

of mediating, in which he sees “the attempt to fashion an internationalist subjectivity.” The author’s task is to understand what role modern media forms play “in crafting modern sociopolitical subjectivities” (29).

Tyneman’s book allows us to approach many questions of Soviet cultural history in a new way. And this was the task of the author. He corrects our ideas about Soviet Orientalism, the role of culture in advancing the political agenda, the limits of Marxist internationalism in Soviet Russia, and the evolution of the imperial project in the USSR. Overall, this book deals with a failed political project: Soviet internationalism proved to be too bound up with Russia’s imperial past and melted too quickly into a new Stalinist imperial project. But this is not surprising: the very turn of Soviet leftist intellectuals towards China (and more broadly towards the east) was a reaction to a failed world revolution in the west. Having turned away from one project, Soviet culture created a new one, one that was to prove Vladimir Lenin’s view of the world revolution correct, one that was now supposed to win in yet another weak link of imperialism, this time in China. And so it happened. But history has proven that this was only an episode in the political perturbations of the twentieth century. Tyerman’s book makes one take a fresh look at the early Soviet experience through the prism of painful attempts to move beyond the imperial imagination of a century ago, and will be an invaluable guide for those interested not only in problems of Soviet-Chinese relations but also in problems of nationalism, cultural interactions, and the universality of the Soviet experience.

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Stalin’s Library: A Dictator and His Books. By Geoffrey Roberts. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. viii, 259 pp. Notes. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Plates. \$30.00, hard bound.
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Lev Trotskii famously described Iosif Stalin as a mediocrity, an intellectual nonentity. Nikolai Sukhanov’s Stalin was a gray blur unworthy of intellectual attention. That this standard view came almost exclusively from Stalin’s defeated opponents should always have given us pause, yet despite abundant evidence and recent research to the contrary, it persists largely because of the intellectual credentials of his critics and because of the dictator’s brutality. Recent biographies of Stalin by Stephen Kotkin and Ronald Suny, along with studies of Stalin’s political thought by Erik van Ree have instead shown the breadth (and specificities) of Stalin’s learning. Building on these studies, Geoffrey Roberts’ analysis of Stalin’s library puts paid to the old notion of Stalin as an unread if sinisterly clever rube.

Admittedly, Stalin’s formal education was limited and he did not produce a large corpus of theoretical writing. Reginald Zelnik’s work on Semen Kanatchikov and Charters Wynn’s on Mikhail Tomskii are excellent studies of self-taught Bolshevik intellectuals who were voracious readers across many disciplines. Like them, and unlike his intelligentsia detractors, Stalin was one of these Bolshevik autodidact plebeians.

It is not surprising that Stalin’s reading tastes ran toward history, communist ideology, economics, and literature or that “complexity, depth and subtlety were not strengths of Stalin’s, nor was he an original thinker. His lifelong practice was to utilize other people’s ideas, formulations and information—that was why he read such a lot” (153). Yet is it possible to overemphasize the derivative nature of Stalin’s intellect. One is reminded of H. Stuart Hughes’ characterization of great thinkers like Charles Darwin and Karl Marx as synthesizers, albeit brilliant ones, who owed much to those

who came before. Stalin's marginalia show that he saw himself as a serious intellectual and critic whose job it was to distill theory for the masses. His notes also show him seeking theoretical supports for his political stances: "politics generally trumped all other considerations in Stalin's reading of literature" (188). "He was a Bolshevik first and an intellectual second. In theory he stood for truth and intellectual rigor. In practice his beliefs were politically driven dogma" (208). Again, it is possible to make too much of Stalin's distinctiveness. A good argument can be made that to some extent he shared this trait with his Bolshevik rivals from the intelligentsia who were also politicians, if less competent ones, who like politicians everywhere, also shifted theory to fit their ambitions.

The story that Stalin exhorted his Politburo lieutenants that they should read 300–400 pages per day in addition to their work may be apocryphal, but books were important to Stalin. They "drew Stalin to the revolution and reading remained essential to his autonomy as a political actor" (210). Stalin's Kremlin rooms and his dacha were packed with more than 20,000 books, and judging by his marginalia and slit pages, he read hundreds of them. After his death, most of the books were dispersed to various libraries. Some of them vanished. Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov claimed to have seen Stalin's heavily notated copy of Niccolo Machivelli's *The Prince*, which an archive official told this reviewer had been stolen from the archives, like so much else as the Soviet Union collapsed. Some 400 of Stalin's books that bear his hand-written marginalia ended up in Party archives available to researchers today, and it is these that Geoffrey Roberts analyzed in this excellent book.

In a chapter entitled "Bah Humbug!" Roberts shows what we can learn from Stalin's marginalia such as "Ha ha!" or "Nonsense!" plus a number of colorful expressions not printable here. Although Stalin's notations do not contain any bombshells about the dictator's inner plans or thoughts about collectivization, terror, or other major and monstrous initiatives, they do tell us much about his thinking and suggest that he could be surprisingly balanced and even-handed. He expressed what he saw as pluses and minuses about Ivan the Terrible, the US, Fedor Dostoevskii, and even Trotskii, who "was an enemy but he was a capable person . . . who also has positive qualities" (181).

Roberts' book is not only a study of Stalin's library. Written in a lively and attractive style, it provides substantial and judicious background material about Stalin's career and his known interventions in film, literature, and foreign policy that will be new to Stalin specialists and interesting for non-specialists, advanced undergraduates, and for the general public.

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Revisiting the Revolution: The Unmaking of Russia's Official History of 1917. By Larry Holmes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. xix, 195 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. £22.00, paper.
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In this final contribution to the field, published shortly before his death in 2022, Larry Holmes again demonstrates the meticulous archival research skills which defined his previous work. A leading expert on Stalinism, particularly from the regional perspective, Holmes has done as much as anybody to illuminate the provincial history of the revolution in a series of important books and articles on topics including education, the experience of the Second World War and local governance.