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Marjorie L. Hilton. *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. 344 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6167-3.

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Work on Russia's history of consumerism has surged since the turn of the century. Into this growing field comes Marjorie L. Hilton's *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930.* Hilton's work, recently published in paperback form, speaks to the continuity of government economic strategies and consumer culture between the late Tsarist era and the 1930s. This is an ambitious effort to speak to a number of fields, including economic history, social history, urban history, gender history, and cultural history. Approaching such a number of fields is a daunting task, but Hilton demonstrates that breadth of vision is an asset for a historian, not a weakness.

Hilton's argument, as she notes, speaks to three overarching themes: the connection between state power and the retail sector; the relationship between city and retailing (including the place of specific groups, such as men, women, and Jews); and cultural transformation. Hilton's work, based largely on Moscow but also using comparisons to Odessa, raises significant points. She sees remarkable continuities, both of government processes and cultural views, between retailing life at the end of the empire and Soviet consumerism, and along the way a constant tension, due to the ongoing discussion of what modernity meant. Consideration of consumerism, she argues, in all of its aspects, served as a "flashpoint for a discussion of how a modern, just, more civil and democratic society should be constructed even after the 1930s" (p. 270).

This argument emerges through eight distinct chapters, each of which suggests avenues for further research. In the first, she sets the stage, describing retailing at the end of the empire. Through chapter 1, Hilton defines a cultural debate about retailing's form: the traditional *lavka* (associated with an array of negative images) versus the *magazin* (seen as a modern consumer emporium). The long-standing distaste for retailing, emerging from traditional views of the *lavka*, prompted the government and economic elite to seek a reconstruction of the consumer sector. That is the topic of the second chapter, tracing the developing of the Upper Trading Rows, thanks to a state-sponsored joint stock company. Consumerism and imperial government grew closer together by the reign of Nicholas II; Hilton describes, in chapter 3, how the monarchy increasingly used commercial techniques to reach out to the public. This included merchants celebrating state events, as well as the creation of consumer goods bearing the image of the double-headed eagle.

Having set the initial narrative in order, Hilton then turns to look more closely in the markets and department stores she describes. In chapter 4, she focuses on the role of gender in Russian consumerism. Both *kupets* (the traditional shopkeeper) and *kommersant* (the modern merchant) were exclusively male roles, she points out; women's involvement in Russian commerce was to be limited to a negative stereotype of the easily tempted shopper. In chapter 5, she fits these shopping women into a larger picture of the life of the marketplace–both the positive (memoirs glowing with stories of shop visits) and the negative (the haggler, a legacy of the *lavka* image). Government shifts, she explains, did little to change this culture initially; she describes, in chapter 6, commonalities in economic policy between the late empire, the Provisional Government, and the NEP period. (Most eye-opening here is her point that state seizure of property and goods was as much a late Romanov policy as a Soviet one.) Finally, in chapters 7 and 8, she turns to view how these trends molded life in the Revolution and after. While department stores like GUM advertised an "all for everyone" message, she argues, the Soviets did attempt to encourage a reversal of the consumer/merchant role. No longer was the consumer always right–indeed, Hilton shows us how even the development of the three-queue system shifted commercial power into the hands of the shopkeepers. While a culture of complaint (the topic of chapter 8) was developed, it served a double purpose: it allowed consumers to remind the state "of its failure to

provide everything for everybody" (pp. 262-263), and it allowed shopworkers, judging their customers' commitment to an egalitarian life, an opportunity to define how to live a socialist life.

Hilton's work in this wide-ranging book is richly sourced. In order to speak to an audience beyond the imperial capitals, Hilton's work relies on a study of Moscow (the merchant capital of the later empire) and a study of Odessa, chosen for its ethnic and religious diversity. She has examined the major archives of both cities as well as the relevant state archives (GARF, RGIA, RGASPI, RGAE, and so on); her work reflects this with statistical analysis of commercial life (for example, the number of female shopkeepers in the Upper Trading Rows by the turn of the century) and use of memoirs (especially in describing retailing in the later empire). In addition, she turns to thirty-two contemporary newspapers from these cities, looking for stories (in the case of merchants' trade journals), advertisements, and news relating to financial events (like the creation of GUM). This is in addition to a significant body of historiographic literature that reaches far beyond Slavic studies, including works on the U.S. history of consumerism.

This body of research is one of Hilton's great strengths. It allows her to speak to a number of works and writers: Louise McReynolds (for urban leisure life), Sally West (for the development of consumerism at the end of the empire), Allan Ball (for NEPmen), Benjamin Nathans (for Russian Judaism at the end of the empire), Richard Wortman (for discussion of imperial rituals), William Craft Brumfield (for the connection between architecture and imperial merchant life), and more. She can address such an array of topics because her work, stretching across such an expanse of time and embracing the myriad ways in which commerce affects us, does not hesitate to include areas of potential connection. As a result,*Selling to the Masses* offers many opportunities for discussion of additional points. This is a work, therefore, in which government economic policy of dispossession is set alongside brief excursions into the history of Russian fashion, the role of Orthodoxy in Moscow merchant culture, the cultural dispute over haggling, and the use of agit-prop advertising for Ukrainian stores in the 1920s.

For anyone interested in culture at the end of the empire and into the Soviet period, *Selling to the Masses* has much to offer. Two other points are worthy of note: Although her book is mostly about Moscow, Hilton is advancing work on Ukrainian commercial history, particularly in her research on Odessa's Passazh. In so doing, she raises comparisons that go beyond the financial order of Moscow and Odessa; for example, she compares the choices of the Jewish merchant elite of St. Petersburg and Odessa to integrate "selectively" (p. 69). Second, and most noteworthy, is Hilton's insistence on including gender history at every point in her monograph. While she has a chapter exclusively devoted to gender and the retail marketplace (chapter 4), gender is treated throughout the work. For example, while tracing the construction of the Upper Trading Rows and issues with its management, she repeatedly marks the role of female merchants and attitudes toward women in shopkeeping. In her work on retail and the Revolution, she describes debates on fashion as a discussion of women's role in building the state retail sector, and socialist life itself. Under the culture of consumer complaint under NEP, she sees an "antifeminine bias" that manifested itself in hostility toward women's bodies, particularly those not of the slim, androgynous shape associated with the 1920s (p. 268).

There is little to critique in Hilton's *Selling to the Masses*. It is admittedly based on studies of two very Western imperial cities, Odessa and Moscow; a follow-up study using a less Western city would be valued. The book, moreover, takes such a broad stance that Hilton, while raising important topics, cannot go into them all with equal depth (attitudes toward fashion for women and men, or the life of Jewish merchants across the empire, for example). But this weakness is Hilton's strength as well: her breadth of coverage allows her to engage with a diverse scholarship for her main point, continuities between the imperial and early Soviet eras.

Marjorie L. Hilton's *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* is an important book that fuses together works in a variety of fields, adding to literature on continuity between the end of the empire and the early Soviet era. The author's breadth of topic may be considered a flaw, leading to unequal coverage, but in reality this ambitious effort creates a work that can easily speak to a diverse body of scholarship, contributing significantly to our understanding of the passage from empire through the NEP period.

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