suitable for use in college and university teaching, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The book runs counter to many myths related to the Salafi activism, which were created in the highly charged climate during the past decade. As such, it demands our attention, careful reading, deep engagement, and understanding.

Ermin Sinanović
United States Naval Academy

Fergana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia

Edited by S. Frederick Starr, Baktybek Beshimov, Inomjon I. Bobokulov and Pulat Shozimov

Fergana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia is a remarkable volume that offers a very comprehensive and interesting study on the political and social life of the Fergana Valley and the three countries that include parts of it, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Central Asia in general. The book is based on two general assumptions that can be easily picked from its title and the introductory words of the editor, S.F. Starr. As he maintains at the beginning, the Fergana is assumed to be the heart of Central Asia and so the contributors believe that what happens there might affect the fate of the whole region. The second assumption is summarized also by Starr in the following phrase: “nothing about the Fergana Valley is simple” (p.ix).

Fergana Valley is a comprehensive study since it aims to reflect the complex and multidimensional nature of the political and social construction of the Fergana both as a center and as a peripheral mirror of the whole region from pre-colonial times to the division of the valley among three independent republics. Although two basic dimensions of geopolitics, time and space, and the relation between geography and politics, seem to be the subject of this edited book, Fergana Valley intends to go beyond the simple geopolitical calculations that are generally used to explain the strategic and political intentions of external powers in the region. Instead of focusing of such narrations as the (New) Great Game, this book on the one hand tries to analyze the economic, social, political, demographic, ecologic and cultural forces in the region throughout the periods of political unity (as during the times of Kokand Khanate, Tsarist Russia, and the Soviet rule), periods of disintegration (as during the times of independent republics) and transitional periods (as during the time of Revolution, the perestroika period and the nation and/or state building periods of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). And on the other hand, the chapters collectively intend to illuminate two contradictory trends in the valley: 1) “unity in diversity” as the reference to Sasha Kuprin who is one of the Fergana poets illustrates: “words like kishlak (village), aryk (irrigation canal), chinar (oriental plane tree), bazaar, chaikhane (teahouse) and...
plov (pilaf) are not mere fragments of exotic vocabulary but worlds through which we experience a common time and destiny” (p.293); and 2) “diversity in unity” that reveals in the overlapping dual lives, languages, identities and loyalties existing in Fergana along with different fault lines in the Fergana states (especially chapters 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 13).

*Fergana Valley* is an interesting book not only because of the complexity it reflects but also because of the nature of each chapter’s structure in which the editor(s) try to offer insights of scholars from all three Fergana states. Therefore each contribution is based on the collective work of one principle author and other contributing authors from different Fergana countries, with two exceptions (chapters 4 and 11 where the leading authors are respectively from Russia and Switzerland). This structure is significant especially when one thinks that the Fergana’s social, economic and political realities, such as the role of religion—primarily Islam—and state in the construction of the region, the meaning of nationality (Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz), the instruments of economic (in) equality (trade-water-energy bargaining), the culture of resistance (from the time of Basmachi Revolt to the Tulip Revolution), the future of democracy and inter-state challenges, the continuous interplay between conservatism and modernism since the Jadid movement, and the shifting regional tendency from being isolated to being a contact zone where external influences reach to the main cities and enclaves of Fergana, have different and contentious meanings in each republic, in Russia and in the West. Moreover, this book as a collective study may be taken as example of the prolific face of contact zones that are usually supposed to generate economic, ethnic and religious tensions such as that observed in the Fergana Valley particularly during the last three decades.

All in all the editorial team tries to reflect different visions of 27 regional experts from various disciplines in 14 chapters to reach a coherent reading of the Fergana’s reality. To accomplish this difficult task, the editorial team bring forth nine key questions (pp.xvi-xix) used by the authors in writing their chapters. Among these, three questions are especially important and are used in each chapter to explain the nature and direction of change in the Fergana. These questions are related to 1) the role of localism in reflecting continuity and change in the valley; 2) the driving motives for change, whether they are external or internal; and 3) the direction of change and whether it creates centripetal or centrifugal forces in the valley. Although, the book provides a very elaborate but coherent picture of the Fergana’s reality, distinguishing the sources and directions of change is not easy because there is a continuous interchange between top-down and bottom-up reflections of change as well as between its inside-out and outside-in drivers. The interplay between causes and consequences of change in Fergana actually resembles the visual impact of a möbius ribbon on which external influences and top-down policies of change can be vernacularized and localized over time as one can see in the revival of Islam in valley either in conservative or radical form since 1980s (chapters 9 and 13).

The international community has mixed feeling of indifference and concern for the Fergana Valley and Central Asia as it is seen as relatively stable compared to
the contemporary Middle East. The Fer-
gana Valley, now located at the periph-
ery of three Central Asian republics but
once the center of Central Asia, illustrates
both the risks and opportunities for social
and political changes in the whole region,
and the book *Fergana Valley: the Heart
of Central Asia* proves that understanding
the Fergana’s complexities and its fluctua-
tion between unity and diversity is crucial
to understanding regional change.

Vişne Korkmaz
Yıldız Technical University

Islam Without Extremes - A Muslim Case for Liberty

*By Mustafa Akyol*

In Mustafa Akyol’s book *Islam With-
out Extremes*, the author takes up the
challenge to confront the many miscon-
ceptions and false portrayals of Islam
as inherently conservative or violent by
tracing back Islam’s history, the develop-
ment of political Islam, and offering his
own vision for a modern and more liberal
political Islam. Throughout his writings,
he is implicitly and explicitly guided by
the question why a dominantly conserva-
tive brand of Islam is nowadays present
in many governments or societies. Yet in
the course of the book, he contrasts (for-
merly) authoritarian and secularist Turkey
with other Islamic countries, concluding
that Islam may not be the reason for au-
thoritarianism but that other factors are at
play. Drawing also on his own experienc-
es, religious beliefs, and Turkish heritage,
Akyol analyzes the emergence of political
Islam by deconstructing the past, meaning
he sheds light on both conservative (Tra-
ditionalists) and more progressive (Ratio-
nalists) movements within Islam and sup-
plements his evaluation of the movements
with a discussion on other factors, such as
the environment (desert vs. arid regions),
cultural context (tribalism) or economics
(commerce). To support his arguments
and interpretations, he employs quotes
from the Qur’an, Hadiths, and explains
the socio-cultural setting that shaped and
influenced the development of (political)
Islam. Akyol focuses on the origins of
Islam in the first part of the book and as-
serts that they provided a foundation for a
more liberal future, citing women’s rights
(p.53) or the role of the individual (p.49).
He then goes on to follow the blossoming
of Islamic culture, trade and political life
which all come to an end or faced stagna-
tion from the 12th century (to a degree
even earlier) on due to, among other rea-
sons, the economic decline, and a lack of
trade (pp.125-127).

However, aside the lack of economic
development, Akyol also discusses the
role the desert environment played on
shaping the nature of Islam, the function
of the middle class, and the role of the
respective rulers of the land. This critical
review will assess the latter point, the role
and power of rulers in the Muslim world
and how their interests influenced the de-
velopment and interpretation of Islam.