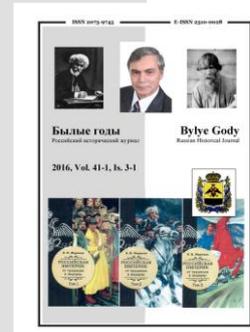


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A Glass Half-Full, Perhaps Three-Quarters: Imperial Questions in Boris Mironov's "Rossiiskaia Imperiia"

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Abstract

"Rossiiskaia imperiia" is a remarkable feat of scholarship – ambitious, intense, erudite, dazzling in its command of sources and topics. It's also idiosyncratic and unwieldy, abounding with so many claims and so much information that it can sometimes be hard to define or reduce to a single impression. The book is a curious hybrid: a deeply empirically based survey of social life in the imperial era that also, at least in parts, has the feel of a meandering essay with multiple digressions on disparate topics. Sunderland's remarks concentrate on just one aspect: the question of empire. Mironov's points are compelling in many ways. There are good reasons to draw attention to the empire's long-term historical stability and the particularities of tsarist rule that made the empire similar yet also different from other empires of its time. The vastness of the empire was stunning and clearly had a critical and overall advantageous impact on the development of the state. Numerous peoples indeed gained in important ways from their incorporation into Russian space, while ethnic Russians, as Mironov correctly points out, were not a "ruling people" who benefitted unambiguously from the imperial structure. "Rossiiskaia imperiia" generalized that created an overly one-sided picture of the empire's virtues. Long-lasting and diverse states like the Russian Empire are complex forms hard to fit into tight categories of success or failure. Squeezing them into these boxes invariably means leaving things out, but leaving things out, in turn, creates a distorted view. Mironov's book is far from a superficial glorification of the Russian experience. The work is full of scholarly complexity, contradiction, and nuance. It engages with difficult issues and invites constructive disagreement. But there is also no denying that Mironov tends to round up rather than round down when making generalizations about the tsarist experience, including the aspirations, practices, and consequences of Russian imperial rule. His insistence in "Rossiiskaia imperiia" in seeing tsarist Russian past as a glass half-full, perhaps three-quarters.

Keywords: Russian Empire; colonization and colonialism; expansion; ethno-confessional relations; national politics; "clioterapiia"; social history; modernization; anti-Semitism; racism.

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In the fourth edition of "Sotsial'naia istorii Rossii," (Mironov, 1999; Mironov, 2000a; Mironov, 2000b; Mironov, 2000c; Mironov, 2003) revised and retitled as "Rossiiskaia Imperiia," (Mironov, 2014; Mironov, 2015a; Mironov, 2015b) Boris Mironov offers a powerful restatement of

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his well-known argument for seeing imperial Russia as a successful state and society. More still than the previous editions, the book is also a passionate commentary on what Mironov sees as the errors of Russian historiography and national self-perception as well as a plea for changing course. Indeed, it's these intertwined aspects of "Rossiiskaia imperiia" that make the book so unique. It's all here – Mironov's view of his topic, his field, his country and the world, in particular, the relationship between Russia and the West, all of it bound together, in a direct and personal way that one rarely sees in academic histories in Russia or elsewhere.

Of course, this is also why the book is likely to be controversial. When Mironov published his massive anthropometric study of health and well-being in the imperial era a few years ago ("Blagosostoianie naseleniia i revoliutsiia v imperskoi Rossii"), reactions were mixed (Mironov, 2010; Mironov, 2012a; Mironov, 2012b). Some historians celebrated the work; others responded harshly, critiquing Mironov's use of data as well as his overall conclusion that the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 were the result of political machinations on the part of the "liberal-radical intelligentsia" similar to the "color revolutions" of the 2000s rather than proof of the tsarist order's failings as a system (Mironov, 2010: 692–693). Extending the exchange, Mironov published a collection of responses to his critics, "Strasti po revoliutsii," in two editions in 2013 and 2014, and now "Rossiiskaia imperiia", in effect, resumes the debate (Mironov, 2013). As he notes in his preamble, this is a truly new *new* edition of "Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii," a "comprehensive overhaul" (*kapital'naia pererabotka*) of the original that summarizes his wide-ranging research on the imperial era over the course of his long career and offers, in effect, the fullest possible statement of his views.

One thing about "Rossiiskaia imperiia" is clear: It's an assertive work, a book in the midst of an argument, and reading along, one indeed finds oneself wondering: Is Mironov right about tsarist Russia? Is he right about the Russian historical field and about how Russians need to reconsider their past? What of his methods, his terminology, his use of statistics? Are his conceptualizations valid? Does he overstate his case? Alternatively, despite the fact that this version of the book is more than twice as long as the earlier ones, is it possible, in the end, that he hasn't said enough?

Personally, I see "Rossiiskaia imperiia" as a remarkable feat of scholarship – ambitious, intense, erudite, dazzling in its command of sources and topics – in effect, the latest iteration of the magnum opus of a master historian. On the other hand, it's also idiosyncratic and unwieldy, abounding with so many claims and so much information that it can sometimes be hard to define or reduce to a single impression. More than the preceding editions, the book is a curious hybrid: a deeply empirically based survey of social life in the imperial era that also, at least in parts, has the feel of a meandering essay with multiple digressions on disparate topics: the virtues of art history, patterns of consumption in the contemporary world, the need for Russians to cast aside their "negativism" and take pride in their country, the shortcomings of post-modernism and microhistory, the relationship between modernization and happiness, and many other issues besides.

Though unusual and probably not to everyone's taste, I find Mironov's blend of research and commentary thought-provoking. As he noted in an essay a few years ago, historians are never without their "individual 'I.'" Try as we might to be "sterile" communicators of historical truth, we cannot magically scrub ourselves from our scholarship. Our personal "intellectual orientations and political affinities" are always present (Mironov, 2013: 104). To his credit, in "Rossiiskaia imperiia," Mironov is completely forthright about his orientations and affinities. His individual "I" as a historical thinker is in full view. Responding to the book, one thus finds oneself inevitably reacting both to what he is saying and the distinctly "Mironovian" way in which he's saying it.

Because the work is so sprawling, my remarks here will concentrate on just one aspect: the question of empire. Empire is my area of interest, so the choice to emphasize this subject plays self-servingly to what I know best. Imperial concerns were also the focus of a critique I wrote in the early 2000s in response to first edition of "Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii" (Sunderland, 2001; Mironov, 2001). In that sense, Mironov's arguments about empire are familiar to me, making it easier to return to them a second time.

Yet for all that, a new look at what Mironov has to say about empire seems nonetheless justified. For one, with this edition, the word "empire" now figures in the title of the book, suggesting a new prominence to his consideration of the subject. Secondly, much as in the earlier editions, empire continues to serve as a kind of metaphorical antechamber for the work as a whole since imperial themes provide the focus of Chapter I of Volume I, now entitled "Colonization and

its Consequences” (“Kolonizatsiia i ee posledstviia”), which is not only one of the book’s longest chapters (210 pages of text + 31 more of notes – practically a book in itself!) but also one of two that he enhanced the most for the new edition (for Mironov’s statement on this, see: (Mironov, 2014: 12)). Finally, the imperial thematic seems all the more tightly linked here to Mironov’s primary historical argument: the contention that imperial Russia was a successful state. “Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii” drew attention to imperial expansion and policy as key dimensions of Russian success. “Rossiiskaia imperiia” makes this point still more emphatically, which itself suggests the usefulness of looking into Mironov’s understanding of empire and where and how he situates it in his work.

So, what is new about the imperial picture presented in “Rossiiskaia imperiia”? The most obvious changes indeed appear in Chapter 1, where Mironov has now added extensive discussions on topics such as Soviet and especially post-Soviet historiography and the position of Jews within the empire. Meanwhile issues treated somewhat briefly before have been considerably expanded – for example, the section on the “principles of [Russian] nationality policy,” which now also offers new sub-sections on “the cost of empire” (*tsena imperii*) and “the undergovernment of the national periphery” (*nedoupravlenie national’nymi okrainami*), and a more detailed discussion of theories of geographical and demographic determinism in the Russian context. Inclined towards statistics, Mironov grounds much of the authority of his argument on numerical values – measurements of land, population, grain production totals, heads of stock, income, literacy rates, levels of caloric intake, indices of height and weight, and so forth. If anything, this new version of “Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii” rests still more resolutely on this methodology: Chapter 1 of the first edition of the book included 11 statistical tables, Chapter 1 of “Rossiiskaia imperiia” includes 49¹.

Looking beyond these new additions, however, Mironov’s overall approach to the empire in “Rossiiskaia imperiia” remains largely the same as before. Despite the new title, this book, like the earlier editions, is not a history of the empire as a multiethnic polity or society but rather of the Russians and their institutions and social practices, and the geographic emphasis falls more readily on “Russia proper” than the imperial borderlands. The word “empire” in the title evokes the name of the state rather than a special focus on the relations that made up imperial society. In fact, Mironov argues more explicitly here than before that no such society ever existed. As he puts it, the empire’s various ethnic groups “did not live together as a large united community. The languages they spoke were different, literally and figuratively” (Mironov, 2014: 287).

Moving beyond Chapter 1, one finds scattered references to the diversities of the empire. For example, Mironov notes differences in the rate of out-of-wedlock births among different ethnic and religious groups in Chapter 3; the process of the “nuclearization” of the family in the Baltic provinces in Chapter 4; and statistics on fines levied against workers in various factory districts around the country, including the district of Warsaw, in Chapter 12. Yet these and other interesting remarks on the comparative landscape of the empire generally don’t drive the argument as much as provide color and context. (One exception is a revealing comparison between literacy rates in Russia and the Baltic (Mironov, 2015b: 485–487)). As a rule, Mironov does not take up empire as an analytical framework, even with regards to subjects that might seem to invite an imperial approach. For example, a new chapter on collective mentalities and perceptions (Chapter 12) offers insightful reflections on how imperial-era Russians thought about peasants, the urban lower classes, the intelligentsia, and their own work ethic, but not how they perceived the different ethnic and religious groups around them. (Mironov touches on Russian stereotypes of non-Russians briefly (Mironov, 2014: 164–165)). Likewise, Chapter 13 on the “results of Russian development during the imperial era” as well as the stimulating Conclusion to the book, both of which range across numerous topics, have little to say about imperial themes.

The empire thus serves essentially the same function in “Rossiiskaia imperiia” that it did in the earlier editions of the book: it sets the stage for the story rather than providing the substance of the story itself.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with this approach. All historians make choices about what to cover and what to leave out. The key with every historical work is the integrity of the method and its suitability for addressing the questions being posed. Mironov’s goal, which he described in the earlier editions but expands upon here, is effectively a national one – he wants his book to help in making a more historically informed citizenry. As he sees it, Russians today have a

¹ For more on Mironov’s view of the value of “mathematical methods” in history, see the interesting reflections in his “Istoriia v tsifrakh” (Mironov, 1991), esp. the Foreword and Chapter 1.

dim view of their country's past in large part because generations of Russian and foreign interpreters have stressed the negative, creating an abiding impression of tsarist Russia as "a colossus on feet of clay" rather than "a great state with a glorious history and promising portents for future development" (Mironov, 2014: 11). Thus what the country needs now is "cliotherapy," which Mironov describes as a more balanced historical approach that pays attention to successes as much as shortcomings (Mironov, 2014: 18). As Mironov sees it, historians are the "physicians of society" (*sotsial'nye vrachi*), while the patient is Russian society itself, which needs to be "healed" of its negative thoughts and practices, including its overly negative view of the national past (Mironov, 2014: 18).

One obvious implication of this perspective is that empire *per se* is not the main concern of Mironov's book. The thrust is national history, and therefore we shouldn't expect the work to prioritize an imperial analytic. Another is that, where the book does address imperial themes, it's likely that Mironov will emphasize the positive.

And indeed, the ledger on the empire in "Rossiiskaia imperiia" ends up squarely on the plus side, highlighting far more the empire's stability and practical policies of accommodation and toleration than its injustices or failings. The earlier editions made the same argument, and Mironov notes that his views on this score have only grown stronger since the book first appeared, in part due to his continued reading in the large historiography on empire (Mironov, 2014: 94). It's perhaps not surprising, then, that the new edition stresses the positive all the more firmly. One small but telling indication: The title to the conclusion of Chapter 1 in the first edition is "Long Live Russia's Expanses!" (*Da zdravstvuiut rossiiskie prostory!*), while the title of the same section here is more emphatic: "The Russian Empire – It Made One Proud" (*Rossiiskaia imperiia – eto zvuchalo gordo*) (Mironov, 2014: 269).

The basic gist of Mironov's view, however, is unchanged and comes down to what I see as the same set of four basic claims: (1) The vast size of the Russian state was more a blessing than a hindrance for Russian development; (2) The state's growth over time ultimately did more good than bad for the Russians and especially for the empire's other peoples; (3) despite a "colonial aspect" (*kolonial'noe sostavliaiushchee*) to aspects of Russian expansion (Mironov, 2014: 96), the empire was "never a colonial state (*derzhava*) in the European sense of the word" (Mironov, 2014: 271), by which Mironov seems to mean that it therefore wasn't as exploitative as its European counterparts; and (4) the empire operated as a generally successful political structure for centuries and was never predestined to collapse. In fact, in Mironov's view, while the fateful turn towards "greater integration" that began in the 1860s increased tensions within the state, the threat of collapse did not really surface until World War I, which then changed everything (Mironov, 2014: 278). If the tsarist government had avoided or quickly won the war, or if the Provisional Government had managed to defeat the Bolsheviks, the empire might not have come apart at all.

As I wrote fifteen years ago, Mironov's points are compelling in many ways. There are good reasons to draw attention to the empire's long-term historical stability and the particularities of tsarist rule that made the empire similar yet also different from other empires of its time. The vastness of the empire was stunning and clearly had a critical and overall advantageous impact on the development of the state. Numerous peoples indeed gained in important ways from their incorporation into Russian space, while ethnic Russians, as Mironov correctly points out, were not a "ruling people" who benefitted unambiguously from the imperial structure. And yet, in my view, the first edition of "Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii" made a number of generalizations that created an overly one-sided picture of the empire's virtues, and this remains the case with "Rossiiskaia imperiia." Long-lasting and diverse states like the Russian Empire are complex forms hard to fit into tight categories of success or failure. Squeezing them into these boxes invariably means leaving things out, but leaving things out, in turn, creates a distorted view.

Rather than repeat the discrete points I made in regards to the first edition of *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii*, let me focus here on two general issues that seem special or more emphasized in the latest edition.

(1) Colonization and Colonialism

The term *kolonizatsiia* is a "keyword" of Mironov's treatment of empire in "Rossiiskaia imperiia"¹. It appears in the earlier editions, too, of course, but here it's more prominent, figuring in the title of Chapter 1 ("Kolonizatsiia i ee posledstviia;" the original title was "Territorial'naia

¹ On "keywords" as words laden with special meanings for "understanding culture and society," see (Williams, 1983: 15).

ekspansiia i ee posledstviia”) and serving as an organizing concept for an expanded early section of the chapter focusing on the history of territorial growth and land settlement. What does Mironov mean by the term? The short answer is many things. On the one hand, he uses it in reference to peasant settlement – or resettlement – into new territories – that is the physical movement of people (Mironov, 2014: 94). It’s also the larger process of state and socio-economic incorporation that unfolds along with the arrival of settlers. In that regard, it runs in synch with the term *osvoenie*, which also appears in the chapter (Mironov, 2014: 96). In another usage, Mironov employs *kolonizatsiia* in tandem with *ekspansiia*, since, as he argues (correctly, in my view), state expansion and colonization often unfolded together in the Russian case (Mironov, 2014: 77). Finally, Mironov seems to imply a more specific meaning to the word, suggesting that *kolonizatsiia* refers explicitly to the process of taking over “territories unclaimed by any other state and populated by tribal societies living at a non-agricultural stage [of development.” (*na stadii prisvaivaiushchei ekonomiki*) (Mironov, 2014: 77). In other words, *kolonizatsiia* would be appropriate to use in describing settlement in 17th-century Siberia but not 19th-century Ferghana.

At the same time, other aspects of colonization are left out or underemphasized. Mironov does not address the issue of violence in a systematic way, for example. References to the operations of conquest are also rare, despite the critical importance of conquest in the history of Russian expansion. He notes that the Russians didn’t drive native peoples onto reservations as Europeans and their descendants did in North America and Australia, which is certainly true. But he goes farther to say that “representatives of other ethnicities” settled on “the Russians’ own lands” (*sobstvenno russkie zemli*) no less than the Russians settled on “incorporated lands” (*prisoedinnnye*) (Mironov, 2014: 96) (meaning, presumably, non-Russian lands “incorporated” in the periphery), and that incoming Russians arriving on those lands, as a rule, didn’t displace native populations. As he puts it, “In general, Russians resettled onto unpopulated lands in New Russia, the Southeast, the Northern Caucasus, and Siberia, and very rarely on lands occupied and used by other peoples.” (Mironov, 2014: 97)

To me, these are overstatements that reduce some of the complexity of the empire. I’m not sure which groups Mironov is referring to when he states that other ethnicities settled on Russian lands or which Russian lands in particular he has in mind (he may be making a reference to this: (Mironov, 2014: 273), but it’s not clear). Still, on the face of it, far fewer foreign settlers (Germans, Swiss, Scots, etc.) moved to Russia than Russians moved to the imperial periphery during the imperial era. Chinese migrant laborers did not settle permanently in massive numbers in the Russian Far East. Ukrainians, Jews, and Kabardians did not settle much in central Russia. Conversely, native peoples in Siberia, the Volga region, and the Urals were indeed displaced from areas they had settled or used prior to the Russians’ arrival, often from along the rivers, which served as the principle arteries for Russian expansion. Pressures of Russian as well as non-Russian (Mari, Mordvin, Chuvash, Teptiar, Mishar) settlement helped precipitate revolts in Bashkir territory across the 1700s. The massive Kalmyk exodus of the late 18th century was also influenced by increasing settlement and state incorporation. The lands of New Russia and the Northern Caucasus were not “unpopulated” in an absolute sense. Large areas served as zones of pasturage for nomadic and semi-nomadic groups. As the Russian state expanded into these territories, it oversaw the gradual but steady reduction of land used by native groups in ways that were both different from and strikingly similar to processes elsewhere – the Indiana Territory of the United States, for example, or the British Cape Colony or French Algeria.

At the same time, it’s clear that Mironov is *not* using “colonization” in the uncritical manner of Kliuchevskii and other Russian (metropolitan?) historians of the late imperial era who described Russia’s history as the “history of a country that colonizes itself” and thus effectively elided the complexities of empire from the national narrative.¹ The approach in *Rossiiskaia imperiia* is different: Rather than stepping around or ignoring the problem of empire, Mironov engages it head-on. Yet like Kliuchevskii, he nonetheless appears to regard Russian settlement as a largely natural and non-disruptive process – a function of “relative agrarian overpopulation” in Russian areas, which then leads to the largely benign filling-in of unclaimed and unused lands elsewhere (Mironov, 2014: 107). The process of colonization/settlement/incorporation in the Russian case, in my view, was more complicated and contradictory than this. It was at once hard and soft, brutal and benevolent, driven by rural people (Russians and non-Russians alike) who weren’t thinking at

¹ For more on the way that Kliuchevskii and other late imperial Russian historians interpreted colonization as a motif of national rather than imperial history, see (Sunderland, 2004: 209–212).

all about building the empire as well as state planners who were, and it unfolded in phases and modes that varied considerably over time and place, making the generalizations that Mironov offers about the process here incomplete.

Mironov also leaves things somewhat untidy in his discussion of another thorny issue related to colonization: the question of whether imperial Russia should be seen as a “colonial empire in the European sense of the term.” On the one hand, Mironov makes it clear: no, we shouldn’t see Russia this way. The empire, “in essence” (*v sushnosti*) was not a European colonial state. He critiques late imperial Marxist and Soviet-era scholarship that cast the state in this light as well as contemporary post-Soviet historiography in Uzbekistan and other former republics and autonomous regions that does the same thing (Mironov, 2014: 37, 78–79, 80–83). Yet, at the same time, he nonetheless acknowledges that there was a “colonial aspect” to certain “cases” of Russian expansion and also that, at least “according to a few scholars,” “elements of ‘Western colonialism’ can indeed be observed in regards to [Russian policies in] Siberia, the Caucasus, and Turkestan” (Mironov, 2014: 96, 271, 275).

Unfortunately, Mironov does not define what a “colonial empire” was “in the European sense of the term,” so it is difficult to know exactly what he means when says that Russia wasn’t one, but the implication seems to be that the Russians were not operating a colonial empire because their expansion unfolded differently and they didn’t discriminate against or exploit their colonized peoples in the way that Westerners did. The Russian state expanded out of military-strategic concerns. Economic goals were less important, and the territories they took over were less profitable, even unprofitable (with the exception of Siberia). Indeed, Mironov argues, Russia’s borderlands cost the country much more than they ever brought in (Mironov, 2014: 139–140). Russian colonizers meanwhile were closer to the peoples they conquered and settled around. They did not draw rigid lines between “us” and “them.” Rather than excluding native peoples, they incorporated them into the imperial state.

These generalizations are not wrong, of course, but they are incomplete, in my view. Every one of these broad statements could be qualified in ways that made imperial Russia seem *more* rather than less comparable to Western colonizing states. One example: Mironov states categorically that “the Russian Empire never knew racism” (Mironov, 2014: 130), which would certainly fit with the overall view that Russians did not draw strict lines between “colonizers” and “colonized” and that Russia in general was not “a colonial state in the European sense of the term” since it’s well known that race was a critical organizing principle of modern European empires. Yet to say that the Russian empire never experienced racism is an overstatement that ignores aspects of the history of Russian rule in Central Asia and the Far East where Russians and “natives” (*tuzemtsy*) resided in “new” and “old” Tashkent and “yellows” (*zheltye*) found themselves moved into Chinese “quarters” on the basis of sanitary and criminal prejudices in ways similar to practices that were common in more overtly racist societies like the US, Canada, and Australia (Sorokina, 2001; Rakhmonova, 2010; Sahadeo, 2007).

Mironov ultimately concludes that the tsarist state reflected the attributes of varied empires – European overseas empires, the Chinese (Qing?) and Ottoman empires, the Mongol empire, and others besides – but that Russia combined the features of these states in its own fashion and thus its overall imperial profile was unique (Mironov, 2014: 272). I agree with this. But then again, uniqueness is a quality that one might apply to every empire – everything depends how finely one chooses to define the line between similarity and difference. In my view, Mironov is often too categorical in stressing the positive distinctions of the Russian empire in comparison with other imperial states and colonizing peoples, especially Western colonial states, which leads him to stop short of fleshing out important issues, such as a full discussion of Russian colonialism and of colonialism more generally. His position in this regard seems to echo the tensions implicit in much older qualifications of Russia as being both comparable to the West yet also more considerate. As Nikolai Karamzin put it in the 1820s while referencing Moscow’s expansion into Siberia, Ermak was “the Russian Pizarro” – “no less terrifying to the savages but gentler on humanity” (Karamzin, 1997: 226).

(2) Russians and Non-Russians: Who Did Better By the Empire and Why?

One of the salient claims of *Rossiiskaia imperiia* is that the Russians were not a “ruling people” but rather an “unprivileged national minority” within the empire (Mironov, 2014: 271–272, 264). As Mironov argues, ordinary Russians enjoyed no special privileges and, in fact, were poorer, less literate, less represented in the professions, more likely for longer to bear a greater obligation of military service, more likely to be enserfed, more taxed, and generally burdened with

disproportionate costs in supporting the empire, including the cost of social tensions in the non-Russian borderlands, which boomeranged back to the “metropole” and led to the Russians’ own rising dissatisfaction with the government (Mironov, 2014: 264, 270). Mironov adds that “the non-Russian peoples provided the Russians with a model of disloyalty..., which then encouraged the rise of oppositionist sentiment in the country as a whole and weakened the power of the central authorities” (Mironov, 2014: 270). The non-Russians, rather than the Russians, thus led the way in undermining the imperial state, even though, in his view, ironically, it was precisely the non-Russians (or at least a subset of them) who benefitted from it the most (Mironov, 2014: 279–280).

Indeed, plebeian Russians by the late imperial era lived poorly compared to a number of other ethnic groups according to a variety of indicators, but did they live poorly because those other peoples were favored by the government and they, the Russians, were less favored? Were the Russians exposed to greater pressures because non-Russians were treated more gently? Alternatively, did the non-Russians do better within the empire due to imperial policy or to other factors? Mironov overall seems to answer: Yes, the empire is the cause. Imperial necessities forced the Russians to bear greater burdens and the non-Russians to be granted greater concessions, and though everyone overall, including the Russians, benefitted from the general stability of the empire and the greater aggregate wealth, opportunity, and status that flowed from territorial expansion, the non-Russians came out, according to his reckoning, 15 % better off (Mironov, 2014: 282).

Here, too, in ways similar to his position on colonization, Mironov seems to me to stretch the argument too much. As I see it, these questions of relative cost or benefit can’t be answered so neatly because the effects of life within the empire were too diffuse. The landscape was too uneven and disjointed to be a zero-sum game in which one group’s burden became another’s advantage. Plus, much of what explains the relative wealth or health of one group versus another was only partially the result of government policy. As Mironov correctly points out in his summary to Chapter 1: “The central government functioned at best as the conductor, while the peoples of the empire were the musicians who played the music. The arrangements and orchestration came from the capital, but the music itself did not” (Mironov, 2014: 287).

The position of the Jews in the empire is interesting to consider in this regard. Mironov’s new section on the “Jewish question” asks, effectively, were the Jews as bad off as the traditional historiography would have us believe? Marshalling an array of compelling statistics, his answer, overall, is “no.” Though “the most discriminated against people of the empire,” Russian Jews nonetheless experienced dramatic population increase, preserved their identity and culture, and “achieved noted success in every area of life, while modernizing themselves more than other ethnicities within the state” (Mironov, 2014: 216). What created this outcome? Mironov’s short answer: Both the overall success of Russia’s rapid economic development in the post-reform era and the Jews’ ability to take advantage and overcome many of the obstacles facing them (Mironov, 2014: 217). Thus here, too, the empire provides a milieu for success even as it discriminates.

Mironov is critical of government policy. He regrets that the state did not grant civil rights to the Jews more quickly. If it had done so, the some 2 million Jews who emigrated after the 1880s (most of them to the United States), would probably have remained and continued to prosper, adding to the empire’s development rather than America’s. The government thus made a costly error based on what Mironov correctly points out was unfounded prejudice and fear (Mironov, 2014: 220–21). He also notes that, though the pogrom wave of 1905 was not directed from St. Petersburg, certain local police and government officials nonetheless fanned anti-Jewish violence during the revolutionary turmoil (Mironov, 2014: 178). In other words, Mironov does not dismiss the reality of state prejudice. Yet his treatment of the Jewish question overall, again to me, seems so strongly shaped by the need to see the empire as a glass half-full that it, in turn, leads to distortions.

Thus, Mironov describes anti-Semitism as a Western import (Mironov, 2014: 218), but he doesn’t elaborate on the virulent development of the ideology in Russia. There is no mention of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” here, for example, no Beilis Case, though the outcome of the trial would have otherwise fit with aspects of his argument. We read of members of Russian *obshchestvennost’* rising to the defense of Jews (Mironov, 2014: 216–217). He cites a passage from the conservative writer Nikolai Leskov denouncing anti-Jewish prejudice (Mironov, 2014: 220). Yet we don’t find a passage espousing anti-Semitism by other conservatives, like, say, Vasilii Shul’gin, which, together with Mironov’s quotes showing Russian support for Jews, would have offered a fuller sense of context.

Finally, Mironov argues that it would be “incorrect and hardly just” to describe state policy toward the Jews as anti-Semitic, characterizing it instead as “inconsistent, meandering, and multivalent.” (*neposledovatel'naiia, izvilistaia i mnogoznachnaia*) (Mironov, 2014: 217). In other words, Jewish policy was complex, much like Russian “nationality policy” in general. But for all this, isn't it still appropriate to describe state policy toward the Jews as anti-Semitic? Anti-Semitism was a big tent during the late tsarist years. As an elastic prejudice, it evolved and diversified over time, developing numerous offshoots and insinuating itself into a wide range of social positions, in ways similar to other forms of intolerance. White attitudes and state policies toward blacks in the US during the Reconstruction era, for example, North and South, encompassed a spectrum of views and measures, some more tolerant than others, but they were all racist in that they were informed by racial stereotypes and prejudices. Describing the late tsarist state's approach to the Jews as anti-Semitic is not controversial, in my view. The label is a complicated one, but it's not incorrect or unjust to use it.

In sum, “Rossiiskaia imperiia” offers a compelling portrait of the tsarist order as a complex multinational state. Mironov's basic argument – that we should appreciate the Russian empire as a successful enterprise – is consistent with previous editions of the book, though he has added much new empirical material and the emphasis he brings to discrete points is also different. If I had to describe the work with a single adjective, I'd call it a “Mironovian,” by which I mean bold, wide-ranging, massive in scale and evidence, passionate, and creatively unconventional in the way it combines statistical and narrative evidence as well as historical argument and social commentary. This is also a fitting description of Chapter 1, which focuses most directly on Russia's profile as an imperial state. This massive chapter represents just one part of the book (in fact, a small part – only about 13 % of the total measured by pages), but it's no less remarkable for that.

At the same time, it seems to me that part of what makes Mironov's book unconventional – namely, his forthright decision to bare his “individual I” and make plain his goal to offer his fellow Russians a more positive view of the national past – leads him into generalizations that are more one-sided than they should be. “Rossiiskaia imperiia,” more still than the previous editions of *Sotsial'naiia istoriia Rossii*, is a book committed to making a public case – a case for seeing Russia as a country to cherish and believe in. For Mironov, as a historian, the way citizens conceive their national past is critical to this process. If they can look back and see success behind them, it then becomes easier for them to imagine success ahead of them as well. As he noted in a forum devoted to his book on anthropometrics a few years ago, “A successful past is a down payment on a successful future” (*Uspeshnoe proshloe – zalog uspeshnogo budushchego*) (Mironov, 2013: 103). Thus his insistence in “Rossiiskaia imperiia” in seeing tsarist Russian past as a glass half-full, perhaps three-quarters.

Mironov's book is far from a superficial glorification of the Russian experience. The work is full of scholarly complexity, contradiction, and nuance. It engages with difficult issues and invites constructive disagreement. But there is also no denying that Mironov tends to round up rather than round down when making generalizations about the tsarist experience, including the aspirations, practices, and consequences of Russian imperial rule. One virtue of his book, in my view, is that it does this in an open and thought-provoking way.

In a compelling metaphor in the first section of Chapter 1, Mironov describes the empire as “neither a prison house of peoples nor a house of friendship but rather... a dormitory with a headman in charge.” Life in the dorm was often contentious, and the headman was only human – he liked some of the dorm residents better than others. But overall, his intentions were good, and he did the best he could to treat everyone the same. Only at the very end, under challenging circumstances and with most of the residents better off than when they'd moved in, did some of them set about trying to leave or carve up the building (Mironov, 2014: 92–93).

Much of the reaction to Mironov's approach to the empire, I suspect, will come down to how one responds to this image and perhaps how one feels about dorm life in general. If you remember your dormitory experience fondly and you felt the people in charge treated you fairly, the model will resonate. If your dorm wasn't so good for you, the image may appear much too rosy. Either way, though, it will make you think.

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Стакан, наполненный наполовину, возможно, на три четверти: имперские вопросы в «Российской империи...» Бориса Миронова

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Аннотация. «Российская империя» – замечательное достижение науки – амбициозное, эрудированное, ослепляющее богатством использованных источников и количеством рассмотренных проблем. Это уникальное и громадное по объему произведение, изобилующее таким большим числом выводов и столь значительной информацией, что порой затруднительно определить в своей оценке и выразить свое мнение одним словом. Книга представляет собой необычное сочетание глубокого эмпирического исследования социальной жизни России в имперскую эпоху и эссе на разнообразные темы, которые временами перемежаются с анализом. Замечания дискуссанта концентрируются на имперских вопросах.

Концепция Миронова заслуживает одобрения во многих отношениях. Как он правильно указывает, следует учесть и положительно оценить долгосрочную историческую стабильность Российской империи и принципы этноконфессиональной политики правительства, превратившие ее в своеобразную конструкцию, в одних отношениях подобную другим империям, в других – от них отличавшуюся. Ошеломляющая необъятность империи на самом деле оказала принципиальное и позитивное влияние на развитие государства. Многочисленные народы империи действительно извлекли пользу из их присоединения к российскому пространству, в то время как этнические русские не были «господствующим народом», получающим наибольшую выгоду от имперской структуры. И все же картина, рисуемая Мироновым, представляется критику несколько односторонней, так как преувеличивает достоинства империи. Долгую, сложную, противоречивую историю различных народов в империи «трудно вписать в категории успеха или провала». А если это сделать, то неизбежны пропуски, которые могут создать искаженное представление об империи. Книга далека от поверхностного прославления российского опыта – это вполне академическое произведение, рассматривающее империю во всей ее сложности, противоречивости и разнообразии. Однако Б.Н. Миронов, анализируя имперский опыт, склонен обобщать его скорее в положительном, чем негативном ключе, – «он округляет в сторону увеличения, а не в сторону уменьшения. Российская империя в его изображении напоминает автору стакан, наполненный наполовину, возможно, даже на три четверти.

Ключевые слова: Российская империя; колонизация и колониализм; экспансия; этноконфессиональные отношения; национальная политика; клиотерапия; социальная история; модернизация; антисемитизм; расизм.

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