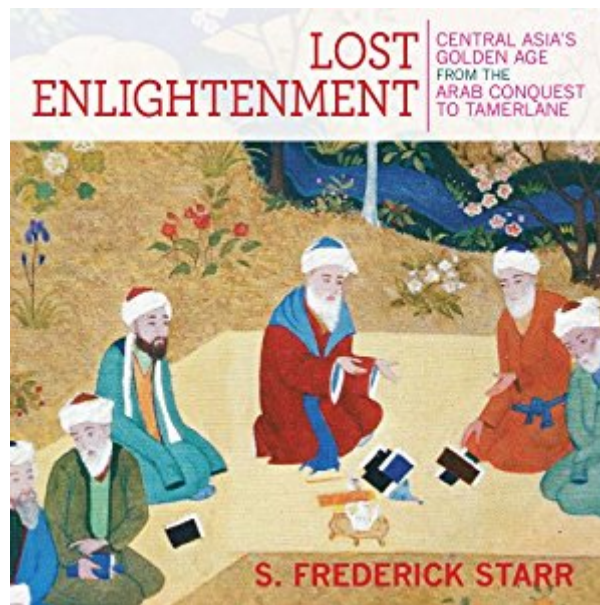




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# Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age From The Arab Conquest To Tamerlane



## Synopsis

In this rich and sweeping history, S. Frederick Starr tells the fascinating but largely unknown story of Central Asia's medieval enlightenment through the eventful lives and astonishing accomplishments of its greatest minds - remarkable figures who built a bridge to the modern world. Because nearly all of these figures wrote in Arabic, they were long assumed to have been Arabs. In fact, they were from Central Asia - drawn from the Persianate and Turkic peoples of a region that today extends from Kazakhstan southward through Afghanistan, and from the easternmost province of Iran through Xinjiang, China. *Lost Enlightenment* recounts how, between the years 800 and 1200, Central Asia led the world in trade and economic development, the size and sophistication of its cities, the refinement of its arts, and, above all, in the advancement of knowledge in many fields. Central Asians achieved signal breakthroughs in astronomy, mathematics, geology, medicine, chemistry, music, social science, philosophy, and theology, among other subjects. They gave algebra its name, calculated the earth's diameter with unprecedented precision, wrote the books that later defined European medicine, and penned some of the world's greatest poetry. One scholar, working in Afghanistan, even predicted the existence of North and South America - five centuries before Columbus. Rarely in history has a more impressive group of polymaths appeared at one place and time. No wonder that their writings influenced European culture from the time of St. Thomas Aquinas down to the scientific revolution, and had a similarly deep impact in India and much of Asia. *Lost Enlightenment* chronicles this forgotten age of achievement, seeks to explain its rise, and explores the competing theories about the cause of its eventual demise. Informed by the latest scholarship yet presented in a lively and accessible style, this is a book that will surprise general listeners and specialists alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a very interesting book, but not one to buy on Kindle. The Kindle copy is of very poor quality compared to a hard copy, for the book contains many illustrations and some maps, but in the Kindle copy many of the illustrations are black and it says 'To view this see the hard copy' which sounds like a rip off, and something that is somewhat dishonest. How can one see the hard copy unless you buy or borrow a copy? What is the point of buying a book where parts are missing? Furthermore, the book refers to plate so and so, but how do you find the plate from the text, and going to the menu and trying to find the location of the plates, there is nothing. So while I would recommend this book as an excellent overview with some detail of the caldron of Central Asia at the time when the Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews and Muslims met, and where the age of Enlightenment preceeded the european equivalent by a thousand years, the is NOT A BOOK TO BUY ON KINDLE.

The author describes a period of several hundred years of Central Asian history through a series of biographies of important thinkers. It is the story of a scientific and philosophical enlightenment in a part of the world where most westerners today can't even name the countries, and it takes place in a time where the great cities of Europe were still villages. It opened my mind in ways I didn't expect.

Starr's very accessible book provides a history of the Islamic enlightenment, one that occured not in Arab lands but in Central Asia among Turkic and Persianate scholars around 1,000 years ago. Although they wrote in Arabic and are often considered as "Arab" scholars, these doctors, philosophers, scientists, and writers were actually Central Asians (e.g., Avicenna, al-Biruni, etc.). The combination of the Mongols and a reactionary turn in Islam itself pretty much ended this enlightenment, and it prompts one to speculate on how much better the Middle East might be today had things gone otherwise in the 13th Century. Well worth a read by anyone interested in the history of ideas and the transmission of knowledge from ancient times to the present.

Interesting and surprising story of how what was once the world's most advanced civilization fell apart and dropped back to be one of the least advanced, at least in terms of technology and forbearance. I'm not knowledgeable enough to challenge the (extensively researched) data, so,

assuming that the information is correct and fairly presented, he makes a compelling story. He does not commit to one final argument, but presents at least three major hypotheses, which singly or together carried the society of Avicenna, Biruni, and Khayyam to present-day Afghanistan. I found the book from a mention in a column by the economist Paul Krugman in the New York Times. It is well worth the read, very provocative, and a story that westerners should know much more about.

I purchased this book to plug a very large gap in my knowledge of history and the cultures of the world. The reviews I read were very favorable so I took a chance and I must say I am not disappointed. The first chapter, quite correctly, outlines the author's purpose, places his work in scholarly perspective and handles some technical issues. From chapter two on, the narrative just pulls the reader on in a smooth narrative and discussion of a fascinating world and the fabulous minds that inhabited it. I find the book extremely enjoyable and highly informative. Having said this, and given the book five stars, I feel compelled to make two complaints. First the map in the front is insufficient. This book needs and deserves a number of first rate maps scattered throughout the text. Second, although Mr. Starr writes very nicely, the book is poorly edited. It is distressing to come across over a dozen typos. A book of such high quality content should command first rate quality control. The cost, I believe, should have been enough to ensure this. --JRG

Wonderful introduction to a lost era. Helpful illustrations. Clear writing and format. Helps one fit the area and era into more familiar contexts. Could use more maps.

Terrifically interesting, engaging book about a geographical area and time that I knew nothing about.

I had heard about Rumi and Ibn Sina but that is really just the tip of the iceberg, there are so many great intellectuals and innovators from the great and wondrous culture. The world is owed a great debt to the Central Asian people. Mr. Starr does a good job in making the the whole era of Warlords and inventors, heretics and holy men come alive in rich detail.

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