

Svetlana Gorshenina. *L'Invention de l'Asie centrale. Histoire du concept de la Tartarie à l'Eurasie*

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REFERENCES

Svetlana Gorshenina. *L'Invention de l'Asie centrale. Histoire du concept de la Tartarie à l'Eurasie*. Genève, Droz, 2014, 704 p.

- 1 This work uses mainly published sources to explore the intellectual history of the very idea of 'Central Asia' and cast light on important albeit largely forgotten terminological debates whose scientific and political significance is explained in detail. In the wake of the author's valued bio-biographical dictionary and introduction to Western exploration in Central Asia (*Explorateurs en Asie centrale*, 2003) as well as of her *Asie centrale. L'invention des frontières et l'héritage russo-soviétique* (2012), which examined the constitution of the region's contemporary borders, the book, derived from the author's PhD dissertation, is of very extensive breadth. The volume offers a clear synoptically view of the origins of the European textual and cartographical representations of the centre of Asia, from ancient geographies to modern imperialisms. It notably highlights the importance of Russian travel accounts, reports, maps and scientific literature in the 'invention' of Central Asia in the first part of the 19th century and shows how geological and linguistic concepts were used by figures such as Alexander von Humboldt, Nikolai Khanykov and Ferdinand von Richthofen to construct, delimit or contest this notion. The work does not limit itself to a discussion of the toponymical shift from 'Tartary' to 'Central Asia', but also interrogates the wider uses and legacies of notions such as 'Turkestan', 'Middle Asia' or 'Turan', among other alternative terms, until the current rise of 'Eurasia'. By looking chronologically at the variations of the geographical definition of this 'heart of a continent' in the work of explorers, armchair cartographers, military officers, geologists and statesmen, this sizeable and rich

synthesis fills a gap in the literature on the history of the European apprehension of Central Asia and calls for new researches delving further into the various knowledge-making practices involved in this multifaceted undertaking.

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