

Posted to H-EarlySlavic Wed, 9 Jul 2014 06:20:51 -0400

New books on "modernization" and "europeanization"

by Daniel Waugh

Posted by Daniel C. Waugh <dwaugh@u.washington.edu>

New books on “modernization” and “europeanization”

Istoriia Rossii: teoreticheskie problemy. Vyp. 2. Modernizatsionnyi podkhod v izuchenii rossiiskoi istorii. Otv. red. A. S. Seniavskii. Moskva: Institut Rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2013. 383 pp. ISBN 978-5-8055-0248-5.

T[at'iana] V[asil'evna] Chernikova. *Evropeizatsiia Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XV-XVII vekakh: monografiia.* Moskva: Izdatel'stvo MGIMO-Universitet, 2012. 944 pp. ISBN 978-5-9228-0876-7.

Let me be so bold as to suggest that most of the historians of Russia on this list who were trained in the West were introduced to their subject through the lens of “modernization” paradigms and have dealt in one way or another with questions of Russia’s “westernization” or “Europeanization.” Speaking for myself, that certainly is the case, my dissertation and various publications intended to contribute to the study of late Muscovite “westernization.” By their very nature these paradigms involve comparisons. Once I co-taught in a course comparing modernization in Russia and China, joining a colleague who, in addition to his major field in Qing history, had, like me, done a graduate field with Richard Pipes. I still think there are very interesting comparisons to be made between Peter the Great and the Kangxi Emperor. In my Imperial Russia course, I persuaded a student or two to write papers comparing Peter’s efforts at reform (a.k.a., “modernization,”) with those of Ottoman Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II.

In the Soviet Union, even though Western “modernization” paradigms, which became codified during the Cold War, were officially subjects for condemnation, ironically the prevailing Marxist orthodoxies were in fact but another variant of ideas about modernization which could trace their genealogies back through German Idealism and the Enlightenment and which, in various forms, had animated the Russian Intelligentsia and shaped the interpretations of many prominent pre-revolutionary Russian historians. Even though the collapse of the Soviet Union opened the doors to consideration of different interpretive approaches, little more than a decade ago, when I was confronting the question of what words I might use in Russian to discuss “modernization,” “modernity,” etc., it seemed that the Western terms still had no common equivalents. Somewhat perversely wanting apply to the Petrine era the idea of “non-modernity” (while doing penance for my earlier embrace of the “modernization” paradigm) and wanting to avoid calques, I settled on “*ne-sovremennost'*,” for which S. M. Kashtanov pointedly criticized me in a review. How quickly things change: as the books under review here show, “*modernizatsiia*” and even a bastardization such as “*vesternizatsiia*” (representing concepts that may overlap but are not identical) seem now to be quite acceptable.

Neither of these books has much new to say to those who were nursed on modernization approaches to Russian history. And in fact, as the authors of *Modernizatsionnyi podkhod* recognize, there is now a substantial body of scholarship suggesting we should leave the old paradigms behind, since they were so flawed in many ways. Indeed, the most interesting new scholarship on Russian history today has been doing precisely that. Nonetheless, as A. S. Seniavskii and his co-authors argue, it should be of interest at least for Russian scholars to see how those once-condemned theories just might provoke new ways of thinking about questions that never could be addressed by Marxist scholarship.

At first blush, there would seem to be little here for the historian of “pre-modern” Russia—Seniavskii’s opening essay, a tight, smart overview of modern Russian history down to the present that could be assigned to our students, clearly is animated by concerns about very recent history and the present. Those looking for anything of substance on Muscovy or the eighteenth century here will not find it, but I suspect they might just enjoy the author’s skewering of Jeffrey Sachs and those who adopted his ideas of shock therapy. Several of the other essays have an explicit modern focus.

Some authors do address the earlier history; I will mention but three of the contributions. V. V. Kerov takes up what might be considered the counter-intuitive case of the Old Believers and modernization, the question, of course, being how we parse their success as innovative entrepreneurs in a society where entrepreneurship was often hard to find. Not surprisingly, Max Weber does make a bow in one note. The essay concentrates on religious thought, but leaves one wanting a closer examination of the social basis for Old Believer commercial success, an issue which I think others have successfully explored. V. V. Alekseev’s essay addresses what he terms “protoindustrialization” and focuses on the example of the Demidovs’ iron works in the Urals. Again, a familiar topic: in the early going the Demidovs did manage to be at the forefront of the European iron industry, though eventually Russian production fell behind due to the failure to introduce new technologies and, as might have been emphasized, the cost of transportation. K. I. Zubkov’s contribution on the “Geopolitical Basis of Petrine Modernization of Russia” is concerned in the first instance with the theory and practice of mercantilism, a subject that provoked substantial disagreement (was Peter a mercantilist or not?). As, Zubkov suggests, some who claim Peter to be a mercantilist need to distinguish early and late phases of mercantilism, the first involving territorial expansion to control resources and develop markets, the second more focused on protectionist measures. I looked for, but did not find here, references to the work of Arcadius Kahan and Alexander Gerschenkron.

Modernizatsionnyi podkhod certainly is worth reading for what it tells us about the thinking of this new generation of Russian scholars. Even though they are not attempting to go into lengthy theoretical discussions or analyses of the Western literature (Russian readers might in fact wish to know more), for the most part they have done their homework. At very least the essays might persuade a reader that Henri Pirenne was right when he suggested to Marc Bloch that the two start their exploration of Stockholm with what was new: “If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore I love life.” (Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, p. 43).

Tat'iana Vasil'evna Chernikova <<http://www.mgimo.ru/users/document2519.phtml>> teaches broadly on Russian History at the Moscow State Institute (University) of International Relations (under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) <<http://www.mgimo.ru/about/>>, which published the book under review. While MGIMO began mainly as a training school for foreign service officers, it has now broadened its scope, although the emphasis still seems to be on "political economy." Chernikova has co-authored the methodological guide for first-year students taking a semester-long seminar on Russian History <http://www.mgimo.ru/files/241384/history_russia_mo.pdf>. The recommended readings (all in Russian), include for the pre-modern period two Western scholars: George Vernadsky and, ironically perhaps, Richard Pipes. The Institute also apparently offers a course on Russian History in English, where the readings are entirely from Western literature in English.

Pipes's *Russia under the Old Regime* lays the basis for Chernikova's argument in her fat volume, although in many ways the books are quite dissimilar. Animated by Cold War modernization theory, he set out to expose the origins of the Communist political system as an extension of the "patrimonial system" of the Old Regime. Her goal is a more positive one, to make a strong case that Russia was part of Europe long before many have been willing to admit, but that at various points when Europeanization (a largely elite development, fostered from above) could have led to modernization (social, political and economic change which had a broader social base), it failed to do so. What Europeanization had been occurring merely strengthened the "patrimonial regime" (*votchinnyi uklad*) and prevented modernization. She looks for various analogies between Russia and the West (colonial expansion, involvement in international relations with the potential to lead to alliances, military modernization) which of themselves may not in fact say much about whether Russia was becoming "European." Much of her attention understandably is on the hiring of foreign specialists, the development of international trade, and the growth of a foreign community in Russia. As a consequence of this, the culture and ideas of at least some of the Russian elite had changed significantly by the end of the 17th century, despite church-inspired efforts to prevent that from happening. All this, of course, is not news to us. In fact one of her favorite authors is V. O. Kliuchevskii, whose elegantly phrased distinction between "borrowing" and "influence" is invoked here to reinforce her argument. As had S. M. Solov'ev and Kliuchevskii, she finds the beginnings of Russian westernization well before the era of Peter the Great, but she goes them one step farther. She is more enthusiastic about the limited "westernizing reforms" and plans of the brief reign of Fedor Alekseevich (a critical point when history might have turned), than the efforts of Peter, who but strengthened the patrimonial regime with a vengeance and deepened the cultural divide between the elite and the mass of the population.

Many of my colleagues distance themselves from Pipes's book, and some have in fact written explicit rebuttals of parts of his argument, although as Chernikova's distressingly limited bibliography of works in English suggests, she is quite unaware of that scholarship. Indeed, not the least of the problems in her book is her selection of sources. The largest part of her primary source material is the foreign accounts of Muscovy, which she often quotes *in extenso* and excess (a single observation is never enough, even if we cannot be sure whether the third or fourth one is really independent of the first). When she gets into the 17th century, she finds a great deal of her evidence in a very few recent scholarly books (e.g., to her credit, T. A. Oparina [*Inozemtsy v Rossii XVI-XVII vekov*] and S. P. Orlenko [*Vykhodtsy iz Za;adni Evropy v Rossii XVII v.*], and

the Russian translation of Jan Willem Veluwenkamp's *Archangel: Nederlandse ondernemers in Rusland*). Among other things, we miss here a lot of important work on Muscovite diplomacy, and the institutional and human framework in which it operated. No one today should write about medicine in Muscovy relying on scholarship no more recent than 1907 and ignoring Sabine Dumschat's *Ausländische Mediziner*. While periodically Chernikova mentions Muscovite translations of foreign books, there is no sustained effort to treat that important topic or, for that matter, come to grips with the facts regarding the history of publishing in Muscovy. Too often she falls back on textbookish treatments or popularizations, and often is hopelessly out of date. For example, her brief discussion of painting (pp. 764-9), focusing on the development of portraiture, relies on E. S. Ovchinnikova's pioneering study published in 1955, even though more recent scholarship has abandoned Ovchinnikova's attributions of some of the famous *parsuny* to Russians. Her "analysis" of new developments in Russian cartography in the 17th century (pp. 761-64) cannot see beyond the *Kniga Bol'shomu Chertezhu*, even though Semen Remezov would be a perfect example to illustrate important points she wishes to make. She cites none of the important works, new or old, on Russian geography. It is odd that the only mention of the "*torgovyi chelovek*" Arsenii Sukhanov here (p. 713) is for his "discovery" of Egypt for Russians. Chernikova lists all the volumes of the important series of *vesti-kuranty*, but her brief treatment of what they tell us (pp. 668-70) suggests she has not really read them or learned very much from the recent book by S. M. Shamin on the subject. She really should have used the most recent translation of Jacques Margeret's account of the Smuta, rather than the earlier ones. In the process, from that new volume's appendix on Conrad Bussow, she might have been forced to re-think her bold assertions as to how highly cultured Bussow was. Her point in doing so, incidentally (p. 331), is to justify why she is so comfortable in relying so heavily on the foreign sources, even as she seems unaware of many of the important critiques of them.

More disturbing is the way she cites certain authors in support of her points, without telling the reader those scholars were using the evidence to suggest just the opposite. Thus, Richard Pipes's statistics on Russian urban growth, which he adduced to prove how little of it there was, are enlisted in the service of proving how much urbanization had advanced (cf. pp. 712-13 and Pipes, *Russia*, pp. 200-01). In general, Chernikova is wanting to attribute to a kind of Muscovite incipient middle class a much more modern sense of political awareness than the sources would seem to justify (cf. p. 497). Lindsey Hughes, frequently cited from the Russian translation of her book on Sophia, is invoked to confirm certain conclusions (by, among others, A. P. Bogdanov), where in fact she expressed skepticism as to whether we should take at face value what the sources say. Did Vasilii Golitsyn really think seriously about the abolition of serfdom as Foy de la Neuville claimed? Well, no (cf. here pp. 830-31, and Hughes *Sophia* [Engl. ed.], pp. 109-11).

As a compendium of a huge amount of material on the foreigners in Russia, Chernikova's book has some value, but her interest too often is biographical, leaving one wanting more substance on what they actually did. This is the case, for example, in her treatment of those involved in the Tula iron works. She clearly has her favorites, dictated in part by the ease of writing page after page based on Oparina's important book. I can share Chernikova's interest in Patrick Gordon, where the new publication and translation of his diary now make possible proper use of him as a source. That said, I think we need to ask questions as to how much we can safely generalize from what he tells us, and we certainly need to be more careful than she in citing him: his memo to V. V. Golitsyn on Russian southern policy in 1684 was a judiciously balanced treatment of pros and

cons, not unequivocal support for the Crimean campaigns; and there is little reason to imply that it set the course for much of later Russian policy in the south (cf. pp. 658-59). For the most part Andrei Vinius the younger is but a coda to the book, but even his empathetic recent biographer, I. N. Iurkin, does not go so far as to claim for him fluency in Russian, German, Dutch, Latin, English, French and Greek, and surely most of his translation activity should not be characterized merely as his *hobbi* (cf. here pp. 835-36).

A good editor could have made this into a much better book. Pipes at least is focused. Chernikova rambles, backtracks, and in general includes a huge amount of irrelevant detail. She frequently lapses into clichés about backwardness or the opposite. More importantly, whereas the essays in *Modernizatsionnyi podkhod* really do point the way forward, even if telling us little we did not already know, Chernikova seems caught in a time warp somewhere between Kliuchevskii's *Kurs* and Pipes's *Russia*. Don't ignore her book entirely though, as it might help you to appreciate the views of Russian consular officials who studied with her or more broadly Russian support for the current idea that Russia must reclaim its status as a "great power."