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G. Patrick March. *Eastern Destiny: Russia in Asia and the North Pacific.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. xvii + 273 pp. $45.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-275-95648-6; $138.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95566-3.

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Russia in the East

Eastern Destiny represents a much needed effort to introduce readers to the history of Russian expansion in the East in all its magnitude. That it does not wholly succeed according to the mission March sets for himself is perhaps more a reflection of the limitations of methodology and format than of the wisdom of the project itself. *Eastern Destiny's* ultimate measure of success will be how much enthusiasm it engenders among junior and senior scholars alike for a subject which has been traditionally little considered.

March, a former cryptologist and Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy and now lecturer in History at the University of Hawaii, wrote his narrative based upon secondary sources to aid in teaching the history of this subject. He states in his Preface that "This volume should properly be viewed as an outline history" (p. i).

The dearth of reliable historical information on Russia east of the Urals is becoming increasingly apparent as Siberia and the Russian Pacific littoral develop into a significant geopolitical and economic entity. Considering not only the region's physical domination of Russia but also that expansion eastward may have been as defining for Russian society as was the United States' advance westward for American society, it is surprising that historians are just beginning to concentrate on this vast landscape. This is not to say that Western scholarship has completely ignored Asiatic Russia. But March's valuable bibliography demonstrates that many sources focus on countries other than Russia and those which do concentrate on Russia in the East were published infrequently throughout this century. In other words, there is still a lot of work to do in this area.

The ambitious scope of this work–chronologically beginning with the establishment of the House of Rurik in 862 and concluding with a brief assessment of Russia's political future in Asia following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and covering events from the Caucasus to Northern California, to Vietnam and the Arctic–not surprisingly reveals many gaps which students should recognize as opportunities for original research. For this reason March's book is as valuable for what it does not cover as for what it does.

Indeed, the breadth of this work is perhaps its major drawback. Despite March's stated goal of an "outline history," 273 pages is still insufficient to cover this amount of material with even the broadest strokes. *Eastern Destiny*, however, is unique in American historiography, as all major syntheses focus nearly exclusively on European Russian history while works on Siberian Russia are typically monographs.[1] This valiant attempt to account for this significant elision is, therefore, valuable in reminding historians that there is much more to the story of Russia's explosive growth as a Great Power than we tend to bear in mind. But *Eastern Destiny* functions primarily as a very basic point of departure for students who wish to learn more about this subject.

Given the enormity of his undertaking, it is somewhat irksome that March makes so many digressions about non-Russian countries. Indeed, March often seems more intent on writing about China than about his purported subject. For example, Chapter Four, which describes initial contacts between the Russians and Chinese, dwells far too heavily on China's internal affairs during this period. Similarly the chapter dealing with the "normalization"[2] of Russo-Japanese relations describes the process essentially from the Japanese perspective rather than the Russian. In describing the Sino-Japanese War at length, March makes only passing mention of Russia. Although many of these tangential discussions on China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia make interesting and informative reading, they may simply be distracting for students using this as a classroom textbook. Certainly many of these countries' internal affairs eventually influenced Russia, but discussion of them could be far more succinct. This would have left room to better develop some of the issues more germane to Russia.

A narrative history basically presents the facts, especially if the text is designed for introductory courses. But the almost complete lack of analysis in *Eastern Destiny* results in two significant problems. The first is some remarkably dry reading in places. The best chapters are the early ones, for which the absence of comprehensive source material perhaps compelled March to enliven his narrative simply for cohesiveness. For example, a chapter dealing with Russia's Petrine-era contacts with Japan and explorations of Kamchatka and the Kurils makes quite lively and engaging reading. Even the author's telescoping of the chronology–the change in policy over time from Peter I to Catherine II covers half a paragraph–is made rather deftly and does not jar. But too often March depends on old-fashioned diplomatic history instead of analysis. By the middle of the book, I was able to predict that with every new mention of a treaty would come at least a paragraph or two routinely listing the provisions of the document, often strictly according to the treaty's numbered articles. This had a somewhat benumbing effect, especially when a treaty would be superseded in the next paragraph by another concluded twenty years afterward. The absence of any element of social history and a focus solely on major figures depersonalizes the narrative. Amazingly, there is only one direct quotation from an historical character–and he is Chinese rather than Russian! In his discussion of the modern era, March awkwardly employs a set of acronyms which further dilutes the flow of the narrative.

Eastern Destiny also suffers from the absence of thematic structure. In the Introduction March states that

The purpose of this volume is simply to present a brief but coherent account of Russian expansion into Asia and the North Pacific and the occasional withdrawal from some segments thereof. This work is intended, as well, to provide some sense of the historical forces that brought about such events and the reactions they elicited from those border states and the Great Powers most affected (p. xvii).

In this section and his discussion of the Mongol invasion, March posits the long-held theory that Russian expansionism was a defensive-cum-offensive reaction to invasion, a reaction which only became more entrenched over time with successive invasions from the West. However, as the author himself clearly demonstrates, the first incursions into Siberia were by fur traders. The dominance of economic interests in guiding eastward expansion further intensified with Moscow's and later St. Petersburg's decision to tax the fur trade and to establish valuable trading links with China, and much later, Japan. National security interests followed rather than preceded these early moves.

The early, rather picaresque account of fur traders and Cossack explorers is soon eclipsed by a heavy, though uneven, emphasis on diplomatic history. This and the tangential-and substantial-digressions into other countries' internal affairs further muddles the search for a cohesive theme.

A significant omission in March's work is any mention of colonization, either voluntary or penal. Although he expressly states that his study is not concerned with colonization, it is just not possible to explain eastward expansion without noting colonization's role in the process. Indeed, the Empire used colonization to mark its expansion to specific geographical boundaries. Nikolai Busse's establishment of a colony (albeit aborted) on Sakhalin in 1853 is a case in point. Further evidence of the imperialist conception of colonization is found in the memoirs of Admiral Gennadii Nevel'skoi and other documents.[3]

Nor does March consider the effect Russian expansion had on the native populations of Siberia. The decimation of these peoples by disease, exploitation, alcoholism, and government-sanctioned genocide parallels that which consumed the native populations in the Western Hemisphere. But in *Eastern Destiny*, Asian tribes appear only as pernicious obstacles to the Russian march eastward. Surely if March wants to demonstrate the effect Russia's expansionism had on its neighbors, a discussion of this topic is in order.[4]

Despite these problems, there is much interesting material in *Eastern Destiny*. The origin of the Russian-American Company, an entity which, like the British East India Company, spearheaded government advance into uncharted areas, is clearly explained. One of the most interesting chapters concerns Russian attempts to establish a presence in Northern California and Hawaii, although the full chapter devoted to this topic may misrepresent its relative importance. Still, the material on the adventurer Nikolai Rezanov is priceless and represents a rare instance in which an historical figure's story is fully developed.

There are also several insightful points which are unfortunately not developed, but suggest possibilities for further inquiry or debate. For example, "[o]ne of the earliest and most energetic proponents of a transsiberian railroad was an American entrepreneur named Perry McDonough Collins" (p. 152). Further on, in a discussion of the motivations for such a railroad, there is a good, albeit brief, explanation of the fear expressed by social conservatives in Moscow that such a communication line

would usher in harmful outside influences. A more substantive treatment of the historical material is however absent, and one gets but a brief taste of these intriguing subjects. Perhaps a more thematic–as opposed to a strictly narrative–approach would have been more effective in these instances. As it is, almost every chapter contains abrupt detours just when the reader wants to travel further down a particular road.

It would also have been helpful, for scholars and students alike, to have the relevant source material listed at the end of each chapter. I often wanted to know where particular material came from but was stymied by the lack of footnotes and chapter-organized readings.[5] There are a number of maps showing the changing political boundaries over the centuries. These are expertly produced by Jane Eckelman and unusually easy to read. But it would have been helpful to have the military and civilian territorial thrusts described in the text also graphically displayed on these maps. The index conveniently doubles as a glossary, with each entry followed by a brief explanation or date.

One wishes the publisher had exercised more editorial control over this work, maintaining the focus and maximizing the space allotted to the subject. March's erudition is obvious in his familiarity with a wide literature that covers such a broad expanse both chronologically and geographically, but it appears that in his zeal to impart his subject to his readers he has overlooked the need for a more tightly-organized and -constructed narrative.

Notes:

[1]. March's colleague at the University of Hawaii, John J. Stephan, has written a work based on primary sources which is something of an exception in that it covers Russia in the Far East–as opposed to all of Siberia and the North Pacific, with which March is concerned–from its entry on the scene up to the present and should be consulted by those interested in this topic. See *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford University Press, 1994).

[2]. Quotation marks are March's.

[3]. See Nikolai Vasil'evich Busse, *Ostrov Sakhalin: Ekspeditsiia 1853-1854 gg.* [Diary of the author, 25 August 1953-19 May 1854] (St. Petersburg: V. tipografii F.S. Sushinskago, 1872); Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi russkikh morskikh ofitserov na Krainem Vostoke Rossii, 1849-1855 gg.*, 3rd. ed. (rpt., Moscow: Gos. izd-vo geograficheskoi lit-ry, 1947). Also cf., e.g., "Nashi zadachi na Sakhaline," *Golos*, 11 Nov 1875; Grigorii Samiulovich Fel'dstein, *Ssylka: eia genezisa, znacheniia, istorii i sovremennogo sostoianiia* (Moscow: T-vo skoropechatni A.A. Levenson, 1893), pp. 150 ff.; N.M. Iadrintsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiur'me i ssylke* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Morigerovskago, 1872), pp. 545ff.; F.G. Safronov, "Ssylka v vostochnuiu Sibir' v pervoi polovine XVIII v," in *Ssylka i katorga v Sibiri (XVIII-nachalo XX v.)*, L.M. Goriushkin, et al., eds. (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka" Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1975), 15-37.

[4]. For accounts of native peoples' decline in Siberia, see e.g. John J. Stephan, op. cit., 23ff; M.S. Vysokov, et al., eds., *Istoriia sakhalinskoi oblasti, s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, 3rd. ed. (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1995), p. 95; N.M. Iadrintsev, *Sibirskie inorodtsy: ikh byt' i sovremennoe polozhenie* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie I.M. Sibiriakova, 1891), statistical tables beginning p. 267.

[5]. There are, however, many elliptical commentary notes.

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