Editorial Introduction

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Have you ever found yourself wishing you had known more about the latest developments in your field — a foreign scholar’s innovative approach, a fierce debate at a conference, the release of a new body of statistics — while you were still thinking through your research results rather than after your conclusions had been committed to print? All scholars potentially face this problem of timely access to information, even in the age of the Internet. For scholars of Central Eurasia, the considerable distance across regions, cultures and scholarly traditions makes communication and access to information even more of a challenge. Overcoming this problem was one reason for founding the Central Eurasian Studies Society, as John Schoeberlein writes in his “Perspectives” column, and we consider the Central Eurasian Studies Review (CESR) to be a crucial element of the work of CESS.

CESR was created with the rather modest assumption that however accomplished we all may be in our scholarly pursuits, we are still students and we will always have something to learn. In this light, CESR is conceived as a vehicle for promoting dialogue and open exchange of ideas and information. We have much to benefit from the knowledge and experience of others working on related questions. If a historian can improve her/his approach to research in Uzbekistan from reading Adeeb Khaliq; if a sociologist comes to a new understanding of the dilemmas facing Azeri intellectuals from Liidam Rzayeva and starts a discussion with her about it; if a numismatist is inspired by one of the presentations described by Stuart Sears that was given at the conference on medieval Iranian coinages; if Shoshana Keller’s experiences in the classroom inspire another educator to follow her model — then CESR will have succeeded in its most basic goals. I believe that if we take seriously our roles as students and endeavor to be open-minded and learn from others as much as we can, then scholarship will benefit enormously.

One of the goals of CESS as an organization is to promote higher standards of scholarship. CESR can contribute to this effort indirectly, in the ways that I have described above. But it is important to note that CESR is not a peer-reviewed journal; the editors of CESR do not accept or decline submissions based on a systematic process of assessing the work’s accuracy or unique scholarly contribution. The disciplines within Central Eurasian studies are too diverse to expect from our small editorial staff of volunteers the background needed for such a task, nor do we have the organization required to obtain outside reviews. But what CESR and its editors aspire to do well is to seek out and present scholarship-in-the-making, research-in-progress, classroom experiences, reviews of recent publications, reactions to conference presentations — all with the object of fostering communication among scholars.

This first issue of CESR is more than a bit of an experiment, and as with every trial, there are things one learns and then does differently the next time. We welcome your comments on how we can improve. Some things we already know. For instance, we had envisioned a larger publication, and so we know that we want more contributions from the Central Eurasian studies community throughout the world. We will work harder from our end to solicit contributions from you, particularly to the Reviews and Abstracts section, which turned out to be surprisingly thin in this issue. However much we do to encourage your participation in this venture, it remains clear that CESR cannot succeed unless there are willing contributors to share ideas in this public way. We are also working on expanding the possibilities of information-exchange in the web-version of CESR. And the CESS Publications Committee, of which I am Chair, is engaged in an on-going discussion about other types of publications that can bring recognition and strength to CESS in ways that can supplement and complement CESR.

For now, I encourage you to read and enjoy this first issue. The five sections of CESR should offer something for everyone. As you are reading, please think of ways that you can contribute your ideas and experiences to future issues. Beyond submitting articles to the Review, we are also in need of volunteers to work behind the scenes, both on CESR and for the organization more generally. In
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I would like to acknowledge the amazing collaborative effort that has resulted in this first issue of CESR. The CESR Publications Committee, composed only of volunteers, has worked since last spring on this project. Without a central editorial office, we have communicated almost entirely via email. If this small group effort is any indication of the type of open communication and information exchange that CESR was founded to encourage, then our organization has a bright future indeed. And you are welcomed to participate in it!