



LOST ENLIGHTENMENT

CENTRAL ASIA'S
GOLDEN AGE
FROM THE
ARAB CONQUEST
TO TAMERLANE



S. FREDERICK STARR

i-40300

Lost Enlightenment

CENTRAL ASIA'S GOLDEN AGE
FROM THE
ARAB CONQUEST TO TAMERLANE



S. Frederick Starr

M.F. Axundov adına
Azərbaycan Milli
Kitabxanası

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

73(5)

Lost
Enlightenment
CENTRAL ASIA'S GOLDEN AGE

Copyright © 2013 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu

Jacket art: Detail of ms. Elliott 339, fol. 95v, courtesy of
the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Starr, S. Frederick.

Lost enlightenment : Central Asia's golden age from the Arab conquest
to Tamerlane / S. Frederick Starr.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-15773-3 (hardcover)

1. Asia, Central—History—To 1500. I. Title.

DS288.3.S73 2013

958'.02—dc23

2013013684

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Minion Pro text with Archer display

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

To strive for knowledge is the duty of every Muslim.

—Saying or Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad,
recorded in the tenth century by the scholar
Abu Isa Muhammad Tirmidhi (824–892)
from Tirmidh (Termez), and inscribed at the
entrance to the madrasa of Ulughbeg, ruler and
astronomer, Samarkand, ca 1420



Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.

And with all thy getting, get understanding.

—Bible, Proverbs 4.7, King James Version

Contents



List of Illustrations ix

Preface xiii

Dramatis Personae xxi

Chronology xxxi

CHAPTER 1

The Center of the World 1

CHAPTER 2

Worldly Urbanists, Ancient Land 28

CHAPTER 3

A Cauldron of Skills, Ideas, and Faiths 62

CHAPTER 4

How Arabs Conquered Central Asia
and Central Asia Then Set the Stage
to Conquer Baghdad 101

CHAPTER 5

East Wind over Baghdad 126

CHAPTER 6

Wandering Scholars 156

CHAPTER 7

Khurasan: Central Asia's Rising Star 194

CHAPTER 8

A Flowering of Central Asia:
The Samanid Dynasty 225

CHAPTER 9

A Moment in the Desert: Gurganj under
the Mamuns 267

CHAPTER 10

Turks Take the Stage: Mahmud of Kashgar
and Yusuf of Balasagun 303

CHAPTER 11

Culture under a Turkic Marauder:
Mahmud's Ghazni 332

CHAPTER 12

Tremors under the Dome of Seljuk Rule 381

CHAPTER 13

The Mongol Century 436

CHAPTER 14

Tamerlane and His Successors 478

CHAPTER 15

Retrospective: The Sand and the Oyster 515

Notes 541

Index 611

"*Lost Enlightenment* brilliantly re-creates for us the world of Central Asia. The book is not a backwater but a center of world civilization of the large historical sweep as well as an eye for detail, Fred Starr's important book that will be a resource for years to come."

—FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, AUTHOR OF
THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL ORDER

"A delight to read, this is a fine survey of the intellectual and cultural history of Central Asia by a distinguished historian. By showing the remarkable discoveries in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and other fields made by Central Asians from the earliest times, *Lost Enlightenment* is certain to surprise many readers by challenging traditional misconceptions of the region. The book's biographical approach makes for lively reading. Anyone interested in the Silk Roads will find it enthralling."

—MORRIS ROSSABI, AUTHOR OF
THE MONGOLS: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

"For more than three hundred years the Islamic world exercised the scientific and philosophical mastery of Europe. With compelling urgency and lucidity, *Lost Enlightenment* tells the story of the rise and tragic demise of this golden age of Islamic learning in Central Asia. It is a story whose lesson we should never be allowed to forget."

—ANTHONY PAGDEN, AUTHOR OF
THE ENLIGHTENMENT: AND WHY IT STILL MATTERS

"From 800 to 1200, Central Asia was the world's most advanced civilization in the sciences, mathematics, medicine, law, and art. Starr's *Lost Enlightenment* thoughtfully explains this astonishing evolution and its end."

—HENRY A. KISSINGER

"Fred Starr makes the most persuasive case yet that medieval Central Asia was a major center of civilization and high culture—and what a picture emerges."

—RICHARD W. BULLIET, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

"This ambitious and much-needed book will be an eye-opener for many readers. S. Frederick Starr shows that Central Asia, often viewed today as a backwater, produced some of the most outstanding minds of the Middle Ages."

—PETER B. GOLDEN, AUTHOR OF
CENTRAL ASIA IN WORLD HISTORY

"Drawing on his vast knowledge and experience of Central Asia, Fred Starr provides a brilliant account of the history and culture of the land that produced some of the greatest Islamic scholars, scientists, saints, artists, and architects. Thanks to this book, the Central Asian enlightenment is no longer as lost as some might think."

—SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



“Müəlliflik hüququ və əlaqəli hüquqlar haqqında” Azərbaycan Respublikası Qanununa və nəşr ilinə, ölkə üçün mühüm əhəmiyyət kəsb etdiyinə görə bu elektron resursdan yalnız kitabxananın “Lokal şəbəkədən istifadə üzrə oxu zalı”nda istifadə etmək olar.

* * *

Due to Law of Azerbaijan Republic on “Copyright and related laws”, year of publication and for this reason that this material is important for our republic you can use this electron resource only in the “Local network reading hall”.

* * *

Принимая во внимание закон Азербайджанской Республики "Об авторском праве и сопутствующим правам", год издания, и чрезвычайную важность для страны, получить доступ к данному электронному ресурсу можно только в библиотечном "Читальном зале по использованию локальной сети".