‘The Archives Talk’ – Paolo Sartori’s contribution to the history of Central Asia

‘In the first place, he knows his evidence. He knows the range of it, how it came into existence, what people or institutions produced it, what it can tell and what can never be got from it.’ G. R. Elton *The Practice of History* (1967)

Positivism in historical writing has been under attack for many decades now – at least since the publication of Hayden White’s *Metahistory* in 1973, and the broader ‘linguistic turn’ which it helped to usher in.¹ Even before this, Geoffrey Elton considered history as profession and craft to be threatened by ‘relativists’, who favoured ‘the opinion that it is all simply in the historian’s mind and becomes whatever he likes to make of it’.² He was referring above all to E.H. Carr’s *What is History?* (1961), whose questioning of the notion of historical truth was mild compared to what followed in the succeeding decades: Elton saw postmodernism as a ‘devilish temptation’, nothing less than a moral failing.³ His fears were only partly justified. While there were times (particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s) when postmodern, relativist approaches to the study of the past looked as if they might carry all before them, positivism, empiricism and historical truth found many staunch and distinguished defenders.⁴ What Marc Bloch called the historian’s craft has not only survived but thrived in the face of the postmodernist challenge, whose positive effects included a much greater sensitivity to structures and hierarchies of power in the analysis of sources, and the emergence of microhistory.⁵

Paolo Sartori may not thank me for placing him in the Eltonian tradition of deep archival research and meticulous documentary analysis, but this virtual ancestry was suggested partly by an (uncomplimentary) reference to his approach as ‘positivism’ in a review of his recent book, *Visions of Justice*,⁶ and partly by the title of one of his now-completed research projects: ‘The Archives Talk: Writing the Social History of Colonial Central Asia’, on which Sartori worked with Jürgen Paul and Thomas Welsford, was funded by the

¹ Hayden White *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

² G. R. Elton *The Practice of History* (London: Fontana, 1967) p.77.

³ G. R. Elton *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) p.41.

⁴ e.g. Richard J. Evans *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997).

⁵ Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village, 1294-1324* (London: Penguin, 1978); Carlo Ginzburg *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980); Natalie Zemon Davis *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁶ Paolo Sartori *Visions of Justice. Shari‘a and Cultural Change in Russian Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Robert Crews ‘Review: *Visions of Justice*’ *Central Asian Survey* (2018)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1500818>, p.2 (accessed 13/08/2018)

Volkswagen Stiftung and ran from 2010-2013.⁷ This was probably the single most important capacity-building historical project of any kind to run in the hostile environment of Karimov's Uzbekistan. Eight young Uzbek scholars received specialist training from leading experts in Central Asian history, and were enabled to publish their work internationally.⁸ Thanks to close collaboration with the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Samarkand Historical Museum, it also produced important publications by Sartori himself and his collaborators.⁹ His current project, supported by the Austrian Science Fund, is called 'Seeing like an Archive',¹⁰ and focuses on the chancellery documents of the Khans of Khiva from before the Russian conquest – a collection which was also the basis for much of the work of the great orientalist Yuri Bregel.¹¹ Central Asian archives and the documents they contain are thus absolutely central to Sartori's work, not just as sources for understanding the past, but as objects of study in themselves. Reading any of Sartori's publications you will get a clear sense of how, when and why particular archives were assembled and of the types of material they contain – petitions, deeds of *waqf*, *qazis'* judgements, colonial minutes and memoranda. This is then used to frame careful, in-depth analysis of particular documents and draw out the stories they can tell.

Is this unusual, particularly praiseworthy or even important? In my view it is. This is partly because taken together, the documentary collections of Central Asia are among the richest archives anywhere in the Islamic world.¹² Largely inaccessible to researchers from outside the USSR until the early 1990s, they remain under-explored in English-language

⁷ <http://portal.volkswagenstiftung.de/search/projectPDF.do?projectId=7535> (accessed 12/08/2018)

⁸ James Pickett 'From Halle to Tashkent to Vienna: The Volkswagenstiftung International Research Partnership' *The CESS blog* 26/02/2014 (accessed 12/08/2018) (<http://thecessblog.com/2014/02/26/from-halle-to-tashkent-to-vienna-the-volkswagenstiftung-international-research-partnership/>)

⁹ Thomas Welsford and Nuryogdi Tashev *A Catalogue of Arabic-Script Documents in the Samarqand Museum* (Samarqand: UNESCO, 2012); Paolo Sartori (ed.) *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th – Early 20th Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013)

¹⁰ <https://seeinglikeanarchive.wordpress.com> (accessed 12/08/2018). For some early results see Paolo Sartori "Seeing like a Khanate: On Archives, Cultures of Documentation, and 19th Century Khorezm" *Journal of Persianate Studies* Vol.8 No.2 (2016): 228-57

¹¹ Ю. Е. Брегел *Документы Архива Хивинских Ханов по истории и этнографии Каракалпаков* (Москва: Наука, 1967).

¹² Sean Pollock. "Historians and Their Sources: Discourses of Russian Empire and Islam in Eurasian Archives." *Ab Imperio* 2008/4: 234-252; Дмитрий Арапов "Ислам в архивных материалах высших государственных учреждений Российской империи (1721–1917 гг.)" *Ab Imperio* 2008/4: 253-266; James H. Meyer "For The Russianist in Istanbul and the Ottomanist in Russia: A Guide to the Archives of Eurasia" *Ab Imperio* 2008/4: 281-301; Adeeb Khalid "Searching for Muslim Voices in Post-Soviet Archives" *Ab Imperio* 2008/4: 302-312; Alexander Morrison "Archives: Central Asia", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam III* ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24236 (Accessed 13/08/2018).

scholarship compared to Ottoman, French and British archives, or those in metropolitan Russia. As a corollary of this, Central Asia was for many years marginalised within Anglophone scholarship on the Islamic world, the preserve of Sovietologists and the occasional visitor from Russian or South Asian studies.¹³ While the tradition of Oriental Studies in the USSR had remained surprisingly robust and immune to ideological considerations,¹⁴ the same was not true of most historical scholarship in Russian and Central Asian languages. Here Islam and its institutions were dismissed as a source of oppression and superstition, on the rare occasions where they were mentioned at all in the midst of earnest discussions about the formation of class consciousness among sharecroppers and the 'progressive role' of the Russian people in pre-revolutionary Central Asia.¹⁵ In practical terms this meant that just twenty years ago a historian trying to establish a very basic question – the sphere of jurisdiction of Central Asian *qazis* before the Russian conquest – could not find the answer in published scholarship. I know, because I tried and failed.¹⁶ In *Visions of Justice* Sartori has solved this conundrum, explaining clearly the vital role played by Central Asian rulers in administering justice, and the error of assuming (as I did) that this constitutes a parallel 'secular' system of law, as opposed to another facet of *shari'a*, properly understood – part of what he calls the 'Islamic juridical field' in Central Asia.¹⁷ This is of importance not just to those working on Islamic legal history, but to anybody with an interest in the broader social, political and economic history of 19th-century Central Asia, both before and after the Russian conquest. This is one example among many – we might cite Sartori's analysis of the reasons why *qazis* were so consistently portrayed as corrupt in both Russian and vernacular sources;¹⁸ his convincing resolution of the knotty question of *mulk* land, and the gradual transformation of notions of land tenure under the influence of Russian bureaucratic and legal

¹³ Devin DeWeese 'Islam and Legacy of Sovietology: a review essay of Ya'acov Ro'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*' *Journal of Islamic Studies* Vol.13 No.3 (2002): 298 – 330.

¹⁴ I reflect on this in an obituary of a great Kazakh orientalist: 'Timur Kasymovich Beisembiev, 1955 – 2016' *Central Asian Survey* Vol.36 No.3 (2017): 391-394.

¹⁵ e.g. C. A. Раджабов *Прогрессивное значение присоединения Средней Азии к России* (Ташкент: ФАН, 1960). For an excellent account of the contortions of Soviet historiography see Lowell Tillet, *The Great Friendship. Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), esp. 32–4, 174–190 on Turkestan.

¹⁶ Alexander Morrison *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868-1910. A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) pp.246-7.

¹⁷ Paolo Sartori 'Constructing Colonial Legality in Russian Central Asia: On Guardianship' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol.56 No.2 (2014) pp.424-6; Sartori *Visions of Justice* Ch.1; Crews claims to have found inconsistencies in Sartori's argument on this point: 'Review: *Visions of Justice*' p.2. I cannot see any discrepancies myself.

¹⁸ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.128-134.

practices and concepts;¹⁹ or the changes to that fundamental Islamic institution, *waqf*, once again not because of any particular colonial policy, but because of exposure to Russian legal practice and the creation of alternative venues of ratification and appeal under colonial rule.²⁰ The consistent theme is that colonial rule wrought many, often fundamental changes in Central Asian legal consciousness and practice, but that these came about not primarily as a result of any deliberate initiative from their Russian rulers, but because of the ways the latter misunderstood the nature of *shari'a* and the role of the *qazi* (something familiar from other colonial contexts),²¹ and above all through the agency of the ruled, responding to new opportunities the Russians themselves often did not realise they had provided.²² Sartori charts the emergence of what he calls a 'culture of lies' generated by colonial rule, in large part because Russian officials did not have the intellectual tools or linguistic and technical competence to distinguish between genuine and malicious or purely self-serving appeals and petitions.²³ Central Asian Muslims saw no contradiction between their own 'Muslimness' and their use of the institutions of the Russian colonial state to undermine such apparent cornerstones of the Islamic legal system as the *qazi* court, or the validity of *waqf*, where it suited their interests.²⁴

These discoveries and conclusions in Sartori's work are not the result of the pursuit of any particular thesis, but rest on his unrivalled knowledge and understanding of materials whose variety and complexity would baffle even the majority of specialists in the field. Sartori makes comprehensive use of chronicles in Persian and Chaghatai, works of jurisprudence in Arabic, archival materials and newspapers in Russian and Turki, and a vast range of published works in these and other languages. The stories he relays would be impossible to tell if relying on Russian accounts alone – but the interaction between the local population and the Russian colonial state and its officials is nevertheless central to it, meaning that 'traditional' Islamic sources, such as Persianate chronicles, would also be insufficient. Sartori's detailed case-studies are largely based on individual or sequences of *dela* (archival files) generated by the investigation of particular cases, usually by the administration rather than the judiciary, and

¹⁹ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.176-210.

²⁰ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.247-249.

²¹ S. A. Kugle 'Framed, Blamed and Renamed. The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia' *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.35 (2001) pp.260, 272-4, 286; Elisa Giunchi: 'The Reinvention of *Sharī'a* under the British Raj: In Search of Authenticity and Certainty' *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol.69 No.4 (2010): 1119-1142.

²² Paolo Sartori 'Behind A Petition: Why Muslims' Appeals Increased in Turkestan under Russian Rule' *Asiatische Studien* Vol.63 No.2 (2009): 401-434.

²³ Sartori *Visions of Justice* p.138.

²⁴ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.306-315.

containing a rich and challenging mixture of petitions, *rivayats*, *waqfnamas* (real and forged), confessions, minutes of interrogation, reports and memoranda in Russian and Turki. It is above all these documentary materials in Turki produced under Russian rule which are the most challenging to read and interpret: the sheer level of linguistic and palaeographical virtuosity required is beyond the ability of all but a handful of historians of colonial Central Asia (I am not one of them). Of those who can, most – such as Bakhtiyar Babajanov or Sartori's colleague and frequent collaborator, Ulfatbek Abdurasulov - publish primarily in Russian.²⁵ It would be easy for Sartori to rest on these laurels alone, but he makes an important methodological point about sources early on in his monograph which bears repeating:

'I make no assumption that texts written in Arabic-script languages are intrinsically more "useful" than those written in Russian by virtue of their reflecting local writing practices. They are no doubt crucial to understanding a local system of knowledge, but "indigenous" sources are not endowed with greater authenticity than any other texts, including those written by non-Central Asians. One script hardly makes a text more or less authentic than do others. Nor, in principle, are there sources that can speak more authoritatively of the past and those who lived it.'²⁶

This is an important corrective to the tendency to fetishize vernacular materials, and to disdain documents written in the language of the colonizer which is sometimes found in postcolonial scholarship.²⁷ Sartori has the intellectual tools to allow him to read and provide clear exegeses of what are often turgid legal documents in Turki, but equally importantly he is able to 'engage colonial knowledge', reading Russian archives both with and against the grain.²⁸ The cases that he chooses to present in depth are a mere fraction of the mountains of similar documentary material which he has sifted through, which allow him not just to show which cases are particularly illustrative of changes in legal practice, but also to establish typologies of cases and the documentary forms they produced. Here I cannot resist quoting Elton again:

'And here the first demand of sound historical scholarship must be stressed: it must rest on a broad-fronted attack upon all the relevant material. Historical research does not consist, as beginners in particular often suppose, in the pursuit of some particular evidence which will answer a particular

²⁵ Бахтияр Бабаджанов. "Андижанское Восстание 1898 Года и "Мусульманский Вопрос" в Туркестане (Взгляды "Колонизаторов" и "Колонизированных)" *Ab Imperio* 2009/2: 155-200; Бахтияр Бабаджанов *Кокандское Ханство: Власть, Политика, Религия* (Токио-Ташкент: TIAS, 2010); Ульфат Абдурасулов & Паоло Сартори 'Неопределенность как политика: размышляя о природе Российского протектората в Средней Азии' *Ab Imperio* 2016/3: 118-164.

²⁶ Sartori *Visions of Justice* p.38.

²⁷ See David Arnold & David Hardiman (eds.) *Subaltern Studies VIII. Essays in honour of Ranajit Guha* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), critically reviewed by Ramachandra Guha "Subaltern and Bhadraklok Studies" *Economic & Political Weekly* 30,33 (19th Aug. 1995): 2056-2058.

²⁸ Ann Laura Stoler *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Ricardo Roque & Kim A. Wagner 'Introduction: Engaging Colonial Knowledge' in *Engaging Colonial Knowledge. Reading European Archives in World History* ed. Roque & Wagner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp.1-32.

question; it consists of an exhaustive, and exhausting, review of everything that may conceivably be germane to a given investigation.’²⁹

Elton’s injunction is all too often ignored these days, where Ph.D. and book projects frequently seem to be thesis-driven, based on the cherry-picking of evidence to support a particular argument, and privileging short excursions into multiple archives over the deep knowledge of a particular body of material. It is a problem raised in acute form by the turn towards global history, which can only rarely be written in any other way.³⁰ Not coincidentally, Sartori has had some harsh things to say about the facile way in which global connections and parallels are sometimes invoked in modern scholarship.³¹ He is very well-read in the broader historiography of Islamic law and of legal pluralism in a colonial context, and he pays generous tribute to the work of Lauren Benton, among others, in framing his own research.³² At the same time, he is always very definite about the need to establish Central Asian specificities in detail before attempting more ambitious syntheses. This is surely correct – it may be possible to write good global history, but it will always need to synthesise existing scholarship in the field, and be able to rely on its quality and comprehensiveness.³³ For the history of pre-Soviet Central Asia we simply have not reached that stage – the fundamental work in social and economic history in particular remains to be done: we do not know whether living standards were rising or falling under Russian colonial rule; we do not understand how the land market worked, how cropping and labour migration patterns changed, or the real nature of the social change that lay behind Soviet stereotypes of ‘class stratification’ (to name just a few outstanding questions). We have barely scratched the surface of the sheer wealth of primary material available for this period, and are still developing the tools to allow us to understand much of it. Once again, Elton is pertinent:

²⁹ Elton *The Practice of History* p.88.

³⁰ A particularly egregious example of the thesis-driven approach to global history is Sven Beckert *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), whose section on cotton cultivation in Central Asia is risibly inaccurate.

³¹ Paolo Sartori ‘On Khvārazmian Connectivity: Two or three things that I know about it’ *Journal of Persianate Studies* Vol.9 No.2 (2016) p.141; Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.20-26.

³² P. Sartori & I. Jahar ‘Legal pluralism in Muslim-majority colonies: Mapping the terrain’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol.55 Nos.4-5 (2012) pp.637-663; Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.21-22, referring to Lauren Benton *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History 1400-1900* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) & Lauren Benton ‘Law and Empire in Global Perspective: introduction’ *American Historical Review* Vol.117 No.4 (2012): 1092-1100.

³³ As an example of a successful global history I would cite James Belich *Replenishing the Earth. The Settler Revolution and the rise of the Anglo-World* (Oxford: OUP, 2009). What makes it successful is partly the topic, where global parallels and connections were clearly central at the time and are not retrospectively imposed, partly the focus on the Anglophone world, making the overwhelming reliance on sources and scholarship in English less problematic, and partly the fact that the quality of secondary literature in this field is very high.

'In regions of superabundant material the real work of discovering historical truth must for quite a while concentrate upon particular studies of restricted problems.'³⁴

This is exactly what we find in Sartori's work – a series of careful reconstructions of particular legal cases, concerning inheritance,³⁵ divorce,³⁶ guardianship,³⁷ *waqf*,³⁸ land rights,³⁹ and murder⁴⁰ – and the broader social relations which are captured in these. They also provide a series of very human stories – sometimes touching, sometimes hilarious, sometimes reprehensible, but always fascinating. While Sartori explicitly shuns the notion that he is somehow recovering 'subaltern' voices from the archives in his work (and indeed many of his protagonists were relatively wealthy and well-educated), the cast of characters is very different from what we usually find in the history of colonial Central Asia – it is striking in particular how active female litigants and petitioners for justice were.⁴¹ Robert Crews has a point when he suggests that much of the value of *Visions of Justice* lies precisely in the details of social life and everyday human interaction revealed by these stories, and that Sartori's focus on the question of legal consciousness means that he does not spend as much time as he should drawing out their wider implications for the social history of Central Asia – however his characterisation of Sartori's approach as 'a curious blend of positivism and disdain' seems unjust:⁴² without the positivism we would not have all these fascinating details in the first place, and when Sartori suggests that protagonists were motivated by greed or malice he always provides detailed evidence, which is not limited to the views of Russian officials. It would be remarkable indeed if the reasons Central Asian Muslims resorted to the law were always disinterested and high-minded.

I have focused here on Sartori's work in Islamic legal history, but he has also made important contributions elsewhere: to the ongoing debate over the nature and importance of

³⁴ Elton *The Practice of History* p.95.

³⁵ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.289-302.

³⁶ Sartori *Visions of Justice* p.76.

³⁷ Sartori 'Constructing Colonial Legality'.

³⁸ Paolo Sartori & Niccolò Pianciola 'Waqf in Turkestan. The colonial legacy and the fate of an Islamic institution in early Soviet Central Asia, 1917-1924' *Central Asian Survey* 26/4 (2007) pp.475-498; Paolo Sartori: 'Authorized Lies: Colonial Agency and Legal Hybrids in Tashkent, c. 1881-1893' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol.55 (2012) pp.688-717; Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.211 - 249

³⁹ Paolo Sartori 'Colonial legislation meets shari'a: Muslims' land rights in Russian Turkestan' *Central Asian Survey* Vol.29 No.1 (2010): 43-60.

⁴⁰ Paolo Sartori 'Murder in Manghishlaq: Notes on an Instance of Application of Qazaq Customary Law in Khiva (1895)' *Der Islam* Vol.88 No.2 (2012): 217-257.

⁴¹ Sartori *Visions of Justice* pp.25-6, 76, 139-154, 289-305.

⁴² Crews 'Review: *Visions of Justice*' p.2.

Muslim modernism in Central Asia;⁴³ to the history of the Kazakh steppe under Russian and Soviet rule, where he has worked closely with Niccolò Pianciola and Pavel Shabley;⁴⁴ and, in his earlier work, to the political role played by the Tashkent *'ulama* in the revolutionary and early Soviet period.⁴⁵ In all this work we see a powerful combination of the skills of the historian and the trained orientalist – *vostokoved*. Sartori is able to bring these two scholarly traditions into dialogue in way that is sadly all too rare. He is also able to integrate the history of Central Asia into the wider history of the Islamic world in the manner pioneered by Devin DeWeese, using his court cases to illustrate the daily lives and world view of his protagonists in a manner reminiscent of DeWeese's use of hagiographies.⁴⁶ Like DeWeese, he has also produced a body of work which is increasingly influential among historians of Islam beyond Central Asia, something reflected in his appointment as editor-in-chief of one of the oldest and most important publications in the field, the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. To have a Central Asian specialist in this position would have been unthinkable twenty years ago, so marginal was the region within Asian and Islamic studies. Sartori can take a good deal of the credit for having changed this.

Review articles which spend most of their time praising their subject make for tedious reading, and my main justification for penning this one is that Sartori's body of work is already so extensive and so formidably complex that some sort of handy guide to navigation seems to be called for. And I do have a few criticisms - it is clear that Sartori does not teach undergraduates – and indeed that he is a full-time researcher who does little teaching of any kind. His books and articles are dense, challenging and require close and careful reading even from specialists in the field if their main points are to be grasped. I would not assign them to any but the best and brightest of my students, and it would be unkind to point those seeking an introduction to the history of Central Asia to Sartori's work: they need something more

⁴³ Jeff Eden, Paolo Sartori & Devin DeWeese "Moving Beyond Modernism: Rethinking Cultural Change in Muslim Eurasia (19th-20th Centuries), *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* vol.59 Nos.1-2 (2016): 1-36.

⁴⁴ Niccolò Pianciola & Paolo Sartori: *Islam, Society and States across the Qazaq Steppe (18th – Early 20th Centuries)*, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013); Паоло Сартори & Павел Шаблей 'Судьба Имперских кодификационных проектов: адат и шариат в казахской степи' *Ab Imperio* 2015/2: 63-105.

⁴⁵ Paolo Sartori «La nazione nella tradizione. *Millat* nelle pubblicistica degli *'ulamā'* di Tashkent (1917-1918)» *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* LXXIX (2008), Supplemento no.1: 1-110; Paolo Sartori "When a *Mufti* Turned Islamism into Political Pragmatism: Sadreddin-Khan and the Struggle for an Independent Turkestan" *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale* Nos.15-16 (2007): 118-139.

⁴⁶ Devin DeWeese *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde. Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Devin DeWeese 'Dog saints and Dog Shrines in Kubravī tradition. Notes on an Hagiographical Motif of Khwārazm' *Miracle et Karama. Hagiographies médiévales comparées* ed. D. Aigle Turnhout: Brepols, 2000): 459-497.

digestible first. In *Visions of Justice*, for instance, Sartori assumes his readers will already have a comprehensive knowledge of Central Asian geography, and makes little effort to establish any clear chronological sequence of events. To get a sense of how Russian colonial policies, viewpoints and legislation changed over the fifty years from the conquest to the revolution you would need to look elsewhere. For entirely understandable reasons he largely eschews over-arching narrative in favour of microhistories, but the reader who is not already acquainted with the broader history of the emergence of the Uzbek khanates, Russian colonial rule and the intellectual history of Central Asia's Muslims will struggle to understand much of *Visions of Justice*.

For lightness of touch and accessibility I would recommend instead Scott Levi's recent history of Khoqand to students interested in the history of Islamic Central Asia,⁴⁷ and Adeeb Khalid's book on the *Jadids* for those interested in more modern topics,⁴⁸ before I asked them to embark on anything by Sartori. I did not choose these two scholars at random – both have been attacked rather acerbically by Sartori in recent publications, Khalid for (in Sartori's view) over-emphasising the importance of self-styled Muslim reformers in Tsarist Central Asia, Levi for similarly exaggerating Central Asia's degree of global connectivity.⁴⁹ I hope that both sides in this dispute will see that our young field needs both types of scholarship: painstaking, meticulous analysis of individual documents and specific case-studies that allow the microhistorical reconstruction of institutional practices, mentalities and social relations, and more sweeping interpretations based on narrative sources which provoke argument and debate, and offer an engaging way into Central Asian history for the student. Paolo Sartori is one of the very few scholars with the palaeographical and linguistic skills to provide the former for nineteenth-century Central Asia, and we are all greatly in his debt.

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⁴⁷ Scott Levi *The Rise and Fall of Khoqand 1709 - 1876: Central Asia in the Global Age* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh UP, 2017).

⁴⁸ Adeeb Khalid *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁹ Sartori 'On Khvārazmian Connectivity' p.141; Paolo Sartori 'Ijtihād in Bukhara: Central Asian Jadidism and Local Genealogies of Cultural Change' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol.59 Nos.1-2 (2016): 193-236.