
REVIEWS

A HISTORY OF RUSSIA: MEDIEVAL, MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY. By *Paul Dukes*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974. xi, 361 pp. \$12.50.

This short history has three distinctive features. The volume presents more fully than any other Western textbook the views of Soviet historians regarding their country's past, firmly pushes the comparative approach in an effort "to prevent the limitations of an exclusively national approach to Russian history" (p. ix), and offers an unusual plenitude of footnotes (well over 400!). The author's presentation and views are refreshing, often provocative, and sometimes irritating. The classroom student will not find it just another dull textbook.

The book is divided into three major parts: "Medieval," from 882 to 1645 (covered in 64 pages); "Modern," from 1645 to 1917 (140 pages); and "Contemporary," from 1917 into the 1970s (108 pages). Each chapter includes a brief introduction of two or three pages and then a tripartite arrangement into political, economic, and cultural subsections. With only slightly more than three hundred pages of actual text, there is a good deal of compression (if not exclusion) of important aspects of Russian history—for example, the skimpy treatment of non-Russian nationalities—but still the author has done a remarkably fine job.

The author, lecturer in history at the University of Aberdeen and a professed adherent of E. H. Carr's view of history, has given us a work that concisely presents the essence of the historical record and also the major conflicting interpretations. Dukes's constant attention to the findings and views of Soviet scholarship does not result in whole-hearted acceptance of the Soviet interpretations, but much is accepted—for example, the Soviet view of the economic basis of Kievan Russia, Lenin's interpretation of the nature of Muscovite economy, and so forth. Professor Dukes obviously wishes to free the reader from the traditional stress upon such matters as the cruelty of the tsars, the terrors of the *oprichnina*, the backwardness of Russian culture, and, beating a dead horse, the myth of the isolation of pre-Petrine Russia. In treating the Soviet era, he searches for a more dispassionate and understanding approach, one that could rise above Cold War attitudes, but many will feel that he has shown excessive understanding.

A few errors may be noted in the volume. The Third Partition of Poland took place in 1795, not 1797. The largest single national group in 1897, after the Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Turkic peoples, was not the Jews but the Poles. Kolchak was executed by the Bolsheviks, not by the Czechs.

Professor Dukes's book is devoid of pictures but does contain three maps and a select bibliography of English-language works. Supplemented with other readings, including documents, it should provide students with a stimulating and debate-provoking account of the course of Russian history.

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