

brief tour as minister managed to alienate President Ulysses Grant and Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, whose good offices Catacazy needed to represent Russian interests in Washington. Catacazy tried to drive a wedge between the United States and Great Britain, made his grievances public in the American press, accused President Grant of potentially benefitting from a claim against the Russian government for breaking an agreement with a private American citizen to provide arms during the Crimean War, and was a gossip monger. His testy relationship with Fish prompted Fish to call him a “first-class scamp” (93). According to Lee Farrow, Catacazy had more detractors than sympathizers (90), even in St. Petersburg. Moreover, his wife’s alleged “past,” an adulterous affair with Catacazy long before he became minister to the United States, caused her to be ostracized by the Washington “arbiters of etiquette” (66), thus hobbling the couple’s efforts to become a presence in Washington polite society.

Farrow’s book will no doubt be the definitive study of the diplomatic imbroglio caused by Catacazy, about whom it may be said, as Winston Churchill remarked of John Foster Dulles, that he was a bull who brought his own china shop with him. Farrow suggests that her study demonstrates the importance of the individual in diplomacy. This is accentuated by her use of diplomatic correspondence in Russian and American archives and, even more so, by her extensive use of stories, many of them gossipy, from newspapers all over the United States. At the same time, her study raises an important question of when and how is it appropriate for one country to request the recall of another country’s diplomatic representative. Given Farrow’s emphasis on the importance of the individual, it may not be possible to settle this question except on a case-by-case basis.

Farrow’s thesis that the Catacazy affair was “the beginning of the slow decline in Russian-American relations from friend to foe” (142) is not convincing. To do so would require greater contextualization than Farrow provides. She ignores many other studies of American-Russian relations in mid-nineteenth century—economic, cultural, and military relations, as well as technology transfer. Not only did the visit in 1871–72 of Grand Duke Alexis proceed successfully, but Russian displays were prominent at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia; American firearms and production technology aided the modernization of the Russian Army under Minister of War Dmitrii Miliutin; Americans provided significant famine relief in 1891–92; and the commercial treaty of 1832 remained in force until 1911. To be sure, toward the end of the century, George Kennan’s articles on Siberia and the exile system, published in the 1880s in *Century* magazine, transformed the Russian government in the American imagination into a model of despotism. Young Russian revolutionaries persecuted by the government aroused American sympathy (though this was often countered by American antipathy to political assassination). In the 1880s pogroms darkened the image of Russia; in addition, naturalized American Jews born in the Russian empire found discriminatory practices when they returned. But, until then, the diplomatic china broken by the bullish Catacazy was seemingly repaired.

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Russian Peasant Bride Theft. By John Bushnell. Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe. New York: Routledge, 2021. Xii, 217 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Maps. \$160.00, hard bound.
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John Bushnell’s *Russian Peasant Bride Theft* explores the phenomenon of “bride theft” and the practice’s role within peasant communities culturally, socially, economically,

and religiously in northern Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bushnell presents a rich narrative of the “performative elopement” in which grooms “abducted” their often co-conspiratorial brides to circumvent social, cultural, economic, and even religious expectations for courtship. As Bushnell emphasizes, while bride theft challenged civil and religious legality and morality, the practice fulfilled numerous needs, most importantly to the peasant economy through marriage and reproduction. At the heart of Bushnell’s study is the extent of bride theft by the groups collectively known as Russian Orthodox Old Believers. Of particular interest to Bushnell is the use of bride theft by the priestless branch of the Old Rite: Old Believers that while split into several *soglasie* collectively rejected the legitimacy of any church hierarchy following the Nikonian Reforms in the mid-seventeenth century. Unlike their *priestly* Old Rite counterparts who relied on converted priests (or later established their own hierarchies), priestless Old Believers often split over debates on the sanctity of many church sacraments, particularly marriage. In this context, Bushnell argues that while priestless communities debated the morality and validity of marriage, the importance of the peasant economy required them to find ways around their religious convictions and made bride theft an “overwhelmingly” Old Believer practice in northern Russia (vii–x).

Bushnell excels in highlighting the significance that bride theft had in some peasant communities as a means for younger peasants to gain some agency in their own courtship while providing elder peasants with some moral and social “deniability” for their youths’ actions. Drawing on records from government and church agencies, Bushnell provides a thorough overview of the many ways in which peasants participated in the “performance” of bride theft. As Bushnell reveals, bride theft regularly allowed a younger couple to circumvent economic and social obstacles, such as the collection of doweries or even parental approval, and thereby gain autonomy in selecting their spouse. Simultaneously, the parents and the larger peasant community, accepted the bride theft practice to a degree, as it offered them the means to feign ignorance as the marriage fulfilled the needs of maintaining the peasant economy and community’s continuation. Critical to Bushnell’s ties between bride theft and the Old Rite, the practice also provided the new couple with a means to circumvent the ecclesiastical and civil legal obligations often associated with marriage in imperial Russia.

It is within this context that Bushnell builds his argument of bride theft becoming “overwhelmingly” an Old Believer practice throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bushnell presents an impressive and thorough exploration of the origins and evolutions in the debates on marriage as a sacrament among priestless Old Believers. To Bushnell, what makes bride theft predominately an Old Rite phenomenon stems from the need for at least “common law” marriage to propagate future generations while providing Old Believer parents the deniability of giving approval for their children entering into a “sinful” and “illegitimate” marriage. While Bushnell’s argument seems logical as presented that some priestless Old Believers would practice some form of bride theft in regions where the practice appeared more common, the conclusion that this would make bride theft “overwhelmingly” an Old Believer practice unfortunately needs further exploration and placement within the historiography. Bushnell regularly admits that records documenting bride theft marriages rarely recorded the partners’ religious affiliation. However, this is regularly presented as evidence of the participants’ association with the Old Rite on the assumption of both officiants’ and participants’ desire to hide any association with the Old Rite in any official matter in order to avoid persecution or penalties. As Bushnell argues early, he concludes this through his own estimates of Old Believers through analysis of assumed populations of Old Believers compared to the notoriously

inaccurate “official” counts of Old Believers by both civil and ecclesiastic authorities. Additionally, weakening Bushnell’s placement into the larger historiography on the Old Rite is an unfortunate incomplete discussion and absence of a number of works by Irina Paert, Robert Crummey, and Roy Robson that explore the historiography of Old Rite debates on marriage.

Ultimately, Bushnell’s work presents a fascinating historical overview of the many factors that played a role in the practice of bride theft in northern Russia. Furthermore, this work now provides a thorough foundation for further exploration into this practice’s place within the larger social, economic, and religious debates of both Russian Orthodoxy and the Old Rite in imperial Russia.

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Russia on the Danube: Empire, Elites, and Reform in Moldavia and Wallachia, 1812–1834. By Victor Taki. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021. ix, 376 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Glossary. \$105.00, hard bound.

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In the often misunderstood history of southeastern Europe, the 1812 to 1834 era has been one of the most poorly served historiographically. Lodged between the Napoleonic era and the revolutions of 1848, functioning under the overwhelming shadow of Prince Metternich, eclipsed by the emergence of liberalism and nationalism, and involving a daunting multiplicity of archives, languages, and cultures, this history has led prudent western historians to prefer diplomatic history. At the same time, most national historians, despite their linguistic and other advantages, persistently remained mired in nationalist and communist historiographical traditions. Both approaches, in Victor Taki’s opinion, tended to perpetuate a mistaken dichotomy between foreign and domestic policy.

Taki addresses these and other issues in this meticulous, somewhat revisionist, and important book. Its core is organized into seven chronological chapters sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion. The story of Russia and the Romanian Principalities is an instructive case study of an effort to maintain an imperial regime in a frontier zone during a post-revolutionary age. Chapter I deals with beginnings of the Russian-Ottoman conflict in southeastern Europe beginning with Peter the Great’s ill-conceived eighteenth century advance to the south and attempts to establish a protectorate over the Principalities. The unforeseen result was the tightening of Ottoman control through the establishment of the Fanariot regime. Russian policy during this era is characterized by the author as a “weak neighbor” strategy, defending the southern borders of the empire by sustaining an infirm Ottoman regime.

Continuing to utilize previously neglected or inaccessible Russian archives and materials, in Chapter II, Taki argues that Russian officials and military men were painfully aware of the distinctive differences between the Romanians and the Balkan Slavs. To cope with this, as they moved southward, tsarist policy evolved from a protectorate to building an institutional foundation for Russian hegemony short of annexing the Principalities (which they believed would risk creating another Polish problem).

Chapters III-IV cover the 1820s: the uprisings of 1821 and their consequences, the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29, another prolonged Russia occupation of the Principalities, and the genesis of a reform agenda for the Principalities. Chapter