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## Preface

The initial drafts of the chapters in this book were written as contributions to an Advanced Seminar on "Central Asia as a Culture Area" held at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the week of April 15 to 19, 1985. The objective of the seminar was to produce a collection of essays that would enhance an understanding of the similar cultural patterns that for many generations have persisted in a region that I was then calling "Greater Central Asia." In the invitation for papers I identified Greater Central Asia as "the region from Turkey to Sinkiang (or Chinese Turkistan) and, on a more southerly latitude, from the Euphrates to North India," and I proposed that this region be examined as a discrete cultural region, on a par with the more commonly recognized neighboring cultural areas, the Middle East, Russian/Soviet Asia, and the Far East. I noted in the invitation for papers that, although the influence of Persianate Islam on this wide area has been widely recognized by historians, the region where it has profoundly affected social institutions in the Islamic period has not been generally considered a distinct culture area.

The seminar consisted of a group of scholars whose complementary skills would enable the long history of such a broad region to be surveyed. Karl Lamberg-Karlovsky came as an authority on the

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ecology, and the prehistoric as well as the early historic adaptations of human populations in this area. Richard Frye brought a broad historical grasp of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period. Three historians considered the developments in the medieval and early modern period: Yuri Bregel, Turkic influences in inland Muslim Asia; Michel Mazzaoui, cultural developments in Iran and Central Asia; and Francis Robinson, the Islamicate culture of South Asia. Three anthropologists treated the traditional culture of key sectors of the region in the contemporary period: Lois Beck, Iran; Nazif Shahrani, Afghanistan and Muslim Central Asia; and Stephen Pastner, Muslim South Asia. Milan Hauner, a modern historian, represented the contemporary geopolitical issues in Greater Central Asia. I examined the historical continuities that linked societies in the region over a long period. Unfortunately, not all the papers could be included in this volume; those by Lamberg-Karlovsky, Beck, and Pastner will appear elsewhere.

The group consisted of five historians (Frye, Bregel, Mazzaoui, Robinson, and Hauner) and five anthropologists (Lamberg-Karlovsky, Beck, Shahrani, Pastner, and Canfield). Anthropologists and historians have for some time discussed the complementarity of their interests, but the seminar was for me a first experience in working with scholars from the two disciplines on a subject of mutual interest. In the discussions the participants were forced to deal with important differences in their research questions, approaches, and explanations, and the interchange affected the final versions of all the papers.

The seminar had a surprising impact on my own conceptual frame of reference. The papers and discussions enriched my understanding of the region, and helped me to rethink some of my presuppositions. I began to question some of the ways I had formulated the issues, and eventually a growing disquiet led me to adopt a different terminology.

To be specific, two conceptual problems bothered me, and both were implicit in the title I had chosen for the seminar. One was the term "Greater Central Asia." I had used this phrase because the cultural system to be examined in the seminar took form within the region that is often loosely called "Central Asia" and was from there carried to other territories, a process that of course not only expanded the influence of the original culture but also produced diverse variations within it. The term for the region, I thought, had to be broader than Central Asia but at the same time had to imply a close association

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with it, hence the juxtaposition of the word "Greater." I had hoped, by such usage, to ensure that Muslim South Asia could be included in the area as well as Persia and Turkey, for these areas were all, especially in the medieval period, influenced by this culture. There was, however, a well-known problem with the term "Central Asia," for scholars have never agreed on its exact parameters. Everyone in the seminar was aware of this problem, for the specific limits of the region have troubled scholars for years, and indeed the problem had only recently been a major issue at another conference. Mercifully, the ambiguities of the term were not further belabored in the seminar, but I believe the general ambiguity about what was meant by "Greater Central Asia" hampered our discussion of its cultural parameters.

The second disquieting conceptual difficulty of the seminar, also entailed in its title, was the term "culture area." I now realize that the underlying problem in the definition of "Central Asia" has been an imprecision in the notion of "culture area." One problem with "culture area," as I had used the term, was that it presumed an association between broad cultural systems and their environment. Originally introduced as a means of classifying the artifacts of different societies in museum displays, the concept owed major assumptions to zoogeography. As it came to be used, the term referred to territories where characteristic culture patterns could be related to certain ecological conditions. However, the attempt to ground culture area definitions in geographic contexts distracts from the crucial definitional features; it is not the geography that defines but the cultural complex. My use of a geographic term for the culture that developed in Central Asia had masked the definitional importance of the cultural configuration itself.

Another problem with my use of the term was that it implied a static patterning of cultural traits. Actually, the geographic scope of the entity I was calling a "culture area" has changed over time; for the clusters of structured meaningful forms that mark "culture areas" not only change within themselves but also vary in their geographic scope in respect of the rise and fall of empires. The more appropriate term, I realized, was "ecumene," a term used often by historians but rarely by anthropologists. "Ecumene" suggests a historically perpetuated complex of meaningful forms – a "world" (Greek: *oekumené*) of shared understandings – in which the basic elements of public interaction are more or less well known.

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My original terminology in the seminar does not, therefore, appear in this volume. I have avoided the term "culture area" and have instead spoken of an "ecumene." And I have replaced the term "Greater Central Asia" with the more precise "Turko-Persian ecumene," or, more compactly, "Turko-Persia." In the Introduction I have accordingly treated the object of study as a historically developing cultural complex. Probably the seminar would have been more effective had I described the problem and the issues in these terms; however, without the seminar I might never have seen the ambiguities in my own usage of the crucial terminology.

In working on this book I have incurred a number of debts which I here gratefully acknowledge, particularly the School of American Research for sponsoring the seminar, and especially Doug Schwartz, its president, Jonathan Haas, its director of programs and research, and Jane Kepp, its director of publications. I am, of course, much indebted to the participants in the seminar for their counsel and patience from the beginning. Also, I am obliged to the following people for particularly important services: Elisabeth Case, for the expert professional and editorial advice and assistance without which this volume might never have been published; Lois Beck, for advice in planning the seminar and many useful comments and criticisms on the project, especially during the period of its inception; Christopher Dingwell, for producing the maps; and Jennifer Day, Kathleen Laird, and Aimee Fishkind-Campbell for assistance in producing the text, each with extraordinary grace and patience.

# I Introduction: the Turko-Persian tradition

ROBERT L. CANFIELD

This book is about some developments in the history of a distinctive culture that arose, flourished for several hundred years, and then seemed to fade in early modern times as European influences were imposed upon it; however, recently it has been the culture to which contemporary Muslims of inland Asia have turned for inspiration and the expressive means to represent their interests.<sup>1</sup> Turko-Persian Islamicate culture, as it will be called here,<sup>2</sup> is an ecumenical mix of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic elements that melded in the ninth and tenth centuries in eastern Iran – that is, in Khurasan and Transoxiana. From there it was carried by conquering peoples to neighboring areas, so that it eventually became the predominant culture of the ruling and elite classes of West, Central and South Asia.<sup>3</sup> In this introduction I will trace the rise and florescence of this culture and point out the topics that receive particular attention in this book. For a detailed chronology of events, please see the chart, pp. 217–29.

## ORIGINS

The underlying stratum from which Turko-Persian Islamicate culture sprang was Persian. Two Persian empires – the Achaemenids of the