

Contrairement à leurs voisins d'outre-Manche, les Français utilisent davantage l'écrit. Or, dans les pièces de théâtre, les pamphlets et les journaux officiels, on n'hésite pas à dénoncer la « vénalité » des Anglais qui, depuis toujours, souhaitent abattre la France afin de s'accaparer l'exclusivité du commerce international. Pour ce faire, on fait appel aux figures du passé comme Jeanne d'Arc dont la statue, qui fut abattue à Orléans par les émeutiers révolutionnaires, est aussitôt relevée par Napoléon. Malgré cette différence évidente dans la façon de communiquer leur différent point de vue, on remarque que leur campagne de propagande est surtout basée sur des facteurs ethnocentriques, bref, après plus de huit cents ans d'hostilité déclarée, les deux belligérants ne se connaissent toujours pas. Très récemment encore, par le truchement des différentes positions adoptées par la France et l'Angleterre sur la dernière guerre en Irak, les auteurs nous démontrent avec brio qu'il existe toujours un fossé entre les deux nations qui, de façon paradoxale, viennent de célébrer le centenaire de l'Entente cordiale signée en 1904.

Dans son ensemble, agrémenté d'une trentaine de caricatures très révélatrices sur le contexte politique de l'époque, l'ouvrage est également rédigé dans un style accessible à tous les lecteurs. À mon sens, suite à cette lecture, je dois conclure que le défi des auteurs, qui consistait à dégager une unicité dans le propos dont l'objet demeure l'analyse de la dichotomie des techniques médiatiques utilisées lors de la guerre entre Napoléon et l'Angleterre, est évidemment atteint.

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BURBANK, Jane — *Russian Peasants Go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905–1917*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004. Pp. xxiii, 374.

This book is a social history at its best — a monograph with a clearly defined object of investigation and voluminous but manageable source material, meticulously read by a researcher whose optic has been sharpened by years of close engagement with the period, sources, and debates in the field. This history of legal routines of ordinary rural people is exceptionally modest in its claims and mode of presentation, but nonetheless full of serious implications for the more general picture of modern Russian history.

Jane Burbank set out to analyse the workings of the township courts — the first-instance courts used predominantly by those legally defined as the peasant estate, constituting the majority of the Russian Empire's population. In the author's words, these peasants have been "the long-term others of Russian history" (p.1) approached as such by the contemporary Russian educated public and generations of historians following in their footsteps. Writing against the grain of many foundational works in Russian and peasant studies, Burbank joins the ranks of revisionists believing that peasant communities were neither homogeneous, nor the same over time and space, nor cut off from the rest of society and state. These revisionist scholars of the Rus-

sian countryside, recovering the agency and individualities of the peasants, join other Russianists trying to save the history of late imperial Russia from the shadow cast over it by the Revolutions and Soviet period.

Township courts are a perfect place for such an exercise. These were part of the Russian legal system, established for the peasants and operated by the peasants. Imagined by intellectuals as pseudo-institutions, an aberration from the normal legal system, sites dominated by corruption, ignorance, and custom, these courts in fact were undergoing significant changes throughout the whole period following the Great Reforms of the second half of the nineteenth century, and by the 1900s had become part and parcel of public life in virtually every community (or “rural society” as it was officially defined), important for the peasants as an alternative way, sanctioned by the state and by law, to seek justice, solve conflicts, and assert what was believed to be one’s own rights. The author proves it convincingly with the help of the impressive database including 907 court cases selected from the 4,500 case records checked.

Court records show that the townships courts, if not fitting exactly the ideal professionalized court procedure desired by the liberal oppositional reformers, were nonetheless quite efficient. Using room reserved for local custom and particularistic tradition by the state legislation, reflecting the specific agenda and concerns of rural inhabitants, these courts based their procedure and sentences strictly on the basis of the imperial statutes and did not discriminate against plaintiffs and defendants because of gender, age, family status, or social position in the village. As a rule the decisions of these courts were based on the availability of evidence such as testimonies of witnesses and documents. The verdicts were fulfilled quickly and rarely challenged. Despite their special status, township courts shared many similarities with the courts in Western societies. Although technically appointed, peasant judges in fact were elected and constituted a kind of “small jury”. The courts were definitely independent from the local village authorities, and being part of the hierarchy of legal institutions they enjoyed wide prerogatives and were in no way commanded from above. Although the judges most probably were subject to all kinds of pressures and negotiations not reflected in the records, there is no reason to assume that these pressures were of greater importance than in any other legal system, including contemporary ones.

The majority of court cases were brought in by individuals and were decided on an individual basis. These court cases provide the best proof of the individual initiative, concerns, and agency of the Russian peasants at the time. Increasing numbers of cases considered in the township courts prove that for the local peasants these courts were an important and just venue to settle both individual grievances and public concerns. The courts did not uphold the extended patriarchal family nor the interests of the village collective; they concentrated upon the law and judges’ own ideas about justice. As a result, for many peasants, the courts were the way out of old and burdensome relationships and arrangements. The court cases reveal that both for personal insults and injustices and for problems arising in connection with market economic relationships these courts provided a legal, procedural, official, and efficient way to achieve desired justice and neutral mediation. Thus peasants

might have come much closer to the “civil society” desired and built by the Russian educated public than did that public itself.

The township courts proved their viability during the time of troubles — with continuous activities throughout World War I and the 1917 Revolutions. The implications of war inflation, new political regulations, and changing gender roles can all be found in the workings of the township courts. During the Revolution the township courts may have been the most viable part of the old imperial legal system. Their problems in 1917 were not the lack of local litigants or disrespect for court decisions, but the absence of proper documentation, ongoing declared transformation of the legal system, and frequently changing higher circumstances. All of this added up to a certain institutional void which forced the dissolution of the courts.

In conclusion, this is an excellent study, the value of which is not diminished by an occasional typographical error or mistranslation. It also shows exemplary modesty in its avoidance of ungrounded conclusions or generalizations. The book will be definitely useful not only for students of Russian history, but for all those working with cases in which law was used by and administered to the lower classes.

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CHOQUETTE, Robert — *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004. Pp. 464.

Until the early 1960s Canada remained a recognizably Christian country. Not only did most Canadians, new and old, publicly identify with either one of the major Protestant denominations or with the Roman Catholic Church, but, to a greater or lesser extent, the political and social culture was influenced in significant ways by Christian ideas, values, and institutions. Since that time, however, there has been a steady erosion of Christian influence in the Canadian public square. The Quiet Revolution in Quebec convinced francophones that their nationalism need not be inextricably linked to their Roman Catholicism. In the rest of Canada, mainline Protestants experienced a crisis of identity as they spent their theological and cultural capital chasing modernist dreams. Across the great Protestant divide a resurgent Evangelicalism remained all too often comfortably cocooned in its own sub-culture, eschewing cultural engagement as both worldly and injurious to its spiritual development.

While the majority of Canadians still identify themselves as Christian, increasing numbers tell the census-takers that they have no religious affiliation (4.7 million in 1991, up from a tiny group of 133,000 in 1941). Yet even this growing cohort of publicly identifiable secularists cannot mask the reality that nearly 90 per cent of Canadians identify themselves as religious and that the majority of these are Christian. What is remarkable about the Canadian situation, then, is not its religiosity but the disjunction between popular religious adherence and the public secular creed of Canada's social and political elites who either ignore Canada's religious past or