
REVIEWS

MOSKAU: STUDIEN ZUR GESCHICHTE EINER MITTELALTERLICHEN STADT. By *Wolfgang Knackstedt*. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa, vol. 8. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975. x, 285 pp. Maps. DM 56, paper.

In recent decades the most significant contributions to Russian medieval history outside the Soviet Union have come from the pens of West German scholars (more particularly from the pupils of Manfred Hellmann of Münster). Their scholarship has been characterized by meticulous analysis of *all* available documentation (much of it published by Soviet scholars), a critical evaluation of the secondary literature, especially with respect to terminology and generalizations concerning historical processes, and finally, by an endeavor to place in comparative context a field whose approach and methodology had been rather parochial. These are precisely the traits that give distinction to the book under review, which surveys the building up and the social make-up of Moscow from its inception (first mentioned in a chronicle for 1147) to the end of the sixteenth century.

The work is not original in the sense of presenting new material or evidence. But it is a signal contribution in that it subjects all known evidence (notes, bibliography, index, and sketch maps make up more than one-third of the volume) to critical analysis, and on that basis tries to reconstruct the topographic and social development in the first four centuries of Moscow's history. This careful review clearly demonstrates the paucity and fragmentary nature of our documentation, especially when compared with the sources on major Western cities in the Middle Ages. Consequently, for the time being at least, many questions must remain unanswered and important problems unsolved, and Knackstedt performs a useful service in pinpointing them. Another outstanding feature illustrated by an analysis of the sources is their confused and vague terminology—characteristic of all medieval Russian terms that are not firmly rooted in clear legal conceptions and institutional continuities. This has enabled Russian historians to infer and extrapolate rather wildly in order to fit their country's historical evolution into "ideological" schemes, of which Soviet Marxism and chauvinism are only extreme manifestations. Knackstedt convincingly and politely sets the record straight, not so much by offering new conclusions, as by clearly marking off the permissible limits of interpretation and generalization.

The book consists of two parts in five chapters. In the first part (chapters 1–4), after a useful historiographic summary and a brief survey of the earliest documented history of Moscow, Knackstedt gives a careful and detailed account of the topographic development of the city's main parts (Kreml', Bol'shoi posad, Zaneqlimen'e, Zamoskvorech'e, Zaiiaz'e). The account is very instructive, not only on the city's political history but also on its social and economic evolution. The second part (chapter 5) provides us with a history of the major social groups of Moscow's population. Stress is laid on the fact that the city was the princely residence (and for this reason conclusions based on data from other towns, especially Novgorod, cannot be mechanically applied to Moscow, as even prominent scholars have done) which not only subjected it directly to the growth of the ruler's political power, but also accounted for a large part of the population's being in a dependent service relationship to the grand duke or tsar. In describing the group of leading merchants (*gosti* or *kuptsy*—on which Knackstedt puts forth interesting terminological considerations) the author analyzes the trade relations with the East, relations which are not only the best documented

but also the most significant, he argues, for the origins and development of the merchant class. In discussing Moscow's social-occupational make-up Knackstedt stresses the fluctuations in definition, role, and fiscal or administrative organization. In so doing he divides the "medieval" history of Moscow into an early period, from the mid-thirteenth century (before that time the city was quite insignificant) to the end of the fifteenth century; a middle period lasting until the end of the sixteenth century; and a third period, from the Time of Troubles to the reign of Peter the Great. The latter is left out of Knackstedt's account as being less organically tied to the earlier ones (it is to be hoped that Paul Bushkovitch's book will appear soon to complete the story).

Throughout the book, and especially in the latter parts, Knackstedt addresses the much discussed and controverted problem of the existence in Muscovy of guilds, corporations, and institutions of urban self-government. His conclusion is that juridical concepts and norms and institutional organizations of genuine corporate character cannot be documented for Moscow (or for most other Russian medieval towns in the post-Kievan period, except for Novgorod, of course). That there were groupings of craftsmen and parish and neighborhood associations is more than likely. But neither these associations (for example, *sotni*, *slobody*), nor urban officials (*tysiatskii*) had any autonomous administrative, fiscal, or judiciary authority; they all acted as agents of the ruler. The intermeshing of free and dependent individuals, the instability of their status, the primacy of the fiscal status of the land on which the urban population lived, and the presence of the prince, all precluded the development of those juridical and institutional features which had enabled Western medieval towns to play their well-known historical role.

To the well-nigh complete bibliography, this reviewer would add anent the important discussion of the dynamics of Moscow's population (pp. 169 ff) Arcadius Kahan, "Natural Calamities and Their Effect on Food Supply in Russia (An Introduction to a Catalogue)" (*Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 16 [September 1968]: 353-77) and as a useful reference aid, V. N. Shumilov, comp. and S. V. Bakhrushin, ed., *Obzor dokumental'nykh materialov tsentral'nogo gosudarstvennogo arkhiva drevnikh aktov SSSR po istorii g. Moskvy s drevneishikh vremen do XIX v.* (Moscow, 1949 [Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie MVD SSSR, Gosudarstvennyi arkhivnyi fond Soiuza SSR, Nauchno-spravochnye posobiia]).

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE PLAGUE WHICH RAGED AT MOSCOW, 1771 (LONDON, 1799). By *Charles de Mertens*. With an introduction and annotated bibliography by *John Alexander*. Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1977. ii, 50 pp. + x, 122 pp.

Before the late nineteenth century, ignorance of the causes and proper treatment of disease was such that doctors and government officials could have little influence on the course of an epidemic. To the extent that they encouraged medical intervention they often simply aggravated the condition of the afflicted and raised the death toll. The best doctors and public health officers were those who knew when to institute a quarantine and who had enough common sense to place patients in a clean and well-ventilated environment and to avoid heroic methods of treatment. Charles de Mertens was one of these level-headed physicians. During the Moscow plague of 1771 he was one of the first to recognize the scourge and to demand speedy government action, despite the objections of some of his less learned colleagues. He continued to give the government wise counsel throughout the crisis. But alas, even the best minds had no understanding of the plague's etiology and hence no chance of controlling it.