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New book: Tikhonov on the Moscow historical school in first half of 20th century.

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V[italii] V[ital'evich] Tikhonov. *Moskovskaia istoricheskaia shkola v pervoi polovine XX veka. Nauchnoe tvorchestvo Iu. V. Got'e, S. B. Veselovskogo, A. I. Iakovleva i S. V. Bakhrushina.* Moskva; S.-Peterburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2012. 328 pp. ISBN 978-5-90598-643-7.

A substantial study such as this one, even if its title misleadingly might seem to suggest there is not much new to be learned here, has to provoke us into thinking about a good many interesting questions. After a lengthy introductory section addressing the relevant historiography and laying out his understanding of what constitutes a historical “school,” and how we might conceptualize the analysis of generational differences, Tikhonov plunges into a chronologically organized set of chapters moving through the careers of his chosen four historians, all of them amongst the most prominent scholars of the 20th century who worked in the first instance on pre-modern Russian history. He notes that while there has been a great deal of publication and writing about Russian historiography in the past two decades, in which an emphasis has been laid on personal histories and personal interactions, less attention has been devoted to analyzing how the work of several individuals might reasonably constitute that of a “school” where their training and personal and professional interactions contributed in meaningful ways to the development of their research.

He distances himself from the idea of a sharp divide between the putative St. Petersburg and Moscow “schools” and the tendency of most to define the latter as that of the “students of V. O. Kliuchevskii.” In fact Kliuchevskii was only one of the influential mentors of these historians of the next generation in Moscow, and in their work, especially insofar as it concerned the close analysis and publication of historical sources, these younger scholars clearly bridged whatever the gap may have been between the Moscow and St. Petersburg approaches. A common thread in their work was an emphasis on social and especially economic history, with the latter occupying a more prominent place in their work than it had done for, say, Kliuchevskii.

The four historians came from different social backgrounds, but, with the exception of Bakhrushin, the youngest whose career did not fully develop until after 1917, they found it extremely difficult to accept the Revolution, seeing it as a disaster for all they held dear about Russian history and culture. Bakhrushin was the one amongst them who most readily (and genuinely) adopted postulates of Marxist historiography, although that did not spare him exile in consequence of the “Academic Affair” of 1930. Oddly (and Tikhonov has no explanation for this), it was Veselovskii, the one member of the group from a noble family, his economic position bolstered by an advantageous marriage, who avoided arrest. His university training in the Law Faculty, not as a historian, clearly set him apart from his historian colleagues and helps

us to understand the focus of his historical studies. One might think it also would have made him a target for arrest and exile.

While approximately the first two-thirds of the book concentrates on the pre-Soviet period, there is nonetheless here very substantial discussion of the fate of the lead characters after 1917, including some astute comments on whether or not M. N. Pokrovskii was the instigator of the 1930 purge (not so, according to Tikhonov). Although the basic facts are well known, it is noteworthy that after Pokrovskii and his ilk became the next victims of purges in 1934, the historians who had been trained under the Old Regime were brought back and to a limited degree resumed positions of importance in teaching and publication. Tikhonov makes it clear his focus here is on their contribution to Russian historiography; he indicates we still need full biographies of each of the four. Yet some questions, such as the important one of how Veselovskii's magnum opus *Feodal'noe zemlevladienie v Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi* was published at all in 1947 (even with a foreword, written apparently by L. V. Cherepnin, which denounced its approach) seem to beg for further investigation.

Even for readers not interested primarily in whether or not these historians were part of a "school" and what that might mean, Tikhonov's book should prove of great value. He systematically reviews and explains their major writings as well as some of their unpublished lecture courses. In doing this, he goes beyond mere summary and attempts to connect important points of emphasis with that of their predecessors and contemporaries. And then he provides interesting summaries of some of the reviews they received, not all of them published at the time. It is striking that Got'e and Veselovskii in fact differed substantially in the emphasis they placed on primary sources, the former, following N. A. Rozhkov, relying heavily on the cadastral records (*pistsovye knigi*) but the latter insisting that they needed to be treated with skepticism and economic data derived from other kinds of documents. Veselovskii's review of Got'e (characteristically couched in unsparing terms) in fact gave the editors of *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* pause before they finally decided to publish it. Yet, to a considerable degree here, Tikhonov seems quite right to suggest that the work of his four was closely inter-related, one building on the other, even if taking their investigations in different directions. They might be frankly critical of one another, but nonetheless were also supportive and maintained close professional relations at least up to the point when the purges of the Stalin era disrupted life as they had known it. The kinds of topics they chose to study were often similar. They shared deep concern about the preservation of archives when in the early Soviet period the repositories seemed to be threatened.

If one characteristic of the Moscow historians of the junior generation was to focus on much more narrowly defined topics than had their elders and mentors and at the same time to produce work less accessible for its generalization and at times seeming to be little more than just paraphrase of primary sources, this characteristic also means that the important monographs these historians produced retain considerable value even today. For example, no one has felt it necessary to re-do Got'e's study of provincial administration in Russia between Peter and Catherine; Iakovlev's study of the defensive lines of Muscovy's steppe frontiers is still fundamental, as one section of Brian Davies' recent book demonstrates.

Tikhonov's book (as also other recent contributions to the study of 20th-century Russian historiography and historians) raises some different questions in my mind. Having long been interested in these subjects, I find myself wanting to drop other projects and try to catch up on the spate of recent publications, most of which I have not seen. Yet I doubt I would do that, now in my twilight years and with miles to go before I sleep. For scholars in Russia, this material clearly is of great interest today, although perhaps, with more distance from the collapse of the USSR, it will seem less interesting to the next generation. For those of us outside Russia, even if in graduate school we were exposed to a certain amount of general reading on Russian historiography, often filtered through Western work that had a Cold War cast to its interpretations, we might wonder to what extent we really should care about such subjects. There is no compelling reason why Tikhonov should have said much about Western writings on Russian historiography, although he does cite with approval several times Terry Emmons' article on Kliuchevskii and his students published in 1990 in *Voprosy istorii*. There is no reference to Emmons' translation of Got'e's diary in 1988, the Russian original of which (cited here) appearing in print only a decade later.

I suppose to a considerable degree the answer to whether we should care about Tikhonov's subject would depend on whether we still use the works of historians such as those who are the focus of his book. As a graduate student, I read quite a bit of Veselovskii and at various times over the years have turned to Bakhrushin, whom anyone who works on Muscovite *gosti* or Siberia must consult. In connection with current projects, I really need to take a close look at Iakovlev on the *Zasechnaia cherta*, even if out of laziness I might settle ultimately for a distillation such as that in Davies' book. I have at least hefted Veselovskii's classic *Soshnoe pis'mo*, but have to wonder whether anyone today would ever venture to read its volumes from cover to cover or recommend it to their graduate students. Got'e's *Zamoskovyi krai* is on my shelf (in its Soviet reprint of 1937, the book first published in 1906), but still awaits my focused attention. Whether or not we have read them, I think we would have to agree that the Moscow four contributed significantly to our understanding of pre-modern Russia, and, it seems, passed on a great deal to yet another generation whom most of them helped train. Veselovskii is the exception here as a teacher, since he largely seems to have isolated himself in his study.

I guess, if anything, I am more interested in these historians' personal stories and interactions with one another than in the substance of their scholarship, since reading about such matters intersects with reflections about how the work of historians anywhere emerges, the fates that may unexpectedly determine career directions, and so on. Part of this story involves even some interesting American connections. Frank Golder met Got'e and arranged for his diary and other parts of his personal archive to be deposited in the U.S., where the diary was finally identified years later by Edward Kasinec. Golder also left a brief memoir about meeting Bakhrushin in 1925. One of the pioneers in the development of Russian history in the U.S., George Vernadsky, was trained in Iakovlev's seminar, not that I was ever aware of that when as an undergraduate taking my first course in Russian history, I heard Vernadsky in his dotage, long ago retired, give a presentation on Peter the Great. If anything, the more lasting impression of those same years was when Aleksandr Kerenskii, in *his* dotage, lectured to a packed house at Yale, still defending his actions in 1917.