

perhaps this is the attraction in choosing to work with Russia over their former European colonial masters, or preachy Americans, as Ramani argues. As the war in Ukraine has dragged on, and Russia's economy has become ever more decoupled from the west, it is its relationships in the Global South, and Africa in particular, that have helped it to feed its war effort. Ramani is less sanguine, however, on whether Russia's resurgence in Africa is sustainable in the long run. Its relationships with African countries tend to be transactional and contingent rather than based on deeply shared interests and values. In the end, Putin's Russia is not a "bellicose pretender," and if it is not quite a great power in Africa, Ramani's study indicates that it is nonetheless a disruptive and influential presence on the continent.

Susanne Schattenberg. *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman.*

Trans. John Heath. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. xviii, 484 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. Maps. \$36.00, hard bound. \$36.00, eBook.

Christopher Ward

Clayton State University
Email: cward@clayton.edu

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.480

Considering that Leonid Brezhnev's "unchallenged eighteen-year reign" (2) as leader of the Soviet Union concluded more than forty years ago, the fact that this work, the first biography of Brezhnev by a western scholar to employ a wealth of archival and other sources, has appeared only recently is remarkable. As Susanne Schattenberg notes in her comprehensive biography of one of the most important figures in the second half of twentieth century Soviet history, there are many reasons why this book took so many years to come to fruition. We now have a biography of Brezhnev that does justice both to the man and his legacy. Despite the author's occasionally apologetic perspective toward her subject, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman* redresses a longstanding deficit of scholarship on the man who, depending on one's perspective, embodied either the "era of stagnation" or the "era of stability."

The characterization of Brezhnev as "Khrushchev without Khrushchev" (2) that Schattenberg mentions in her introduction is both simultaneously true and untrue. Brezhnev can be considered as a reformer and a champion of the status quo. While he was the apotheosis of a risk-averse Soviet leadership, Brezhnev was also the person most responsible for promoting the enthusiastic reformer Mikhail Gorbachev to the highest levels of the USSR's governing apparatus.

Able translated by John Heath, *The Making of a Statesman* adds nuance to the life and times of a man who, in his later years and after his death in 1982, became a byword to describe the sclerotic Soviet gerontocracy. Schattenberg convincingly argues that Brezhnev's pragmatic détente with the west was mixed with an inherent conservatism and ideological rigidity. It is also important to contextualize this biography by remembering the perception of Brezhnev's legacy within the Soviet Union at the time and within Russia today. Far from being viewed only as a period of stagnation, this period is officially referred to by the Putin

regime as a period of stability. For many of those Russians who are old enough to remember it, the nostalgia of the Brezhnev years outweighs their negative memories.

In many ways, Schattenberg's work is truly impressive. The author's source base is not only large and varied, but also capably managed. Biographies of major personalities such as Brezhnev can sometimes overlook the subject's personality and human qualities in favor of their historical significance as outsized political figures. Schattenberg skillfully melds both the man and the legend. Brezhnev's early years, in particular his experiences in Ukraine and during the Great Patriotic War, where his formative relationships with Khrushchev and other important figures such as Mikhail Suslov were forged in the midst of the Stalin era, are described richly. Schattenberg's emphasis on Brezhnev's innate skills of networking and longevity contrasts with Khrushchev's brashness and ultimate demise.

Brezhnev's sizeable influence in Soviet domestic affairs, including his substantial role in the suppression of internal dissent, is also discussed in detail here. Schattenberg also devotes considerable attention to Brezhnev's legacy in crafting the USSR's foreign policy, particularly in connection with the Soviet Union's relationships with the United States and western Europe during the Cold War. However, there is a surprising lack of attention given to the Soviet involvement in and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan. As Brezhnev's personal role (or lack thereof) in this matter has been the subject of much controversy, Schattenberg's cursory treatment of the Soviet relationship with Afghanistan both before and after its decision to invade in 1979 is disappointing.

Within such a massive tome as this, other faults will inevitably be found. Since this book's publication, it has been reviewed in a variety of publications. A number of reviewers rightly note Schattenberg's apologetic tone toward Brezhnev, which the author herself acknowledges. In addition, while it is understandable that the original version of this book was written with a German speaking audience in mind, Schattenberg introduces her subject by describing a 2014 transfer of power in Germany during the Angela Merkel era that is at best tangentially related to Brezhnev. Such an opening gambit does not give a non-German reader a sense of his importance, nor does it pique one's interest in diving into this lengthy work.

Such criticisms are relatively benign. Schattenberg's biography of Brezhnev deserves its rightful place within the scholarship of the man who both made and unmade the postwar Soviet Union. While future biographies of Brezhnev are certain to appear, this work shows us the way forward.

Ekaterina Pravilova. *The Ruble: A Political History.*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. xi, 560 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$39.95, hard bound.

Chia Yin Hsu

Portland State University
Email: hsuc@pdx.edu

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.484

Ekaterina Pravilova's book is an impressive and illuminating guide to—as its title indicates—the “political history” of the ruble, or more precisely, the paper ruble. This history opens with the *assignats* issued by Catherine II. A paper money at first readily convertible to silver or copper, the *assignat* dipped in its exchange rate to metal by the second