

THE KURBSKII-GROZNYI APOCRYPHA: THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY GENESIS OF THE "CORRESPONDENCE" ATTRIBUTED TO PRINCE A. M. KURBSKII AND TSAR IVAN IV. By *Edward L. Keenan*. With an appendix by *Daniel C. Waugh*. Russian Research Center Studies, 66. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971. xii, 241 pp. \$10.00.

The bill of particulars formulated for us by Professor Keenan in this book is staggering indeed, and it is of great complexity. Kurbsky's first letter to Ivan IV actually is Prince Semen Shakhovskoy's letter to Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich written sometime between 1623 and 1625, but not sent and disguised as Kurbsky's letter. Then the same Shakhovskoy, or someone close to him, composed a first version of Ivan's answer, and shortly afterward a second expanded version of the same letter. At this point there was a lull of several decades, until "in the latter years of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich's reign some representative of the upper bureaucratic elite" (p. 5) wrote a précis of Ivan's first letter in a simpler style (one asks what for?), and, still later, already in the late 1670s, Kurbsky's second and third letters were composed (as well as his *History of Ivan IV*) in Golitsyn's milieu as a political allegory attributed to Kurbsky. This is not all. To prove his point, Keenan denies to Kurbsky the authorship of *all* other writings and translations customarily considered as his, and to Ivan IV *most* of the other works ascribed to him. As a matter of fact, he suspects Ivan IV (the author of "Stoglav's" questions!) of "functional illiteracy," and since Kurbsky's first known signature appears in Latin letters on a 1582 document, Keenan concludes that "the writer learned to make his signature only after his departure from Muscovy" (p. 209), and thus was presumably illiterate at the time his letters to Ivan IV were supposedly composed by him!

To prove all this Keenan undertook a considerable textological and analytical effort. With Professor Waugh's competent and diligent help, he examined the manuscript evidence and he did not find any sixteenth-century copy of the texts mentioned. Then he traced the textual history of Kurbsky's first letter, making several comparisons, not all of them impressive. Thus this reviewer did not find any striking resemblance, if at all, between Kurbsky's style and that of Shakhovskoy, Khvorostinin, and Katyrev-Rostovsky. There is, however, an impressive resemblance, and even identity at times, between certain passages of Kurbsky's letter and a sixteenth-century document, Isaiah's "Complaint." Attention brought to this resemblance (not, however, explained satisfactorily within the context of Keenan's thesis) is in fact the only positive scholarly contribution of the book. What follows, in a separate chapter, is an attempt to abolish both Ivan IV and Kurbsky as literary figures. A major argument coloring Keenan's presentation is the assumption of a "rather sharp contrast between secular and religious cultures" in sixteenth-century Muscovy. This assumption of impermeability between both cultures strikes us as the guiding spirit of Keenan's bold hypothesis. Here is the weakest point of his iconoclastic endeavor, for one gets a definite impression that he has not studied with due attention the Muscovite culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which did not know this "chasm" (p. 56) at all. It is sufficient to mention Vassian Patrikeev, F. Karpov, F. Kuritsyn, D. Gerasimov, Viskovaty. . . .

The demonstration is concluded by a chapter on "The Growth of the Correspondence" in which Keenan has sketched his ideas on the rest of the correspondence and Kurbsky's *History of Ivan IV*. Here we have neither much evidence nor analysis. A number of possibilities are generously offered to us, but with so little

evidence that they remain suspended in the air. All is, obviously, predicated on the convincing character of the previous three chapters, which are supposed to carry the day.

Professor Keenan, however, has asked us to accept assertions he could not convincingly demonstrate. All questions and all doubts are *negatively* useful, for they call for answers. Answers will be forthcoming from scholars who specialize in the Muscovite sixteenth century, and more light will be thrown on this topic. This will be welcome. Pending those answers, however, one must say in all objectivity that Professor Keenan's ambitious structure does not modify anything substantive in our picture of Muscovite history. His great capacity for ingenious rapprochements seems to have led him not to the clarification of issues but to the creation of difficulties where they did not exist. Beware of temptation by the demon of hypercriticism!

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THE ROMANOV. By *Virginia Cowles*. With color photographs specially taken in Russia by *Victor Kennett*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 288 pp. 157 black and white, 34 color photographs. \$15.00.

For readers of the *Slavic Review* the worth of this book lies mainly in its pictures. I do not mean to undervalue the contribution of the author. Miss Cowles, an American writer long resident in Britain, has evidently consulted most of the traditional English-language works dealing with the eighteen Romanov rulers. She writes with zest and enthusiasm. Readers who can just relax and enjoy it will find her account breezily entertaining, and will learn a lot about the private lives of the monarchs.

Readers of a critical bent, on the other hand, will notice enough imperfections of various kinds to keep them on their toes. A few of these are pitched for amateur copy editors (the nobles are said to "flaunt" a law rather than flout it; "prevaricate" is used when what is meant is "procrastinate"); but most are for the Russian specialist. There are many minor twists of proper names, such as Kostromo for Kostroma or Hellman for Gel'fman or Helfman. Some of them (like those two) are repeated—which provides at least internal consistency. Numbers are treated casually (for example, Nicholas I was not eleven years younger than Alexander I, but more like nineteen; and serfs of both sexes in 1861 numbered only a little over half of the forty million mentioned). And there are other sorts of misstatements, such as that at the time of Custine's visit Russia "boasted three universities—Moscow, Petersburg, and Kiev," or that "yamshchik" is a "special name" applied only to drivers of troikas.

Beyond the peccadilloes are more serious defects. Some of them reflect the fact—for which we in the field, and not Miss Cowles, are collectively to blame—that the quality of scholarship on the Romanov tsars and their personal and court life has not been uniformly high. But Miss Cowles has made things worse by restricting her use of languages and her choice of sources, and by leaning on the sensational, the sexy, or the brutal—with the result that lay readers will come away fascinated by a gallery of odd characters but poorly or inaccurately informed about many basic facts concerning them and their broader environment.

The book contains over thirty splendid full-page color photographs, mostly by Victor Kennett, and over 150 additional prints and photographs in black and white.