

A MARITIME HISTORY OF RUSSIA

[Review of *The maritime history of Russia, 848-1948*, by Mairin Mitchell. London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949. 544 p., illus., maps, 22 cm. Price 31s. 6d.]

This book deals extensively with the waters surrounding arctic and sub-arctic Russia. There are chapters entitled "The North East Passage", "The Siberian sea road", "The north Pacific", "Alaska", and "Icebreakers". A great deal of information has been painstakingly amassed, and anyone interested in the Russian Arctic would hope to learn much from it.

Unfortunately this hope is only partly fulfilled. Most of the salient facts are given but the book suffers from numerous defects. The most obvious is confused presentation. It may be difficult to arrange in a clear way the heterogeneous facts which make up maritime history, but the author has not always chosen the best possible arrangement. To mention one instance: the chapter on the navies of Russia contains a section of sixteen pages on the Soviet Navy; elsewhere in the book there is another and much longer section on the same subject. There are other examples of such repetition. Sometimes the second account even contradicts the first, as in the two accounts of early voyages up the Yenisey (p. 104 and 259). Another defect is that the material is packed with anecdote, and is curiously digressive. Miss Mitchell is often interesting in her asides, but they lead her and the reader to strange places. For instance, the caption to a photograph (opposite p. 105) of the *Chelyuskin* in the ice in 1933 goes on to discuss, for no apparent reason, Bellingshausen's voyage to the Antarctic in 1819-21.

These are not serious faults. The assiduous reader may pick his way through the irrelevancies to the parts that matter. But when he finds them, he is struck by the number of small mistakes of fact—some of them perhaps misprints—which have crept in. Baron Toll's voyage in the *Zarya* was not an attempt to sail through the North East Passage (p. 103), but to investigate Ostrova Novosibirskiye. Chichagov did not intend to follow the coast-line of North America on his voyage of 1765 (p. 109), but to go straight across the Arctic Ocean. "The idea of setting up a Polar station [at the North Pole] had been Nansen's in 1933" (p. 270); Nansen died in 1930. "All these icebreakers [*Surr Tall* (sic), *Krisjanis Valdemars*, *Krasin*, *Mikoyan*] are Diesel-propelled vessels" (p. 280). In fact they all have reciprocating steam engines.

Each of these mistakes may seem trifling if taken individually; but there are enough of them to shake the reader's confidence in the reliability of the book as a whole. The reason for many of the inaccuracies, particularly in the post-revolutionary period, seems to be that Miss Mitchell has relied too much on secondary sources, accounts by Russian or English commentators and compilers. It is true that first-hand literature on the Russian Arctic is hard to find in England, but there is more of it available than the author appears to have used.

The usefulness of the maps provided in the book is impaired by the fact that they are taken from a number of sources and therefore display a number of systems of nomenclature. Several systems of transliteration of Russian proper

names have apparently been used in the text with untidy results: the normally accepted Tiksi, which is used on p. 280, becomes Tixii on p. 278, and Tixie on p. 264; the Russian letter ж is variously rendered by zh (Nizhne), sh (Deshniev), j (Penjinsk); Milovzorov, as the name is generally spelt, becomes Melefsorov (p. 262). Discrepancies in transliteration do not often render names totally unrecognisable, but other obstacles have been placed in the way of easy recognition. Tranquillity Bay (p. 36) is normally known as Tikhaya Guba (Tikhaya Bay). It is not likely that a reader without specialised knowledge would relate the two. A name like "the Chukot Peninsula" (frequently used in this book) is indefensible. In Russian it is Chukotskiy Poluostrov, Chukotskiy being the adjective of Chukchi, the inhabitants of the area. Chukot means nothing and only adds another to the already swollen number of alternative forms. There is only one real solution, and that is to use a transliteration of the full Russian name in all cases.

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RENEWAL OF ANTARCTIC NAVAL AGREEMENT FOR SEASON 1949-50

[The following statement was issued by the Foreign Office on 18 November 1949. The text of the 1948-49 agreement, to which reference is made, was published in the *Polar Record*, Vol. 5, Nos. 37/38, 1949, p. 361.]

"On 18 January 1949, in order to avoid the risk of incidents during the Antarctic summer season which might exacerbate normal friendly relations, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and the Argentine and Chilean Governments informed each other that they saw no need to send Naval vessels south of latitude 60° S. during the 1948-49 Antarctic season, apart from such naval movements as had become customary. In view of the satisfactory result which followed, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the Argentine and Chilean Governments recently entered into conversations with a view to ascertaining whether an extension to the current season could be arranged. As a result of these conversations, statements were exchanged on 18 November between the Governments concerned, in the following terms:

Being anxious to avoid any misunderstanding in the Antarctic which may affect the friendly relations between the United Kingdom, Argentina and Chile the Governments of these three countries have informed each other that, in present circumstances, they foresee no need to send warships south of latitude sixty degrees during the 1949 to 1950 Antarctic season, apart, of course, from movements such as have been customary for a number of years.

His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom feel confident that this parallel statement of intention will continue to ensure that incidents likely to cause unnecessary friction in the Antarctic between the three Powers are avoided. The United States Government have been kept informed."