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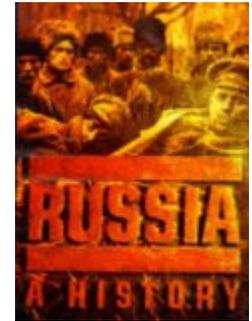
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Gregory Freeze, ed. *Russia: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. xvii + 478 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-215899-4.

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A Collective Portrait of Russia

Several distinctive qualities mark this splendid volume on the broad sweep of Russia's history from Kievan times to the new order of President Yeltsin. The work balances pre- and post-1917 Russia, with three chapters on the Kievan and Muscovite eras, two on the eighteenth century, three on the period from 1801 to 1914, and six on Soviet and post-Soviet developments. Editor Gregory Freeze, who authored two of the chapters, has put together an international team of leading experts in the field, including Janet Martin, Nancy Shields Kollmann, Hans-Joachim Torke, John Alexander, Gary Marker, David Ransel, Reginald Zelnik, Daniel Orlovsky, William Husband, Lewis Siegelbaum, William Fuller, Jr., and Martin McCauley.

The volume offers a coherent chronological narrative, a critical perspective, and a synthesis of historical literature, recent scholarship, and, for selected twentieth-century topics, newly declassified archival materials from Russian collections. Readers will discover the current status of scholarly debate on specific questions, issues, and subjects. The value of the work is greatly enhanced by a wonderful array of illustrations, such as rare photographs, cartoons, and posters, all of which are not only concisely described but clearly integrated with relevant sections of chapters. Maps at the end, along with a chronology, a list of further readings, and an index, are additional features of this useful volume.

The most prominent underlying theme in this collec-

tive portrait of Russia is the tense and difficult relationship between state and society. Rulers and regimes, from Kievan to post-Soviet times, have encountered extraordinary challenges in trying to establish effective control over variegated lands and peoples, especially those outside the main cities. Among the obstacles that have confronted Russia's different central governments are vast geographic distances; economic and social underdevelopment; bureaucratic negligence, incompetence, and corruption; and a multinational population both in the Russian heartlands and across far-flung frontiers.

The concept of state authority emerges from this tome as relatively weak and impotent in carrying out such fundamental tasks as providing order and rule of law and cementing diverse peoples into a cohesive entity. So often in Russia's past coercion and repression from above have spawned resistance from below, expressed in social disorder, violent rebellion, intellectual alienation, or public indifference. A closely related theme is the complexity of reform. Relevant chapters explore the sources, aims, methods, phases, and results of such transformations as enlightened absolutism, the "great reforms," and *perestroika*. Also discussed are the politics and process of reform, the proponents and opponents of reform, the unfulfilled expectations and unpredictable consequences of reform, and the frequency of reform initiatives which have culminated in counter-reform, conservative restoration, or revolution.

All of the essays are coherently organized, lucidly

written, and intellectually stimulating. Each reader will no doubt select different sections or chapters which stand out as particular strengths of this volume. What follows is a sampling of my own selective list of highlights. Janet Martin elaborates on the dynastic conflicts which fragmented both the politics and the territories of Kievan Rus and suggests how Kievan legacies became a foundation for the consolidation of Muscovy. Nancy Shields Kollmann's examination of culture, mentality, and mechanisms of social integration in sixteenth-century Muscovy supports her view of a "minimalist state." Hans-Joachim Torke identifies roots and seeds of the Petrine transformation in the discord, division, and rebellion which marked seventeenth-century Muscovy.

John Alexander provides telling detail and incisive commentary in his discussion of the concrete ways Peter the Great fostered intellectual, educational, and scientific advancement. Gary Marker integrates material on the Russian Orthodox Church in his investigation of the population, social order, and economy in Elizabethan and Catherinean Russia. David Ransel's synthesis of scholarship on the period 1801-1855 interprets the reign of "gendarme-tsar" Nicholas I as a crucial foundation for the 1860s and 70s: state-sponsored changes in law, finances, and agriculture, as well as a vibrant intellectual and cultural life, served as a prelude to the abolition of serfdom, other institutional reforms, and public ferment under Alexander II. Gregory Freeze details the process, politics, goals, and results of the post-Crimean War "great reforms," with emphasis on social and economic questions. Reginald Zelnik reminds readers of deep-seated divisions in the liberal and revolutionary movements and re-examines the optimist-pessimist debate on the fate of Imperial Russia.

Chapters on the twentieth century exhibit the same high marks of scholarly excellence as the previous essays. Daniel Orlovsky discusses the daunting tasks that overwhelmed the much-maligned Provisional Government in 1917, not the least of which were waging war and building a new political order. William Husband succinctly presents the social, cultural, educational, and religious policies which sought to create "a new Soviet man" in the innovative 1920s. Lewis Siegelbaum describes the profound changes in Stalinist society, in particular the mobility of labor, the stratification of the party, and the regime's varied attempts to control the masses, ranging from repression, propaganda, and incentive, to grandiose public projects like the fabled Moscow Metro.

William Fuller concisely explains the combination of

German mistakes and Soviet advantages that decided the outcome of the Great Fatherland War. His section on the start of the cold war, drawing upon newly released archival information, correctly suggests the need for caution about the prospect of unearthing archival "smoking guns" that might profoundly alter our interpretations of this conflict. Gregory Freeze contrasts the Khrushchev reform era with the Brezhnev restoration by utilizing excerpts from citizens' letters to the Central Committee, materials which together with other declassified documents deepen our perspective of the period 1953-1985. Finally, Martin McCauley closes his chapter on the Gorbachev transformation with a cogent analysis of the array of problems facing the chaotic and underdeveloped state authority of contemporary Russia's central government.

No single text, especially a multiauthored one, can fully satisfy all of the interests and questions of its readers. Given the significance of non-Russian peoples in both the growth and the erosion of state power, the volume might have provided more extensive coverage of such topics as expansion and settlement in Siberia, the conquest and colonization of Central Asia, the conflicts in Transcaucasia, and Ukrainian nationalism. Only a paragraph on tsarist expansion in Turkestan in the 1860s-70s is symptomatic of insufficient treatment of Russia's borderlands. Social and ethnic explosiveness on the peripheries of empire exacerbated the crisis of the old regime. Soviet rule in the non-Russian republics combined military force and political repression with limited administrative autonomy, economic and cultural development, and affirmative action programs geared toward creating native intelligentsias, working classes, and local communist elites. Nationalist and separatist impulses gathered force in the "era of stagnation" and took advantage of the favorable climate for political mobilization, ethnic activism, and nation-state building during the Gorbachev era.

The admirable and much-needed focus on reform, society, and related domestic issues might have been balanced with more discussion of diplomacy and foreign affairs. Not only did costly entanglements abroad aggravate internal problems, but the regime's ineffective ruling institutions diminished the country's capacity to compete internationally and to maintain its great power status. In several places the drama and color of prominent rulers might enliven the text. While I am no advocate of the great person theory of historical causation, I suspect that more than a few readers might wonder what role if any personality has played at crucial junctures in Russia's history. More might have been made of the intellectual

and psychological profile of such leaders as Nicholas II, Lenin, Stalin, and Gorbachev.

The most glaring shortcoming of this text is the minimalist coverage of Russia's literature, art, music, and popular culture, all of which resonate with images and signs important for grasping the country's elusive national identity through the ages. Any discussion of populism in the radical movement would benefit from alternative expressions of populism in the paintings of Repin and the Wanderers, in the writings of Tolstoy and other Russian realists, and in the creativity of folk art and peasant culture. I am puzzled why any text on Russia's history would exclude mention of Dostoyevsky's and Tolstoy's novels, Chekhov's stories and plays, and significant works by other major literary figures. For all of the interpretive insight provided by recent scholarly studies, Russia's literature retains its value as a window on society, culture, and mentality.

A few omissions struck this reader as odd, but hardly detract from the overall quality of this collective portrait. Textbooks invariably associate Sergei Witte with the Trans-Siberian Railway, yet this monumental project is not mentioned in the section on late Imperial industrialization. The Civil War erupted for a variety of reasons, but can this conflict be fully understood without at least passing mention of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), the separate peace which exacted a huge loss of former tsarist lands and resources? What impact did the party's social and cultural initiatives of the 1920s have on Soviet Muslims? The chapter on Stalinism does not explain socialist realism, nor does it discuss the imposition of Great Russian nationalism on non-Russian minorities. The Getty-Conquest debate on the terror is cited but needs to be elaborated more clearly and fully.

Any discussion of the origins of the cold war should probably remind readers of two political realities: the

legacy of mistrust left by Allied intervention in the Civil War and the strains within the wartime Grand Alliance evinced at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. The section on Khrushchev's bold steps to de-Stalinize might be strengthened with a brief word on why this process was tentative, risky, and thus limited. The final chapter might comment on the pivotal impact of Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech on the political views of the young Mikhail Gorbachev. It also needs to delineate more sharply the lines of authority between the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet during the turbulent late Gorbachev era.

The authors of this excellent volume deserve high praise for the breadth of their scholarship, the clarity and significance of their contributions, and their attempt to highlight some of the basic continuities in Russia's historical experience. The Freeze-edited text joins several recent scholarly publications, all of which exemplify the creative rethinking and interpretive recasting of history, society, and culture which we see today in the field of Russian studies.[1] The tome will receive serious and sustained attention from students and specialists alike, and one hopes that Oxford University Press will soon publish a paper edition for classroom use.

Notes

[1]. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998). Jane Burbank and David Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

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