

Jacob's Well that the author had previously edited and printed. Each of the texts (which are generally based on existing standard editions) is preceded by a headnote that locates the work in time and space and a bibliographical note and is followed by a French translation (a couple of which have been supplied by accomplished French scholars other than the author), a short literary or social commentary, a section on language, and brief but helpful explanatory notes. The layout is clear, as is the printing, with the exception of the letter yogh, which is too faint for the basic font.

All in all, then, this is a well-conceived and well-executed handbook, interesting both in its own right and as indicating contemporary attitudes toward medieval English studies in Francophone countries. It and the ambitious series in which it appears deserve praise and consideration.

LISTER M. MATHESON, Michigan State University

DAVID CHRISTIAN, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia, 1: Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire*. (The Blackwell History of the World.) Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998. Paper. Pp. xxiii, 472; black-and-white plates and figures, maps, and tables. \$27.95.

David Christian has written not so much a textbook as a new interpretive synthesis of Inner Eurasian historical development. He uses the term "Inner Eurasia" as approximately equivalent to what H. J. Mackinder called the "Heartland" and what Denis Sinor has called "Central Eurasia" or "Inner Asia." This area, argues Christian, has a separate history from Outer Eurasia as the result of ecological and geographical differences. In response to those differences, pastoralism became the dominant lifeway of Inner Eurasia, while agriculture became the dominant lifeway of Outer Eurasia.

Although the histories of the two Eurasias are distinct, Christian argues that they are intertwined. Thus Inner Eurasia provided the trade routes for the transmission of goods and technology from one part of Outer Eurasia to another. In turn, the frontier zone between the two acted as "the dynamo of Inner Eurasian history" (p. xxi). He suggests that we conceptualize Inner Eurasia in terms of concentric arcs, each influenced progressively more by Outer Eurasia the closer it is to that frontier zone. Paradoxically, the instability of the frontier was one of the stable forces of Inner Eurasia, in large part because "the ecological divide" that separated Inner from Outer Eurasia prevented any single society from establishing a decisive advantage across the divide. Christian then proceeds to describe within this framework the rise and fall of various Inner Eurasian cultures.

During the neolithic period domestication of animals spread rapidly in Inner Eurasia, while domestication of plants spread rapidly in Outer Eurasia. Christian draws on recent research to demonstrate that stockbreeding communities in the western steppe originated the Indo-European family of languages. He sees shamanism, with its balance between greater and lesser gods, as a central theme of Inner Eurasian religious history. The Bronze Age witnessed the development and expansion of pastoralism to the central and eastern steppes, the growth of urban areas in Central Asian oases, and ongoing mutually beneficial commercial activity between those two cultural areas. He recalls Owen Lattimore's theory that demographic pressures from China pushed marginal farmers into arid areas with poor soil, which led them to engage in stockbreeding for survival.

Christian prefers the term "pastoralism" to "nomadism" to emphasize the dependence of these groups on livestock rather than their mobility. He asserts that, among the pastoral groups, sense of identity was strong, multilayered, and variable "depending on circumstance, rank, gender and kinship" (p. 149). Moreover, ongoing steppe political systems were always dependent on trade with, or tribute from, agrarian societies that had significant

surpluses. In other words, “all pastoralist states mobilized substantial wealth from non-pastoralist neighbors” (p. 151). Christian draws on Thomas Barfield’s description of two general alternative policies that Inner Eurasian leaders followed in relation to China: an outer frontier strategy, in which they would threaten destructive raids to maintain trade or obtain tribute, and an inner frontier strategy, whereby they would seek support from the Chinese government in return for defending China’s borders against other pastoral groups.

During the period from 50 B.C. to A.D. 500, increased border conflict occurred with more invasions of pastoralists into Outer Eurasian agrarian empires and a concomitant inability of those empires to sustain dynamic counterinvasions. The Kusana Empire, for example, was established by pastoralists over agricultural people, and those pastoral rulers maintained “active trading and cultural contacts with Rome, Parthia, India and China” (p. 213). In doing so, according to Christian, they followed an “enduring pattern in the Central Asian borderlands [that was] dictated by the region’s ecology” (p. 220). Nonetheless, China was able to destroy the Hsiung-nu empires at this time by terminating the “inner frontier” policy of their rulers. The resultant move westward of mixed groups of non-Indo-European speakers ended Indo-European domination of the western steppe. But not all of these pastoral peoples acted the same way. The Avars and Huns had “direct and brutal” contact with Outer Eurasian societies, while the Khazars and Uighurs built commercial and political empires in the steppe, then converted to Outer Eurasian religions, Judaism and Buddhism, respectively.

For the period from 500 to 1200, Christian compares the rise of Rus’ with Mawara’n-nahr, the Transoxiana area. Both areas were substantially agrarian but had extensive and vulnerable frontiers with pastoral societies. Christian sees their respective developments as being “closely intertwined with the pastoralist world of the steppes,” certainly much closer than historians generally acknowledge (p. 354). Pastoral tribes not only raided Rus’ and Mawara’n-nahr but also carried on trade, made alliances, intermarried, and settled among their people.

For Christian, the rise of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century created “a new political, military, economic and even epidemiological ‘world system’ ” (p. 385), or what William McNeill called “the closing of the ecumene,” so that commerce and ideas could pass freely between east and west along the trade routes of Inner Eurasia. Indeed, Christian sees the need for goods to distribute as one of the main drives motivating the Mongols. Their triumphs over agricultural areas brought enormous riches to them as they gained control over the trade routes that the Hsiung-nu had previously tried for centuries to dominate. Nonetheless, after discussing the various possible explanations for why the Mongol Empire arose when it did, Christian concludes that it was “a contingent event” that was dependent on a charismatic and talented leader, Chingis Khan. The success of the Mongols, however, was the high tide of pastoral power, for agrarian Outer Eurasia began its inexorable rollback of that power and subsequent domination of the Inner Eurasian steppe.

In the introduction Christian explains that he wrote this book for two reasons. First, he thinks that “it is useful in principle for historians to look at the past from unfamiliar perspectives.” Second, he believes that one needs to see the history of Inner Eurasia as a whole because it “is in fact a coherent historical region” (p. xvii). By the time he reaches his conclusion, however, the modest first reason turns into a politely phrased criticism of conventional historians of Outer Eurasian societies for not “treat[ing] Inner Eurasia more seriously” (p. 430). Christian sees Inner Eurasia as having had a “profound impact” on Outer Eurasia since the Stone Age by providing connections among their societies and by the introduction of new technologies, languages, and religious practices, as well as by providing models of state formation.

This reviewer has a few suggestions that might be incorporated into second and subsequent editions, which no doubt the wide use and value of this book will require. As broad

as Christian's purview is, I would like to see an even broader inclusion of natural history, such as the changing geography and ecology of the area, beginning with how the land masses were formed and transformed (e.g., the Black Sea), and the incorporation of more description of the changing plant and animal life of the area. Refinements here and there would allow Christian to make some of his points more dramatically, such as including in his account of the campaigns of General Pan Ch'ao the fact that when his army, using Inner Asian routes, reached the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea in the first century A.D., it was the farthest west any Chinese army had then (or since) ever reached. Although there are twenty-three historical maps distributed throughout the book, most of them are drawn on the basis of present-day features and so, for example, depict the reservoirs along the Dnepr and Volga Rivers created by twentieth-century dams and present the course of the Amu Darya (Oxus) River as having always flowed to the Aral Sea, whereas formerly it flowed into the Caspian. It may be too much to expect that even twenty-three maps can include all the geographical references made in the text, but a number of significant ones are left out, such as Christian's reference in at least three places (pp. 13, 179, and 258) to the "fingers of steppe" reaching into Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran, which provided a route for pastoralists deep into these Outer Eurasian lands.

Those few minor points notwithstanding, I must say that I find Christian's book to be exceptionally well conceptualized and well executed. It is a monumental achievement of scholarly synthesis and will be welcomed warmly for providing a coherent unity to what before seemed to be mostly isolated and fragmentary social, cultural, and state developments. Christian makes a particularly strong case for the historical importance of this vast area, the study and relevance of which has been too often ignored for much too long.

DONALD OSTROWSKI, Harvard University

EDWARD I. CONDREN, *Chaucer and the Energy of Creation: The Design and the Organization of the "Canterbury Tales."* Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1999. Pp. viii, 296; black-and-white frontispiece, 10 black-and-white figures, and 1 table. \$49.95.

This is a strange book to have appeared at the end of the 1990s, a decade in which Chaucer criticism emphasized the social, political, intertextual, theoretical, and dialogic aspects of Chaucer's work. Despite its intermittent references to Dante and its recourse to thermodynamic analogy, *Chaucer and the Energy of Creation* can best be described as New Critical in its approach to the *Canterbury Tales*.

The Chaucer whom Condren celebrates is not "Social Chaucer" (so called by Paul Strohm), or Chaucer the Reformer (whose existence Condren explicitly denies), or Chaucer the Clerk, but rather Chaucer the Maker, the author of literature. The image of this artistic Chaucer frames the book. His portrait (ca. 1490) appears as a frontispiece to the volume, while the concluding appendix, "The Chaucer Portrait at the University of California, Los Angeles," offers commentary on it: "Chaucer's right hand, with its inward-pointing two-finger gesture almost dominating the portrait, may have been intended to symbolize both the creative impulse of the poet and the divine inspiration that resided within" (p. 255).

Despite this emphatic framing device, or perhaps because of it, Chaucer himself—his life, his times—is virtually absent from the pages of the book, which concerns itself instead with "the poem itself": "The only reliable instruction on how it is to be read must come from the poem itself, for nothing 'should be permitted to replace an interpretation of the poem arising from the poem'" (p. 14). I noticed only one brief reference in the book to fourteenth-century politics—"the dynastic struggle between Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke"—and Condren mentions it only to dismiss its importance: "Above all these, and