

it became an empire. Smith is able to amplify and extract meaningful assumptions from early sources and to exercise self-control by not focusing too heavily on time periods that are over-represented by more standard archival offerings. Equally admirable is Smith's commitment to puzzling out what everyday Russians ate throughout the thousand-odd years of Russian history with which she is concerned. While written accounts, especially older ones, often focus on the experiences of elites or visiting outsiders, Smith goes out of her way to triangulate sources in order to discern whether the meals and ingredients these rarified sources describe would have also been available to the masses.

Smith misses little in her overview, but I would have liked more descriptions of external culinary influences that infiltrated Russia from the north and east. What impact did East Asian, indigenous, and Central Asian cuisines have on the identity of Russian food? Do salting, drying, or smoking techniques endure in nomadic and semi-nomadic indigenous groups? Are there overlapping techniques among the fermented cabbages, radishes, and other root vegetables that are so central to Russian cuisine and those featured in Korean and northern Chinese foodways? Likewise, there is a paradox in the Russian appropriation of Central Asian and Caucasian cuisines that Smith could have explored more fully. While many of these cuisines evolved out of pastoralist lifestyles, they were embraced in major Russian metropolises as the authentic cuisine of an agrarian Russian empire. The history of Russian food is one of contrasts, but it is also one of appropriation, improvisation and at times, erasure.

In spite of this lacuna, Smith does not shy away from serious themes. Particularly impressive is her inclusion of histories of the famines that have gripped Russia and adjacent territories for centuries. While many famines occurred in impoverished and agriculturally marginal districts, Russia and the Soviet Union are also infamous for some of the most devastating and politically orchestrated famines of the modern era, with a major famine occurring in the territory after World War II. Coherently and compassionately discussing the impacts of food scarcity in a book that is usually focused more on abundance is rare but very welcome.

Smith peppers her narrative, especially the first and last chapters, with personal photographs and descriptions of Russian cuisines, food markets she encountered as a researcher in the country in the 1990s and 2000s. While these first-person accounts offer less historical insight than the chapters based around more traditional written sources, they introduce a welcome element of ethnographic observation into the narrative that makes the text more approachable.

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Russkii vsadnik v paradigme vlasti. By Bella Shapiro. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2021. 704 pp. Appendices. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Tables. ₹900, hard bound.

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Myths about horses and in particular men riding horses abound in myths about Russian nationality, Bella Shapiro observes in the opening pages of this fundamental study. "The world is a horse," (1) says one Russian proverb; in any book about iconic images of Russian life, you will find the Bronze Horseman, Gogol's firebird-troika, and a prince at the crossroads. Aiming her research at specialists in Russian cultural history, Shapiro sets out to "reconstruct not the history of the rider, but his

image, in a historically dynamic way” (16). This means, in Shapiro’s view, staking out an interdisciplinary territory between “the history of our Fatherland, the history of Russian culture, and imageology.” Shapiro believes that the iconography of riders on horses started deep in Russian history and was carried forward by this history to the end of the horse age and beyond. Having won a war powered by oil and electricity, Marshal Georgii Zhukov rode a white horse at the Victory Parade in June 1945. This “last apotheosis” of the rider showed how “how closely different historical epochs are intertwined, and with what power archaic images [*predstavleniia*] influence our Nation’s cultural history” (464).

Shapiro’s book rests on both a deep and a broad reading of horse culture in Russia. Adopting Nikolai Berdiaev’s periodization of Russian history (Muscovite, Petrine, and Imperial), Shapiro divides the book into three corresponding sections. Although Part I (“The Muscovite Tsardom’s Rider”) opens with iconographic analysis of images inherited by sixteenth century Russia, most of the book focuses on the equestrian history of Russia’s court. Shapiro reconstructs how horses were ridden by Moscow’s elite, and how both the horses and the riders on them were dressed and trained. There are chapters focused on individual riders (such as Tsar Fedor Alekseevich Romanov, and Nicholas I), as well as chapters focused on evolutions in the technique and material culture of horse riding (equestrianism proper). To frame these biographical and cultural historical chapters, Shapiro puts them in chronologies largely driven by political and military history. We learn about the interconnection between shifts in war-fighting (the evolution of cavalry, from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century) and political reform. Most chapters line up with the reigns of specific emperors and empresses.

As a result, the book has a somewhat encyclopedic feel. While the material presented is often fascinating—and undoubtedly well-researched—this reader often had a hard time following the overarching, “historically-dynamic,” but continuing evolution Shapiro identifies as the book’s main aim. For a work that sits on the edge of Tartu-school style “culturology,” it says surprisingly little about literary or artistic matters (outside of a wealth of information on equestrian costume and dressage). One result is that the history of the image of the rider—in the sense of an artistic meme that exists within society and is variously produced and received—sometimes seems submerged in a mass of equestrian and historical detail.

This has advantages, it should be said. While there are various essays (gathered in the fundamental bibliographies Shapiro provides) that try to understand the mysteries of the Horseman and the Troika, this book has the unique virtue of surveying the role of horses in Russian monarchy more completely than I have previously seen. Anyone trying to think about the meaning of horses in Russian “scenarios of power” over time would do well to consult it. In addition to its comprehensive bibliography, Shapiro’s book also contains several hundred pages of appendices, publishing a wide range of historical materials.

If there is one clear narrative over time that comes through, it is one of acceleration. In the Tsardom of Muscovy, Shapiro observes, speed was thought to be “in an inverse relationship to the importance of the rider.” For this reason, “boyars on their horses rode out at a walking pace, with the bridle being held by their foot servants” (135). In the Petrine era and thereafter, however, royal riders took on the image of powerful, rapid attackers, reflecting an era where power was not so much held as taken by storm. If, as Shapiro contends, myths about horse-riders shape “the paradigm of power” in Russia (458), their evolution over time has yielded primarily “audacious horsemen, throwing their mounts into headlong attack” (464).

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