

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael Owen Mahoney. *The Ravaged Lands 1900-1914*. Mountain View: Pucker Up Press, 2013. 504 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9883258-0-7.

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Eastern Europe: A Summation of Secondary Sources

Michael Owen Mahoney, a United States Navy veteran and retired postman, has taken it upon himself to write a multivolume collection covering twentieth-century Eastern European history. His first volume, *The Ravaged Lands 1900-1914*, outlines events in Eastern Europe between 1900 and 1914. Unfortunately, the book lacks a thesis and original research, and does not add anything to the historiography of the region. Mahoney devotes a chapter to each year from 1900 to 1914. The chapters focus on major events that occurred in Eastern Europe with a sprinkling of unrelated events outside of the region. Most chapters are short with the exception of those surrounding the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the origins of World War I.

The greatest weakness of the book is Mahoney's lack of knowledge about the history of Eastern Europe. For example, he claims that if Grand Duke Michael Romanov had married Alexandra Kossikovskaya, a commoner, not only would he have been removed from the line of succession, but the marriage also would have brought an end to the Romanov dynasty (p. 149). While Mahoney is correct that Romanov's marriage would have prevented him from being tsar under the Pauline Laws of House Romanov, he is incorrect that it would have ended the Romanov dynasty. He disregards Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich as a legitimate claimant to the throne, despite what popular Russian historian Robert Massie states in *Nicholas and Alexandra*, which Mahoney cites as a source. Massie accurately notes that Grand Duke Vladimir and his son Cyril were next in line af-

ter Tsar Nicholas II, Tsarevich Alexei, and Grand Duke Michael.[1]

Another problem with Mahoney's book is that in each chapter he provides a potpourri of events not related to Eastern Europe or not relevant to the specific time period. Adolf Hitler's first day of Realschule has no importance to the events of Eastern Europe before World War I, for example (p. 8). Mahoney includes popular American history by informing the reader of such events as the release of the Brownie camera by Kodak and the first publishing of *The Wizard of Oz* in 1900 (p. 38). He also mentions such geological events as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the earthquake in Chile later that year (pp. 142, 147). Such trivial and unrelated information is more suited for a game of Jeopardy than a book about Eastern European history.

The Ravaged Lands includes multiple citation errors; some sources are included in the bibliography, but are not found in the endnotes and vice versa. The book lacks any foreign language materials, as well as any archival research. There are no stated primary sources, despite his use of Leon Trotsky's *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (1981), which can be considered one.

Mahoney's book serves as an example of how not to write history. He provides nothing more than dates and information gleaned from popular secondary sources. That being said, it is an ambitious undertaking to write a multivolume history of Eastern Europe from 1900 to 2000, but one that should be done with professionalism,

not amateurish interest. This book represents what historians fear popular history might become in a digital age of self publishing. Perhaps the author should heed his own warning: “Our electronic gadgets have erased the time needed for careful scrutiny of the latest news, making it more difficult to find the truth” (p. vi). Of the recent upswing in World War I books published for its coming centennial, Michael Neiberg’s *Dance of the Furies: Europe*

and the Outbreak of World War I (2013) provides a more informative look at the outbreak of the First World War and is a worthwhile read.

Note

[1]. Robert Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra: The Story of the Love That Ended an Empire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 152.

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