

Matthew Cobbett, published in **Fruit Gardener (Jan-Feb 2007)**

**Pomegranate Roads** review

Flying over the eastern border of Turkmenistan en route to Dubai, I had time to plunge into "*Pomegranate Roads*" Dr. Gregory Levin's part narrative-part autobiography of his lifelong quest to understand the ubiquitous pomegranate in all its forms. Dr. Levin, now 73 and residing in exile in Israel, is the world's foremost punicolologist; a botanist who devoted 40 years of continuous research and exploration based at the Garrigala Agricultural Research Station in Turkmenistan. Until the demise of the USSR in 1990, Turkmenistan was a part of that empire; it gained its independence in 1991.

Without Levin's research and contribution to punichology, the world would have been deprived of our rather limited current understanding of pomegranates. More important, without him the majority of the best pomegranate varieties might have been lost forever, destroyed in the physical decimation that the new Turkmenistan government wreaked upon former USSR facilities—at Garrigala the pomegranate trees were uprooted and replaced with vegetables. As Levin laconically observes: human stupidity knows no limitations. Before the implosion and ensuing chaos, Levin had the foresight to donate the best varieties to international germplasm repositories, mainly in Israel and the USA. During his 40 years at Garrigala he had overseen the expansion in the number of pomegranate accessions from 64 to 1,117. For that achievement alone he deserves our thanks.

*Pomegranate Roads* enthralls and enlightens. Turkmenistan is not well known, yet Dr. Levin weaves a rich tapestry of its geography and culture, combined with anecdotal observations and description of his travels on foot and horseback through mountain search of the elusive pomegranate dwarf variety or other weird mutations.

*Pomegranate Roads* is a story of how great adversity can be overcome in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, ultimately leading to achievement of results. Hence the book should appeal both to budding punicolologists as well as to those who, like me, have a fascination for the Soviet Union with its attendant bouts of madness. As Dr. Levin repeats in the text: one does not choose one's times, one just lives in them and dies...

Barbara Baer, who wrote the highly entertaining introduction, was instrumental in making "*Pomegranate Roads*" happen. She sought out Dr. Levin and persuaded him to put pen to paper. Without her exceptional foresight and tenacity, this book would not exist and the intriguing story of Dr. Levin, the Pomegranate Plant Hunter, would not have been told. Russia's loss has been the world's gain: the man whose quest it was "to explore the harmony of the world through science."

Amen.

For complete review, <http://www.crfg.org>

*Note: Serious punicolologists should watch for Dr. Levin's "Pomegranate", anticipated to be forthcoming in 2007.*