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George E. Munro. *The Most Intentional City: St. Petersburg in the Reign of Catherine the Great.* Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008. Illustrations, maps. 372 pp. $65.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8386-4146-0.

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Constructing an Imperial Capital

St. Petersburg, the capital of imperial Russia, marked the tercentenary of its founding in 2003, a celebration that has summoned forth a wave of new books, conferences, albums, documentaries, and feature films, with several others still in the pipeline, harkening back to the city's first century. The themes and topics have been almost endless: St. Petersburg as a multi-confessional city; the city as a cacophony of church bells, processionals, fireworks, and gunfire; the city as physical and cultural space; the city and its immigrant and migrant communities; the capital as repository of imperial splendor and memory; the city as an oasis of urbanity and sophistication; the city through the eyes of foreigners; and more.[1]

The timing of George E. Munro's richly detailed study of St. Petersburg, thus, is fortuitous, but it is also entirely coincidental. A devotee of the city's historical archives, he began this work many years before the tercentenary. It appears amid all these other works only because he happened to complete his research at an opportune moment. Cognizant of these latest and largely culturally centered works, he nevertheless connects to a different and somewhat older strain of urban historiography, one that examines the city as a material space of work, physical structure, and everyday life. Although he touches on salons, literary life, and education, he does not dwell on them. His focus instead is on neighborhoods, urban landscapes, urban administration, social structure, trade, and provisioning–a combination of its physicality and what he terms "the living, breathing city that was unplanned, but in a sense more authentic" (p. 19).

The organizing premise is stated in the title, "the most intentional city." Petersburg was built, virtually de novo as a planned urban space, intended from the outset by Peter I as the new capital, far away from Moscow and the Muscovite heartland, to which the government began to move just as soon as enough government buildings were in place for it to do so. The quality of town planning, its limitations, and its unintended consequences constitute recurring themes throughout the book, and thematically connect chapters that are otherwise quite distinct. The picture that Munro sketches is of a city heavily dependent on distant travel for its provisions, building material, and human presence. Located amid swamps, islands, and frozen waters, St. Petersburg relied on the rapid development of roads and barge transportation. Indeed only a tiny proportion of the city's land went toward gardens and grazing, and the immediate outlying fields and forests grew few comestibles.

One of the many admirable features of the book is the ongoing attempt to derive useful information from official statistics, a notoriously vexing challenge for anyone studying imperial Russian society and economics. Munro does not attempt to recalculate or apply independent statistical methods to the available numbers, but he does search widely for information, and he displays a hardheaded skepticism toward the manner in which the imperial state assembled many of its figures, especially regarding the size and social distribution of St. Petersburg's population. He concludes that the figures very likely overstated population size early in the century and then understated it at the end, thus obscuring somewhat the robust growth of the city and its environs. More tellingly, he substitutes occupational data for social rosters compiled from legally ascribed social estates (*sosloviia* or *sostoianiia* in Russian) into which everyone was born and–except for soldiers–typically remained irrespective of one's life trajectory. Russianists are well aware of the disparity between official state classifications and actual work, especially in towns and cities. He is on firm ground in suggesting that a much larger proportion of the capital's population engaged in some sort of trade or commerce than can be surmised from estate-based identities. Even tax guilds, through which mer-

chants registered their capital and tax obligations, almost certainly understated merchant activity, as merchants underreported their level of capitalization to avoid paying higher taxes.

Munro's monograph elicits immediate comparison to a number of older works, including J. Michael Hittle's *The Service City: State and Townsmen in Russia, 1600-1800* (1979); Gilbert Rozman's *Urban Networks in Russia, 1750-1800, and Premodern Periodization* (1976); and the classic works of A. A. Kizevetter, in particular *Posadskaia obshchina v Rossii XVIII st.* (The urban community in eighteenth-century Russia) (1903). Although none dwelt on St. Petersburg alone, all these works had a sharper focus than Munro's in that they endeavored to offer clear and discrete definitions or prototypes of premodern Russian towns relative to those in other places. For Hittle, the notion of a "service city" was defining a demarcation from the commercial or manufacturing towns that he saw as more typical elsewhere. For Rozman, urban development, calculated largely by the concentration of populations in confined areas and their modes of interconnectedness ("networks"), constituted objective indices of backwardness. Kizevetter, inspired by liberal dreams of representative government, inquired whether Russian towns were moving toward a form of self-government during Catherine's reign, with perhaps an emergent cadre of prosperous merchants taking the lead.

For better or worse, Munro largely eschews the vaunted "big questions," informed as they are by political ideals and sociological prototypes, and instead he concentrates more directly on a thick description of life on the ground. In this sense, his approach is somewhat reminiscent of three recent books on the earliest decades of St. Petersburg: Evgenii Anisimov's *Iunyi grad: Peterburg vremen Petra Velikogo* (The young city: Petersburg in the time of Peter the Great) (2003), Olga Kosheleva's *Liudi Sankt-Peterburgskogo ostrova Petrovskogo vremeni* (The people of St. Petersburg Island in Peter's time) (2004), and L. N. Semenova's *Byt i naselenie Sankt-Peterburga (XVIII vek)* (Daily life and population of St. Petersburg [eighteenth century]) (1993). All three books are more interested in the initial peopling and structuring of St. Petersburg than in situating it in a comparative continuum. Munro's book also bears some comparison to Aleksandr Kamenskii's recent study of the small town of Bezhetsk in the eighteenth century, *Povsednevnost' russkikh gorodskikh obyvatelei* (Everyday life of Russia's town residents) (2006), although there is a Braudelian subtext in Kamenskii's work that is not apparent in Munro's.

In his conclusion, Munro gives Catherine the Great relatively high marks for enabling the capital to become a vibrant residential city as well as one of the great cities of Europe. Petersburg, he observes, was less affected by famine, epidemics, and pestilence than other Russian cities. In spite of what he terms its "social flux" and the constant inflow of new residents and migrants, Petersburg saw relatively few riots or public disturbances (p. 84). Munro attributes much of this success to underlying economic forces rather than to administrative design, but here I suspect he understates the state's hand in devoting massive resources to making certain that its new showcase capital shined in the eyes of its prominent citizens and foreign visitors.

Given the richness of Munro's descriptions and the immensity of his research in archival and obscure printed materials, one cannot help but hope that either he or someone else will employ his findings to venture somewhat farther into theory, historiographic controversy, or conceptual frameworks. To be sure, he does challenge some arguments directly, such as in his contention that Petersburg exported more finished products and imported more raw materials than is usually assumed. His narrative implicitly challenges both Hittle's concept of the service city and Rozman's emphasis on urban networks. Munro's St. Petersburg was an economic center, fundamentally defined as much by the production and flow of goods and labor as by its governmental shadow. This is an important, and somewhat revisionary, profile, the implications of which deserve to be drawn out some more. Similarly, his argument that Petersburg's growth was atypical for Russian towns, that in fact it took place at the expense of other towns, implicitly raises doubts about the model of urban networks, and offers support instead to Boris Mironov's controversial view that urban Russia declined overall during the eighteenth century. If I have a quibble with the book it lies there. If I have a quibble with the press, which on the whole has done a fine job, it is in the paucity of illustrations. Life, labor, and physical spaces are palpable, and one would love to have seen them visually displayed. But, as I said, these are quibbles.

Note

[1]. The outpouring of new books during the past ten to fifteen years is simply enormous. A representative selection includes Pieter Holtrop and Henk Slechte, eds., *Foreign Churches in St. Petersburg and Their Archives, 1730-1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); I. N. Bespiatykh, ed., *Fenomen Peterburga* [The St. Petersburg phenomenon] (St. Petersburg: Blits, 2000); Julie Bukler, *Mapping St. Pe-*

tersburg: Imperial Text and Cityscape (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); A. G. Cross, ed., *St. Petersburg, 1703-1825* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Grigorii Kaganov, *Images of Space:* S*t. Petersburg in the Visual and Verbal Arts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Emily Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); O. R. Khromov, *Progulki po Sankt Peterburgu* [Strolls through St. Petersburg] (Moscow: Interbuk Bisnes, 2002); and D. D. Zelov, O*fitsial'nye svetskie prazdniki kak iavlenie russkoi kul'tury kontsa XVII-pervoi polovine XVIII veka* [Official civic holidays as an expression of Russian culture from the end of the seventeenth through the first half of the eighteenth century] (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2002).

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