

On Arid Ground: Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia. By Jennifer Keating. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. xiv, 252 pp. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Figures. Maps. £75.00, hard bound.
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The imperial history of Central Asia has been a focus of historians for a while now, including environmental histories of cotton and water management. *On Arid Ground* contributes to this body and adds an entirely new dimension to it as it explores the environmental imprint of Russian colonization beyond the already well-known histories of cotton and water. Jennifer Keating's aim is to "explore Turkestan's environments in a holistic sense" by looking beyond a single commodity and focusing instead on "assemblages of ecological relations" (27). By leaving aside the "obsessive mania of contemporary Russian sources" (157) that focused too much on cotton, she wants the reader to see the diversity in the ways in which nature in arid ecologies was commodified, including the rich and complex interchanges that reveal hidden global histories. In this sense, this dense and well-written book is not only about the impact of colonization on the Central Asian environment, but also on broader patterns of imperial relations, trade, and markets.

The book follows a thematic approach and begins in 1881 with the construction of the Central Asian railway, through which the political ecology of the region began to evolve. According to Keating, it left a significant environmental footprint through the construction process itself, but also in its function as a catalyst for the growth of agriculture, industry, and settlement in the region. In her second chapter, Keating tells the story of how Russians tried to "improve" the land through irrigation and reforestation. These reclamation activities, Keating convincingly argues, were a successful way to reinforce imperial rule as it strengthened Russian presence. The third chapter focuses on the arrival of peasant settlers that were lured into Central Asia with images of abundance, but that in the end adapted only very poorly to the new local landscapes.

The heart of the book, however, lies in Chaps. 4 and 5, where Keating explores how Russians commodified nature. She argues that Turkestan did not only develop as a commodity frontier because of the mobilizing capacity of the state, but also due to the global demand for certain, especially rare goods—a focus that challenges the dominance of cotton. While the exploitation of oil, coal, and gold were disappointing, Turkestan offered not only sheep wool, which was shipped to Russia and abroad, but also alfalfa, a high-protein feed in high global demand. Moreover, santonin an anthelmintic drug used to treat parasitological infections and likewise in high demand, but either exhausted or destroyed elsewhere in the world, grew freely in Turkestan. Together with alfalfa, the plant turned the region into a hub of global livestock farming as they were also shipped in large quantities to North and South America. In the last chapter, Keating links the environmental exploitation and the reform of land use rights to the 1916 Semirechye revolt, during which Russian troops killed approximately 200,000 Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. She shows how the environment became a target and a weapon used by both colonizers and colonized.

Keating very convincingly relates an environmental history that looks beyond the "cotton-mania" and thereby reveals a range of entanglements between the social and more-than-human world. In so doing, Keating emphasizes one of her central arguments according to which Russia was no particularist empire, but that it was precisely in Central Asia where Russian imperialism most clearly resembled the practices of other empires in environmental terms: through the exploitation and the trade of commodified nature, as well as the final resistance of the local population.

There are however, two points that are worth raising. During her exploration of the commodities produced in Turkestan, Keating continuously emphasized that cotton was more significant, but that the history of other resources reveals the entanglements of people, places and commodities. Although she wants to question that a commodity is only conferred by the amount of capital it generates (158), one still wonders what the actual significance was of some of the resources such as coal or oil, considering that their exploitation was not very successful. The second remark pertains to the style. Since the book is very rich in information, spans across a large territory and long time-span and is still compressed to only 218 pages, the book loses at times on details of more specifics on individuals or events. One only wished for it to go even deeper into the environmental histories of Central Asia.

Apart from that, *On Arid Ground* is a fascinating study on the entangled relationship between empire and the environment and the commodification of nature. It is recommended for historians of empire, environmental historians, and political ecologists alike.

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Aleksandr Rodchenko: Photography in the Time of Stalin. By Aglaya K. Glebova. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. 256 pp. Notes Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. \$65.00 hard bound.
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Professor Aglaya Glebova is well aware of her expertise in her field, its creative techniques into the relation to the avant-garde and its political context after the fall of Tsar Nicholas II, the Provisional Government, and Aleksandr Rodchenko's role under Lenin and subsequently under Iosif Stalin. Rodchenko's creative career covered the whole period. He liked to say that he was still only one generation away from serfdom.

Glebova is aware of the great range and shifting cultural and political context of his works. As a painter, designer, and photographer, Rodchenko characteristically worked with elements assembled into visual and material constructions, even at the Kazan School of Art. At the same time photographs of cubist works by Pablo Picasso were carried to Russia by Ukrainian painters Alexandra Exter and David Burliuk, who had also seen cubist works by Picasso in the collection of Serge Shchukin in Moscow. In this way the sense of a constructive process, organized into series of works and variations, was confirmed in Rodchenko's thoughts. Other painters including Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin, who equally responded to aspects of Picasso's constructed innovations, though Rodchenko was perhaps the most elemental and systematic. His techniques were increasingly evident in his paintings, material constructions, and his photographs and photomontages. His works were assembled without narrative, without a window space, and without aesthetic taste. He was able to operate in times of rapid cultural change in war and revolution under Lenin and under Stalin. The entire structure of communal culture led to belief in collective ownership by the proletariat. Art as luxury goods for the wealthy was banned. Rodchenko's methods were constructive, materialist, and dedicated to the masses.

Glebova traces this transition carefully, to keep her reader on board with Rodchenko's increasing use of photomontage assembling often second-hand images with texts, poetic, promotional, or political to offer the proletariat advice and propaganda. Surprisingly, Rodchenko was more readily engaged with photomontage than he was with the immense potential of hand-held photography in the living masses of