

in collaboration with liberal-oriented feminist activists—that alerted me to the shortcomings of the internationally sponsored civil society project. By the late 1990s, even some of their staunchest advocates and participants were articulating disappointment at the NGOs that had taken form in Russia: many were elite and marginal; they often ushered activists into a narrowly circumscribed range of projects that did not make sense to most Russian people.

Writing at the prospect of resurgent forms of authoritarianism in Eurasia, anthropologist Caroline Humphrey wrote, “it seems to me probable that the way this is experienced internally is very different from the face put on it externally, for the benefit of international relations—and hence the need for anthropological studies.” She went on to note that the challenge will be “how to understand and interpret such situations without prejudging them from a Euro-American set of values” (Humphrey, “Does the Category ‘Postsocialist’ Still Make Sense?” in Hann, ed., *Postsocialism*, 15). My project has taken up this challenge.

I do not seek to defend or apologize for state-run organizations such as Nashi (and I am very well aware of the terms many commentators use to refer to them). Rather, I seek to get beyond a normative reaction to understand them from the inside. Unpalatable as it is to many of us, until very recently, Putin has had legitimacy among broad swathes of the population; youth (as other citizens) have participated enthusiastically in the campaigns and projects political elites have offered them. My aim has been to figure out why. To do so in this project, I have gone beyond the circles of liberal intelligentsia with whom it is easiest to accomplish accord in order to reach the ranks of the persuaded: those who choose to participate in these state-run projects and campaigns. I have sought to understand the reasons for their buy-in and acquiescence.

Proponents and supporters of democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech in Russia are extraordinarily vulnerable at this time. The murders and incarcerations taking place are indeed frightening and troubling. And yet our normative western categories and paradigms are unable to account for what is taking form. They result in depictions that demonize Russia’s authorities rather than explaining the public’s support for these leaders or their acquiescence to their policies. To go beyond such caricatures, the anthropological project is more important than ever. It offers tools to help us make sense of the appeal of these kinds of state-run projects, promising to yield insights that will assist those working for a more democratic Russia.

JULIE HEMMENT
University of Massachusetts

To the Editor:

I am honored that James Cracraft, a prominent historian of Peter I and his era, has reviewed my recent book *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths* (vol. 71, no. 2). I wrote it in the conviction that dialogue between scholars trained in cultural history, such as myself, and those trained in social and political history could be a productive undertaking. In the interests of furthering such a dialogue I offer these reflections.

My book investigates the historical myths of Ivan IV and Peter I, as they appear in historiography, political rhetoric, literature, art, drama, and film from the early 1800s up to the 1940s. Cracraft’s central criticism is that I failed to “establish a reliable historical baseline against which to assess the historical accuracy, or otherwise, of the assorted ‘myths,’ ‘visions,’ and ‘representations’ of the two historical figures.” In Cracraft’s view, the chief task of a study of historical myth should be to reveal its deviations from historical truth. Instead, I place these myths in their own time and

place in order to examine their ideological and social significance, as well as the historical unfolding of these myths themselves.

Focusing on a description of how he would have written my book, were he its author, Cracraft expressly refuses to engage my claims concerning the social and political function of the myths of Ivan and Peter, since they can be “neither proved nor disproved.” Further, he fails to note, in this review championing empirically grounded argument, even a single work or figure that I analyze. Apparently, Cracraft feels that the study of historical myth is irrelevant to scholars concerned with historical “realities.”

It is not. Cracraft has authored three books whose titles include the words “The Petrine Revolution.” Can the “revolutionary” character of Peter’s reign be proved or disproved? In none of these excellent works does Cracraft retrace the history of conceptions of Peter as a crowned revolutionary in Russian political thought, which winds from Aleksandr Pushkin, through Aleksandr Herzen, to Soviet historiography, and up to the present day. Although he may not acknowledge as much, Cracraft is a participant in the circulation and elaboration of this mythic conception. I would suggest to him that only by laboring to recognize and analyze the myths that structure historical views may we gain purchase on historical realities and on our own moment in time. That is my book’s topic.

KEVIN PLATT
University of Pennsylvania

Professor Cracraft responds:

I think my review of Kevin Platt’s book made clear my admiration of the sheer wit, energy, and great erudition that went into writing it—a book that will interest, I concluded, “every student of Russian culture.” But, as his letter makes clear, we differ fundamentally on what constitutes history; or, in the terms used in his letter, what separates history, not from the history of myth (obviously), but from myth itself (myth-making, myth-promoting, myth-utilizing, in short, mythologizing). Perhaps this difference will be bridged some day at some epistemic level, though I doubt I shall live to see it. Meantime I must wish Professor Platt well in the quest.

JAMES CRACRAFT
University of Illinois, Chicago