

« Khurasan and Its Limits: Changing Concepts of Territory from Pre-Modern to Modern Times », in : Markus Ritter, Ralph Kauz, Birgitt Hoffmann, eds., *Iran und iranisch geprägte Kulturen. Studien zum 65. Geburtstag von Bert G. Fragner*. Wiesbaden, Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2008, p. 9-19. (Beiträge zur Iranistik; 27)

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- 1 In her survey of the geographical and political meaning of the term *Ḥorāsān*, the Author notes its originally vague meaning (“the place where the sun rises”, whose borders are not precisely fixed by Persian-language medieval literature) and remarks the fact that only occasionally the *Āmū Daryā* represented a political border and even less often was an obstacle to the movements of invading armies. Instead of being divided in two by the river, the region was unified by the relationship between nomads and settled, by the will of the aspiring conquerors to secure control of economic assets (cities and commercial routes), and by the necessity to support the invading armies through the control of summer and winter pastures. Notions of legitimacy and political organization too were largely the same north and south of the river. Only in the 19th century “the emergence of modern borders [...] caused traditional conceptions of

political authority to be charged with entirely new perceptions of space”, almost assuming “corporeal qualities” (p. 18), thus prompting the Amir of Afghanistan, ‘Abdo’r-Raḥmān (1880-1901) to equate the boundaries of his state to the wall of a house (with the inevitable consequences of a new perception of “order” at home and of “we and them” in the domain of foreign affairs). The difficulty to reconcile time-honoured geographical and cultural notions with the new political realities (or, in the words of the Author, the contrast “between an idealized past and an unsatisfactory present” led to “a lingering nostalgia for ‘Greater Khurasan’”, still present in the minds of local scholars (p. 19).

Markus Ritter, Ralph Kauz, Birgitt Hoffmann

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Thèmes : 15.1. Iran

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