

circles. He starts from the problem of the effectiveness of the military education system in Russia and its ability to implement the Enlightenment ideas in the milieu of Russian officers. Analysis of this issue provided the basics for further exploring mechanisms encompassing promotion in the army, the impact of the Enlightenment on military regulations, changes in the image of soldiers, new methods proposed to train and motivate them, as well as demonstrations of individualism derived from west European culture that could be seen as a useful tool for some commanders to strengthen their leadership. The last two chapters deal with the problems and tensions between the principles of Military Enlightenment and the reality of the battlefield, on the one hand, and the attempts to modify some features of the Russian Military Culture and centralize it around the ruler, Paul I, on the other. The conclusion traces the different kinds of Enlightenment influence, including strategy, warfare, and propaganda on Russian military culture in next centuries. The author underlined “long lasting and deep influence of the Enlightenment on Russian military culture” (235).

The author undertook the question of the important changes on the dividing line between culture and the military sphere that was occurring in many European countries in the second half of the eighteenth century. His considerations are based on the solid collection of historical sources—memoirs but also manuscripts from Russian archives. His conclusions derived from analyses of many small case studies are clear and presented in an attractive way for the reader. The author’s ability to explain complex issues in a manner not simplistic is unquestionable.

I suppose that Miakinkov nonetheless overestimated the possibilities of the Russian educational system to spread more complex ideas of the Enlightenment (68). In the majority of Russian officers’ personal documents from the years of 1796–1815, having dealt with their level of education, I would described it as rather elementary: *chitat’ i pisat’ umeet* (he can read and write). This could significantly limit the absorption of Military Enlightenment by the wider military milieu.

A chapter in the book contains an interesting analysis of the Izmail storm by Russian forces and the violent scenes of looting and murder after the battle allowed by Aleksandr Suvorov. In Miakinkov’s opinion, this episode “showed the limits of ‘Enlightenment and reason’ in times of passionate struggle” (199). One may consider that war crimes committed by soldiers with the commander’s consent should be treated as an exception and not as the rule. I wish that the author paid attention to the storm of Warsaw in 1794, when Russian soldiers, again with Suvorov’s permission, massacred at least 5000 civilians. The repetitiveness of such episodes suggest that Izmail was not an isolated incident but a constant element of Russian military culture. As Miakinkov states, “the influence of Enlightenment on Russian military culture was. . . also a work-in-progress” (234). This process has not been completed to this day.

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On Russian Soil: Myth and Materiality. By Mieka Erley. Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, distributed by Cornell University Press, 2021. xi, 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. \$39.95, hard bound.
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This fascinating book examines Russian and Soviet literature through the lens of soil, providing an enlightening re-interpretation of Russian and Soviet identity and culture. The focus on soil allows Mieka Erley to interpret familiar authors and their

works—Fedor Dostoevskii, Nikolai Chernyshevskii, Vissarion Belinskii, and many more—in new ways. At the same time, Erley shows the importance of soil as both a cultural construction and a material reality, drawing on approaches in environmental history that seek to understand non-human actors as agents asserting their own influences on human culture and material reality. Ultimately, the book shows that the drama of Russian and Soviet modernization—tensions between center and periphery, past and present, and town and country—cannot be fully understood without considering how Russians and Soviets conceptualized their relationship to the earth upon which they walked, plowed, flew, collectivized, starved, battled, loved, ate, and drove.

The book is divided into six chapters. It proceeds chronologically—based on the premise that soil has figured prominently in Russian and Soviet culture and politics—from the emancipation of the Russian serfs to the Virgin Lands campaign of the Khrushchev era. Chapter 1 sets the stage by analyzing the Russian adaptation of Johann Gottfried Herder's ideas that linked national identity to landscapes and soil. These conceptions paved the way for the emergence of what the author refers to as the "organic nation," rooted in the soil that supposedly grows national culture and people just like native plants. Herder's "plant-nation" analogy provided a framework around which notions of soil began to fuse with debates about the nature and purpose of Russian modernization, conservative and radical.

Chapter 2 addresses soil science more explicitly and the tension between metaphorical versus the actual real soil that everyone agreed was central to Russia's future following emancipation of the serfs. Chernyshevskii's famous essay, "What is to be Done," was among many other things a contemplation of what to do about the soil question (later taken up by Vladimir Lenin and especially Iosif Stalin, who answered with collectivization).

If Russians understood soil (*pochva*) as a positive resource, dirt (*griaz'*) was its filthy, dangerous doppelganger. Chapter 3 thus explores the concept of dirt (*griaz'*), borrowing from Mary K. Douglas's notions of pollution and purity. When various thinkers contemplated "*griaz'*," they thought of a Russian world that was disordered, though what constituted the "*griaz'*" differed widely (peasant backwardness, non-Russian peoples, European values, the absence of rationality).

Chapter 4 uses soil to examine Soviet constructions of Asia as an impediment to development. Erley analyzes attempts to de-sedimentize encrusted layers of soil, history, and culture that seemed to retard progress. Projects of "land reclamation, hydroengineering, and other such projects" would give the state the "power to transform its psychologically sedimented human subjects" (74). As Erley argues, however, attempts to de-sedimentize supposedly primitive "Asian" foundations, as in Lev Trotskii's idea of combined development, often had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the elements of backwardness that the various excavations were intended to transcend. Andrei Platonov's *The Foundation Pit* expressed the fear that intense efforts at excavating out the backwardness would ultimately fail to produce a solid foundation for socialist social engineering. The end result was instead a large pit containing dead proletarian bodies, adding another layer of sediment that was seemingly impervious to excavation.

Chapter 5 focuses on the notion of "wasteland" (*pustyr'*) that required heroic acts of land reclamation. The work of Platonov, who was trained as a land reclamer, again figures prominently. The deserts of Central Asia became the focus of Soviet efforts to turn wasteland into useful, productive soil by changing the directions of rivers, building hydroelectric power plants, and making deserts bloom. As with other Soviet mega projects to excavate, transform, and make more productive, it was hard to separate the social engineering, physical construction, and literary imagining of these megaprojects. In fact, they were all interconnected as part of the larger project of the

“gardening state,” which the author adapts from Zygmunt Bauman. Stalin, and later the Communist Party, was the head gardener in this effort to build a victory garden that would turn dirt into soil, wasteland into horns of plenty, and flawed humans into happy Soviet, socialist subjects.

The sixth and final chapter is conceived quite literally as a climax: a discussion of the virgin lands campaign launched under Nikita Khrushchev. The book unpacks the gendered understandings of the campaign as the male Slavic conquest and impregnation of the feminized Kazakh steppe. This campaign, as the author so perceptively notes, was coincident with—and explicitly connected to—the Soviet conquest and idea of colonizing extraterrestrial space.

Based primarily on published sources, this is a rich and impressive piece of research and writing that will be of interest to a variety of audiences: literary scholars, science and technology studies specialists, environmental historians, and modern Russian historians. Of course, in a book as ambitious as this one, there will invariably be some areas that could have used further development. The author makes a bold claim that literature shapes the worldview and decisions people make, and as a result it “has the power to determine social and material realities” (117). Supporting that claim, however, would require more than the expert analysis of literature, film and art in this book, but also some sense of how everyday Russians and Soviets read and consumed these notions of soil and acted upon them. One also wonders if those toiling masses had their own ways of understanding soil.

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Russia's Hero Cities: From Postwar Ruins to Soviet Heroarchy. By Ivo Mijnsen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. xxii, 307 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photos. Tables. Maps. \$42.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.273

Mijnsen's monograph examines the ways in which the memorialization of the Great Patriotic War mediated the postwar urban development and local identities of Novorossiysk and Tula. As the author demonstrates, their induction into the pantheon of “Hero Cities” (in 1973 and 1976, respectively) crowned the official efforts to transform wartime trauma into an enduring source of political legitimacy and didactic values. The book's source-base is a mixture of published media, materials from central, regional, and city archives, and a score of interviews with members of the postwar generation.

Russia's Hero Cities presents a rich variety of commemorative discourses and practices in two regional (and heretofore overlooked) contexts. The book reveals the contested and polysemic nature of local war memory in the late Soviet period, which often frustrated the best efforts of the authorities to sculpt it into a “useable past.” Thus, while official narratives foregrounded the cities' wartime unity and stalwart resistance, family memories told of inglorious defeats, needless suffering, desertion, and collaborationism. Solemn monumental ensembles attempted to imbue commemoration with a sacred tenor, but the public also appropriated these spaces for private activities, like wedding photoshoots. Excursions to local battlefields aimed to awe and inspire, but were as likely to founder in the face of public disinterest and logistical challenges. To be sure, war memory had strong emotional resonance, but, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, it often escaped official molds.

Against this backdrop, Mijnsen finds a surprising level of public identification and local pride in Novorossiysk and Tula's “Hero City” status. Convincingly, he