

Russia and Central Asia: Conquest, Coexistence, Convergence. Shoshana Keller. Toronto, Ontario: Toronto University Press, 2019. xii + 346 pp. \$58. Paperback ISBN-13: 9781487594343.

Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present. Adeb Khalid. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. xvii + 556 pp. \$35. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9780691161396.

Modern Central Asia: A Primary Source Reader. Yuriy Malikov. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. xiii + 361 pp. \$126. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9781793612175.

The range and high quality of English-language scholarship on the history of Central Asia which we enjoy today would have been difficult to imagine twenty years ago when the subject was still a largely empty space on the margins of Russian, Chinese, South Asian, and Middle Eastern historiographies. Despite the flood of monographs and journal articles we have enjoyed since then, the great *desideratum* has remained a high-quality but accessible teaching textbook to provide an introduction to the region's history for undergraduates. For years the only real candidate has been Svat Soucek's *A History of Inner Asia*, which had an excellent bibliography of primary and secondary sources but a plodding, outdated, and often inaccurate text.¹ German-speakers could use Jürgen Paul's brilliant *Zentralasien* in the *Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte* series, but this has never been translated into English.² Scott Levi and Ron Sela have produced a sourcebook for Islamic Central Asia which is a powerful tool in the hands of university teachers, but the closest thing to an accompanying textbook is the second volume of the *Cambridge History of Inner Asia* on the "Chinggisid Age," whose essays are excellent but which does not give the narrative overview that students typically need, while neither volume covers the period after the Russian and Chinese conquests of Central Asia or its bewildering transformation under Communist rule in the twentieth century.³ Most recently we now have the second volume of David Christian's general history of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia—but, while it has many merits, it remains largely focused on Russia, and is not entirely reliable on the history of Islamic Central Asia.⁴

Well, those of us who teach Central Asian history can now rejoice—not one, but two accessible and well-written narrative histories of Central Asia in the modern age have been published within a year of each other, accompanied by a sourcebook about the same period. Adeb Khalid's elegant narrative history is set to become the standard account of Central Asia over the last three centuries for many years to come, but I think that specifically for teaching purposes Shoshana Keller's brilliantly compact and readable volume just has the edge.

¹ Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

² Jürgen Paul, *Zentralasien* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2012).

³ Scott Cameron Levi and Ron Sela, eds., *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank, and Peter B. Golden, eds., *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴ David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia*. Vol. II: *Inner Eurasia from the Mongol Empire to Today, 1260–2000* (Hoboken, NJ, and Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

Meanwhile, Yuriy Malikov has produced a collection of translated primary sources that would be the perfect complement to either of these books.

Given how rare it is for undergraduates in the Anglophone world to have a command of Russian, let alone any Central Asian languages, the range of texts Malikov has now made available in translation is a great boon. By and large they are well-chosen, if perhaps with a slight weighting towards the Kazakhs and their history, on which Malikov has published elsewhere.⁵ In the first section, most of the documents relate to the complex relations between the Russian state and Kazakh Chinggisid elites on the steppe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which ranged from close cooperation to the outright resistance of Kenesary Qasimuli (Kasimov) in the 1830s and 1840s. The sedentary regions of Central Asia, which were conquered from the 1860s onwards, get less comprehensive treatment, though students will gain considerable insight into the suspicious attitude of the Russian colonial authorities towards Islam. While neither Ismail Bey Gasprinskii's *Russkoe Musul'manstvo* (Russian Muslims) nor Alikhan Bukeikhanov's *Kirgizy* (Kazakhs) are exactly characteristic of Central Asian *Jadidism* as they are presented here,⁶ they are vitally important texts in their own right for understanding Islamic modernism and the early stirrings of Kazakh nationalism respectively, and it is great to have them rendered into English here. The final section, on the Tsarist period, places the accent on resistance, with documents related to the minor uprising against Russian rule in Andijan in 1898 and the major one which broke out in 1916.⁷ Once we get into the Soviet period, Malikov's geographical coverage is more balanced, with documents from the Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen SSRs, but there are some lengthy chronological gaps. He includes sections on the turmoil of the revolutionary years, the *Basmachi* revolt, national delimitation, and a particularly welcome section on economic policies which focuses on the collectivization of agriculture and the growing pressure to sow cotton. A short section on "Developed Socialism" (i.e., the 1970s – early 1980s) is followed by a lengthier one on *perestroika* and the Soviet collapse, which includes some particularly vivid testimony on the *Zheltoqsan* (December) events in Almaty. As this suggests, Malikov's volume is not completely comprehensive; it is a pity nothing is included on the war years, the period of High Stalinism which followed them, or the Khrushchev thaw in Central Asia. All the documents are translated from Russian, rather than Central Asian languages, which does impose some limitations of perspective, while Malikov's brief introductions are sometimes over-reliant on outdated scholarship (Soucek again). Nevertheless, this sourcebook is superior to anything else currently available, and its publication can only be welcomed.

Turning to our two new narrative histories, both Khalid and Keller are Uzbek specialists, so in contrast to Malikov the balance of geographical coverage is slightly tilted in favor of the sedentary regions of Central Asia. In chronological terms, Khalid's book begins in

⁵ Yuriy Malikov, *Tsars, Cossacks, and Nomads: The Formation of a Borderland Culture in Northern Kazakhstan in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2011).

⁶ Those looking for a classic Central Asian Muslim reformist text to teach with are better off turning to Abdurrauf Fitrat's "Debate between a Teacher from Bukhara and a European," trans. Adeeb Khalid in *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 244-253.

⁷ See Alexander Morrison, "Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic: Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the Aftermath of the Andijan Uprising," *Past & Present* 214 (Feb. 2012), 255-304; Alexander Morrison, Cloé Drieu and Aminat Chokobaeva, eds., *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: Rethinking the History of a Collapsing Empire in an Age of War and Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

the eighteenth century, while Keller takes us back to the aftermath of the Mongol conquests, but both books are largely focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While conquest by external powers is a major thematic thread in both books, the main difference is that Khalid has made a very deliberate decision to include Chinese Central Asia—Xinjiang—in his overview, with its fate compared and contrasted with Russian Turkestan and the Soviet Union throughout. Keller is focused on the relationship between western Central Asia and Russia, which, as the book's subtitle suggests, she sees as having passed through phases of coexistence (until the late eighteenth century), conquest (in the course of the long nineteenth century), and convergence under Soviet rule, with a reversion to coexistence in the post-Soviet period.

Both of these approaches work very well; the division of Central Asia into Russian and Chinese halves has resulted in an identical division in the scholarship on the region, largely owing to the different linguistic expertise required to study each half. Khalid is to be applauded for having taken the plunge, greatly helped by the surge of superb recent scholarship on Qing and Chinese Communist rule in Xinjiang.⁸ Perhaps because of this, and the fact that he himself is negotiating unfamiliar territory, the chapters on Xinjiang are amongst the clearest in the book. Khalid emphasizes important commonalities on both sides of the divide between Eastern and Western Central Asia. These include irrigated agriculture, Sufi Islam, Turkic language, reformist nationalism, and conquest by a more powerful sedentary neighbour as the steppe was “closed” from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. He is also able to highlight some important contrasts: what were higher levels of economic development under Tsarist and then Soviet rule in Western Central Asia have now been overtaken by turbo-charged investment in infrastructure and technological change in Xinjiang over the last twenty years; however, little of this has benefited Xinjiang's indigenous population, because the other, more sinister contrast between Central Asia's two halves has been the story of growing cultural autonomy and eventually full political independence in the five Soviet republics, set against mass resettlement of Han Chinese and ever greater repression of Islam and of the Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Hui in Xinjiang, culminating in the hideous “re-education camps” which scar the region today.⁹ Khalid's final chapter, “A 21st-century Gulag,” makes for harrowing reading, and should serve as a reminder to students that not all injustices are merely historical.

Keller's style is somewhat chattier than Khalid's, with a series of engaging vignettes that help to grab the attention before she plunges into the technicalities of Chinggisid succession politics, Russian colonial administration, or the politics of Uzbek party cadres in the Soviet era, all of which she explains with admirable clarity. Her focus on the different stages of Central Asia's engagement with the Russian Empire and Soviet Union allows her to maintain a strong narrative thread, as she explores the process of conquest (thankfully eschewing the myth of the “Great Game”), the limits of Russification under colonial rule, the turmoil of the

⁸ See in particular James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (London: Hurst, 2007; revised and updated ed. 2021); Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Eric Schluessel, *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁹ The article which first provided incontrovertible evidence of the scale of the camps is Adrian Zenz, “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’: China's political re-education campaign in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey*, 38:1 (2019), 102-128.

revolutionary period, and the much greater engagement of Central Asians in state structures under Soviet rule. Perhaps the strongest aspect of the book is the careful attention she gives to the period of “Stability and Growth” from the ousting of Khrushchev to *perestroika*. Keller argues convincingly that it was in the 1960s and 1970s, now seen by many in the region as a golden age, that Central Asia became both Soviet and national under the rule of long-serving local first secretaries such as Dinmuhammad Qunaev in Kazakhstan and Sharaf Rashidov in Uzbekistan. She provides key statistics on child mortality, cotton production and the growth and changing composition of the urban population to chart economic and social change, and is able to show that, while certain markers seemed to indicate that Central Asians still had a sub-altern, colonial status within the USSR, the reality was more complex. Meanwhile the autonomy and control enjoyed by Central Asian Communist parties within their fiefdoms was real, even if they lacked leverage at the all-Union level. Her account of Gorbachev’s reforms and the reasons they led to the USSR’s dissolution is similarly deft and a model of clarity.

To conclude, Khalid and Keller have both skilfully synthesised the latest historiography, judiciously combined with primary sources in Russian and Uzbek, to produce accounts that can easily stand comparison with the textbooks we have long taken for granted when teaching and studying neighbouring parts of the world, such as the Cambridge “Concise Histories” of Russia and India.¹⁰ I suspect that they will end up appealing to slightly different audiences. Keller’s book is more likely to be the teacher’s choice, and has clearly been written and designed with that in mind. In combination with Malikov’s sourcebook it will make teaching Central Asian history to English-speaking students more feasible than ever before. Khalid’s more expansive account will also no doubt be used in the classroom, but will hopefully come to inform journalists, politicians, travellers, and other interested laypeople in dispelling some of the more persistent myths about modern Central Asia and its history.¹¹

Alexander Morrison, New College, Oxford

¹⁰ Paul Bushkovitch, *A Concise History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Barbara Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹ See Alexander Morrison, “Central Asia’s Catechism of Cliché,” *eurasianet.org*, accessed July 25, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/central-asias-catechism-of-cliche-from-the-great-game-to-silk-road>.