
James L. West, Iurii Petrov, et al., eds. *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 189p.

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This amply illustrated volume brings together essays by American and Russian scholars on one of late imperial Russia's more influential, yet neglected, social groups: urban (mostly Muscovite) merchants and their families. Anyone who has visited the Gorky Museum in Moscow or strolled its central quarters has noticed the remarkable residential and commercial buildings left behind by these entrepreneurs, yet throughout the Soviet era, historians vilified these "class enemies" and ignored their significant contributions to the development of economic, social, and cultural life in Moscow and other urban areas. *Merchant Moscow* attempts to remedy this neglect by collecting fourteen contributions by cultural, architectural, art, and business historians, and matching them up with rare photographs from the collection of Mikhail Zolotarev, a Moscow chemist who, since the mid-1980s has made collecting and documenting photographs of the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie his life's avocation. The combination of scholarly inquiry and contemporary photographs makes for a volume that rewards the eye as well as the intellect.

A brief review cannot do justice to the variety of this collection with its wealth of commentary on every aspect of merchant life. James L. West's useful two-part historical introduction traces the precarious existence of the social estate known as *kupechestvo* in relation to the Tsarist state, then briefly examines the central relationship between Russian merchants and their religious beliefs, anchored in the anti-tsarist protest movement dating to the 17th century known as "Old Belief." In conjunction with the essay by Diane Neumaier that follows, it also attempts to anticipate and respond to important questions about the role that documentary photography such as family and professional portraits played in not only recording the world but also interpreting it. Other than fine art photography, both pre- and post-revolutionary Russian efforts in this medium have been under-studied, and Neumaier's brief but revealing essay reflects a growing acknowledgment among scholars on both sides of the ocean of photography's polyvalency.

The rest of *Merchant Moscow* is divided into five thematic sections. Part One, "From Street Fair to Department Store," addresses the evolving business culture and practices of the *kupechestvo*. Picking up on the theme of photos as source material, Thomas C. Owen opens his argument about "the difficulty of grafting European institutions onto Russian society" (30) on the disjuncture between

image and reality in the photographic representation of commercial space, then continues with a historical overview of corporate history in Moscow up to the revolution. Irina V. Potkina looks at commerce and consumer patterns in her essay, while Iurii A. Petrov examines the financial underpinnings of Russia's grandest private enterprises. In the first two essays in Part Two, "Icon and Business Card: Merchant Culture, Ritual and Daily Life," Christine Ruane and Galina Ulanova look at patterns of dress and religious belief, respectively, while Karen Pennar, herself a descendant of the great Morozov family, offers a more personal view of everyday merchant life, based on her readings of unpublished family diaries. This section, as well as Part Three, "Beyond the Boardroom: Social Hierarchies," with its focus on the social life of the merchant class, incorporates contemporary analyses of class, gender, and education and includes the most experimental essays. This reader found Muriel Joffe's and Adele Lindenmeyr's elucidation of the often hidden role of merchant women in their "Daughters, Wives and Partners," and Sergei Kalmykov's investigation of shifting attitudes towards commercial education and their impact on cultural developments to be particularly informative.

In Part Four, "A City of One's Own," William Brumfield reprises his own earlier assessments of some outstanding examples of central Moscow's turn-of-the-century architecture, its sources and innovators. Joseph C. Bradley's more provocative investigation of merchants' leisure and voluntary activities challenges conventional characterizations of the merchant class as a group closed off to all but its own members and argues that the elite among them became prominent players in a range of civic-minded undertakings, from sporting clubs through scientific and artistic societies, especially by the beginning of the twentieth century. Part Five, "Merchant Dreams," is in some ways the most speculative and thought-provoking section of *Merchant Moscow*. Edith W. Clowes' argument that merchant culture was primarily visual and indeed hostile to the predominantly verbal mainstream culture explains the use by wealthy merchants such as Morozov, Shchukin, and Riabushinsky of art and architecture as a way of carving out a cultural "space of one's own" (156). Clowes ventures in several directions in her ambitious and nuanced essay: one only wishes that she had pursued in greater detail some of her intriguing lines of inquiry: the role of merchant women in cultural and educational projects; the tensions between intelligentsia and merchantry; the internal conflicts and self-perceptions that prevented them from developing "a cohesive rhetoric of public self" (159) that would validate their own achievements in the public realm and translate these into political power. James West continues the speculative mode of this last part, focusing in particular on the Riabushinsky family and its utopian and largely unsuccessful attempts to straddle two different eras

and consciousnesses, and to make the transition from *kupechestvo* to a more Western capitalist model while tracing a more indigenously Russian trajectory.

While many of the contributors to *Merchant Moscow* have written about Russia's merchant elite previously, this multi-faceted volume presents the reader with a single excellent venue for a diversity of social, economic, and cultural perspectives. And, whether it is because of the innate limits of its topic, or the editors' guidance, West and Petrov's collection presents a unified approach, with a number of recurring themes and references to provide a link between the different essays. The photographs, on unnumbered pages, easily comprise about one third of the book's volume and are invaluable to its authors' considerations of the practices and semiotics of merchant life. In sum, *Merchant Moscow* creates a truly synergetic space from which to contemplate and study a neglected topic and is a model for similar future efforts in cultural studies. ✨