

Abstracts

Writing the Environmental History of the World's Largest State: Four Decades of Scholarship on Russia and the USSR

Brian Bonhomme

This article surveys and analyzes long-term and recent trends in English-language scholarship on the environmental history of Russia and the USSR. This literature, following certain precursors, began to take shape in the early 1970s and was influenced partly by the rise of popular environmentalism in the West and also by the exigencies and context of the Cold War. Gorbachev-era liberal reforms and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union conditioned a new wave of writings beginning in the late 1980s that sought to nuance and complicate Cold War-era narratives. This second wave of historiography highlighted the existence of divergent and positive trends – including successful experiments with nature preserves in the early Soviet period. It also effectively challenged earlier notions of the Soviet Union as a monolithic state/culture with a relatively simple environmental history that could be inferred in part from an examination of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Post-Soviet scholarship (which can be considered a third wave) is more heterogeneous than either of its predecessors but overall continues the trend of replacing broad narratives and fondly-held assumptions with knowledge gained from detailed investigations, painstaking archival-based reconstructions, and – frequently – regional and local rather than national focuses. Although much interesting work continues to emerge, the field remains heavily skewed towards the Late-Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods, which seems an important shortcoming. Similarly, there is an abiding (if understandable) preoccupation with the role of political culture and systems, at the expense of alternative approaches, many of which have proven fruitful in the study of other geographical areas.

Forest and Grassland: Recent Trends in Russian Environmental History

Randall Dills

More and more historians are turning their attention to Russia's environment. New research on the territories forest and grasslands demonstrate the ways this

scholarship challenges traditional narratives of Russian history, that often sees it as unique or exceptional, and shows how the Russian experience has global significance for environmental history. As environmental history progresses from its roots in local and regional American stories to the global and comparative scale, scholars of Russian environmental history are uniquely positioned to shape debates about nature, culture, and identity. Historians of Africa, Asia, and the Americas and transnational subjects such as the forest will find common points of understanding in stories of a Russia that sought to forcibly transform nature and alternatively, sought to mitigate anxiety about environmental degradation through a range of scientific and culturally distinct solutions. A new group of scholars trained as environmental historians promise to contribute to a revision of Russian historiography and assure a central position in global conversations about nature and the human place within it. Finally, the author urges scholars to assess the pre-Revolutionary era in more depth and calls for an integration of urban and environmental methods in Russian environmental historiography.

From Yellowstone to Australia and New Zealand: National Parks 2.0

Warwick Frost, Jennifer Laing

Following the establishment of the world's first national park at Yellowstone (USA) in 1872, the concept was rapidly transferred to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. This article examines this second wave of adoption – and adaptation – focussing on five case studies from Australia and New Zealand. While Yellowstone provided the inspiration for further national parks and protected areas, what was developed was often very different from the American template. Some of these national parks were quite small and some primarily orientated towards recreation. The New Zealand examples were profoundly shaped by interactions with the indigenous peoples, whereas the Australian ones were not. By early in the twentieth century, this second wave was beginning to focus on protecting specific ecosystems and wildlife, developments well in advance of the USA at that time. In taking the Yellowstone model and greatly adapting it for a variety of different social, political and physical environments, this second wave laid the foundations for the internationalisation of the national parks concept.

From the Periphery to the Center: North American Environmental History

Andrew C. Isenberg

North American environmental history was on the edges of the historical profession for most of the twentieth century. The concerns of its practitioners found little purchase within mainstream North American history. Instead, in part because of the

inherently interdisciplinary nature of the field, environmental historians found their closest allies in departments of geography, ecology, or anthropology. Starting in the late 1960s, in departments of American studies that brought together Americanists from different disciplinary perspectives, environmental history began to emerge by synthesizing a materialist approach that emphasized environmental agency in the form of diseases and natural catastrophes and a cultural approach that considered the changing apprehensions of nature in human thought. In recent years, North American environmental historians increasingly have applied the insights of environmental history to the central events of mainstream North American history.

**Apples and Experts:
Evolving Notions of Sustainable Agriculture**
Linda L. Ivey

Current advocates of sustainable agriculture in the US posit that our food industry needs to recover from the deliberate missteps of the pioneers of chemical dependency and market-driven cultivation techniques that ushered in an age of industrial agriculture at the turn of the 20th century. A careful look at early 20th century agriculture in California, the theoretical ground zero of environmentally abusive cultivation techniques, reveals that this food industry history is more complex than it seems. Using the Central Coast of California as a case study, this article argues that a nexus of ambitious growers and a growing state agricultural bureaucracy worked to create a “brand name” and teach cultivation approaches that would buoy their local industry with increased production and expanded markets. But these same actors also embraced these changes with all due caution, keeping the long-term health of the industry and the community in mind. Whereas traditionally this juncture in California agricultural history is described as the moment where farmers sold out their traditional stewardship of the land for higher profits and chose non-sustainable agricultural practices, many growers actively pursued sustainable agriculture, at least as understood by them. In navigating market demands and technological changes, they made choices based on both economic grounds, and a modified agrarian ethic, shaped by concerns for environmental and social stability similar to the modern sustainability movement. Using examples ranging from state-sponsored erosion programs to local immigration policy, this article reveals a community that consciously made economic choices to keep up with larger competitors, but also monitored the impact of monoculture on their land and balanced an agrarian ideal with an increasingly ethnically diverse populace and a burgeoning class division. Their concern for social, economic and environmental stability reveal that there were more than market-driven missteps behind the emergence of our current system.

Moving Beyond the Nation State? Reflections on European Environmental History

Martin Kalb

This historiographical essay outlines and discusses major trends within European environmental history. More precisely, it traces recent developments and conversations within various national and regional contexts, hoping to provide a coherent overview. In no way comprehensive and complete given the mere scope of the topic, language barriers, and accessibility of materials, the objective of this essay is to capture recent developments and inclinations within a diverse and very complex scholarship. The importance of nature, wilderness, forests, water, political movements, and numerous other themes are discussed in this context, as the essay focuses on different nation states and regions. It highlights recent discussions and future possibilities regarding collaboration across national borders and contexts, and ultimately argues for more transnational cooperation within the field of environmental history.

Environmental Change, Control and Management in Africa

Vimbai C. Kwashirai

African environments have been studied across many disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. This study draws on economic and environmental historical approaches to explore the consumption-conservation nexus in the use of African natural resources. It explores environmental changes resulting from a range of interactive factors, including climate, population, disease, vegetation and technology. Ecological issues are important in the synopsis, but this work does not develop a detailed record of Africa's environmental changes. Instead, it explores the role and impact of the state, whether exploitative or conservationist, from pre-colonial times to the present. The relationship between economic development, nature and conservation is central, given that the main axiom of world conservation strategy is that development depends upon conservation, and lasting development is impossible without conservation.

Climatic Changes in the Carpathian Basin during the Middle Ages. The State of Research

András Vadas, Lajos Rácz

The aim of the paper is to present a summary of the current scholarship on the climate of the Carpathian Basin in the Middle Ages. It draws on the results of three substantially differing branches of science: natural sciences, archaeology and history are all taken into consideration. Based on the most important results of the recent decades different climatic periods can be identified in the scholarship. The paper

attempts to summarize the different view of these major climatic periods. Based on present scholarship the milder climate of the Roman Period was followed by a cooler period from the 4th century, attested by both historical and natural-historical sources, and apparently climate had also become drier. The cool period of the Great Migrations concluded in the Carpathian Basin between the end of the 7th and the turn of the 8th-9th centuries. The winters in the first half of the 9th century were probably milder. In the warmer medieval period (called Medieval Climatic Anomaly in recent scholarship) winters had clearly become milder and summers warmer, while the climate was probably still dry. The first cooling signs of the “Little Ice Age” had already become apparent in the 13th century, but the cold and rainy character of the climate could only become dominant in the Carpathian Basin in the early 14th century, which then, albeit with great anomalies, endured until the second half of the 19th century.

Reframing the Land Grab Debate: The Need to Broaden and Deepen the Agenda **Annelies Zoomers, Guus van Westen**

This article does not present new evidence about the land rush, but reveals the urgent need of broadening the debate by including a few key issues that are so far neglected. Transnational land acquisitions are a logical outcome of globalisation and neoliberal policies resulting in processes of disembedding land from local societies. Control over land is decreasingly vested in territorially defined communities or societies, and increasingly dictated by global actors and processes, leading to a patchwork of locally disembedded land holdings responding to different translocal network logics. Global actors play an increasingly important role in reserving spaces for global goods, securing food, preserving biodiversity and mitigating climate change in widely dispersed localities. The resulting fragmentation is not conducive for inclusive and sustainable development at the local level. Findings are based on ongoing research on the consequences of transnational land acquisitions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

An Editorial Flop Revisited: Rethinking the Impact of M. Bookchin’s *Our Synthetic Environment* on its Golden Anniversary **Juan Diego Pérez Cebada**

2012 is the golden anniversary of two important books in the history of the American Environmental movement: *Our Synthetic Environment* (OSE), written by Murray Bookchin (under the pseudonym “Lewis Herber”) and Rachel Carsons’ canonical *Silent Spring*, published just a few months later. Both books deal with the complex problem of chemicals in food, and have a clear objective: to achieve

a popular audience. But, these books had a very different reception on the part of critics and public. While *Silent Spring* was a genuine bestseller, *OSE* seemed to fall into oblivion. For some, even, it was a complete flop. This article however revises the reception of Bookchin's work and shows that although Bookchin cannot certainly be considered a mass author like Carson, he was an influential thinker in selected North American and European academic circles of his time. The book had its origin in an article entitled *The Problems of Chemicals in Food* (1952). In the first part of this article, we study this and other related articles that preceded the publication of *OSE* as well as their impact in the intellectual world. The second section analyzes specific bibliography and documentation from Jonathan Cape Ltd, the English publisher of the book (1963), in order to establish its reception. Jonathan Cape had hired Durrant's, a well known press cutting firm, in order to prepare a complete report on references to the book in newspapers and other periodical publications both in the U.K. and the Commonwealth. Durrant's dossier confirms that the book was favorably appraised in U.S. by outstanding figures such as B. Commoner, R. Dubos or W. Vogt. However the documentation shows a better reception of the book in Europe, especially in U.K. and Germany. The final section stresses the contribution of *OSE* to the Environmental movement and the Green left thought.