who would like to use this book as a reference work will find reasonably easy access to particular sets of information. There are a number of maps showing the distribution of settlements in various periods and subregions of Central Asia. In addition, Kohl provides a brief account of the

history of Central Asian archeological research, a separate stand-alone chapter on chronological problems, and a concluding chapter that evaluates the Central Asian sequence and introduces the reader to some of the distinguishing features of Soviet archeological method and theory.

The signal fact of present Central Asian archeology is that it is under Soviet control. Outsiders who wish to make a study of the subject must be able to deal effectively within the Soviet environment. At a minimum this means mastery of a diverse body of literature in Russian, extended study tours, bureaucratic labors, and usually some major disappointments. Additionally the foreign archeologist must learn to interpret the archeological record after it has passed through the Soviet archeological filter. That is, Soviet investigators learn to work within a Marxist theoretical framework and are conditioned to portray the unfolding of historical processes along more well-guarded paths than is common in the West, and anyone who wishes to use Soviet sources must be sensitized to how the data were collected and what goals the investigators had in mind. Kohl has passed all of these tests admirably, and he is certainly one of the very few non-Soviet archeologists experienced and qualified enough to provide us with such a comprehensive book. Even so, Kohl had to rely to a significant extent on published inferences and conclusions that have not been substantiated independently.

How is it possible to synthesize the archeology of the small-scale society of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers with the complexities of Iron Age state-level organization? The question is particularly relevant in Central Asia, where the archeological record can hardly be called complete (not that archeological records can ever be said to be complete). At present there are only tenuous connections between the Paleolithic and the early Neolithic and between the Neolithic and the Aeneolithic, and regional rela-

tionships within the Bronze Age are as yet unresolved. Despite this incompleteness the value of Kohl's work is immediately apparent when the Central Asian record is compared with that from other major regions that are archeologically well known, such as Mesopotamia. What emerges is a picture of pronounced variation in the pattern and tempo of development of cultural complexity. For example, the late third millennium B.C. Bronze Age sites of southern Central Asia do not contain evidence of the kind of marked social-class differentiation seen in Mesopotamia at the same time period. These differences exist despite the genuinely urban character of the Central Asian Middle Bronze Age and a natural environment that was favorable to the development of intensive irrigation agriculture.

It is at this point that synthesizers usually start riding their favorite horses, championing a particular type of explanation to account for the differences between sequences reconstructed from the archeological record. Long-time favorites have been migrations of peoples all over the map, various forms of environmental determinism, and, in Kohl's words, "the accidental outcome of randomly occurring historical events." Kohl is to be congratulated for keeping his charger in check and for only briefly elaborating on his suggestion for following the lead of I. Wallerstein with a model of a "world economy" and a "world system" to be used on prehistoric Central Asia. The available data, and to my mind the theoretical justification, are simply insufficient for such an exercise. Nevertheless, Kohl is looking for a means to look at and to explain large-scale patterning in the development of ancient society. He willingly takes on the challenge and the responsibility of the archeologist to examine history at the macro level. He offers Central Asian archeology not as a study peripheral to the development of civilization in the great river valleys to the south but as dealing with part of an ancient world filled with a rich and exceedingly complex web of interconnections, crosscurrents, spurts of growth, and periods of senescence. It is difficult to imagine anyone improving on Kohl's synthesis of Central Asian archeology for some time to come, and, as he clearly recognizes, there is need for much more collaborative work.

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