

A Single Research Community: Not Yet

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This forum began as a panel at the 2000 National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, which I organized in the hope of fostering a single scholarly community of Russian and western specialists on Russian history, a goal many of us in the field have been working toward since the 1970s, though without stunning success. The publication of Boris Mironov's two-volume *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii* seemed, at first glance, to offer an unusually good opportunity to demonstrate the convergence of our two scholarly worlds.¹ Mironov is one of very few senior Russian specialists who have learned western languages and read extensively in the literature on imperial Russia produced by western scholars during the past thirty years. In a series of books, book reviews, and conference presentations, he has introduced our work to his Russian colleagues.² Although his new social history features a therapeutic or moral agenda unfamiliar to most western history writing (a point to which I shall return), Mironov frequently cites the works of western experts, and a number of his key propositions rest in part on evidence and ideas first articulated in the works of western specialists. One might think that Mironov's book is a sign that our scholarly communities are rapidly converging. The truth, however, is rather different. The reception of Mironov's book in Russia and in this *Slavic Review* forum indicates not a convergence

Thanks go to Laura Engelstein, Daniel Field, Nina Perlina, and Willard Sunderland for sharing their thoughts and offering their advice during the preparation of this article. Sunderland shrewdly questioned my premise, asking why I thought achieving a single scholarly community was desirable; because Russian and western scholars have different constituencies and diverse tasks, we should also expect to produce distinctive types of work—a good point.

1. Boris N. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII–nachalo XX v.): Genезis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem'i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1999). An English translation is available, although it differs in certain respects from the Russian edition. Contrary to what the publication data might suggest, the English text is actually translated from a draft prepared several years before the final manuscript for the Russian edition was submitted. The Russian edition is therefore the product of additional research and argument. The English edition also lacks illustrations, the bibliography, and some tabular material included in the Russian version. Nevertheless, the editor and translators of the English version are to be congratulated for the high quality of the translations and the effective integration of translations of individual chapters made by a dozen different people. Boris N. Mironov, with Ben Eklof, *The Social History of Imperial Russia, 1700–1917*, 2 vols. (Boulder, Colo., 2000).

2. A few examples: B. N. Mironov, *Istoriia i sotsiologiia* (Leningrad, 1984); Mironov, *Russkii gorod v 1740–1860e gody* (Leningrad, 1990); Mironov, *Istoriia v tsifrah: Matematika v istoricheskikh issledovaniakh* (Leningrad, 1991).

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ory places on Mironov's understanding of Russia's legal development. Finally, a key objection of western critics is Mironov's easy acceptance of statistical information in the form it is given. In their view, he should have taken account of the subjective nature of such data. They want him to ask: Why were certain statistics collected and not others? How and by whom were social norms and statistical classifications constructed and used?²¹ Steven Hoch enlarges on this point in his contribution to this forum.

Possibly the most revealing comments on the difference between our intellectual communities can be found in the critics' conclusions about the roots of Mironov's thought. His Russian critics claim that his work is untrue to Russian reality because it is a product of foreign and, more specifically, American historiography. The use of foreign models, according to one commentator, accounts for the disappearance of the individual in Mironov's history and the centrality of social strata as historical actors. By contrast, western critics complain that Mironov is out of step with western methods and conceptualizations and that his history represents a combination of the Russian juridical school of the late imperial era and mid-twentieth-century sociological models of modernization, whose positivist underpinnings are very much out of favor in western intellectual life today.²²

Finally, I want to underline an important quality of Mironov's book, an aspect little noted by his critics, namely, its moral or cathartic purpose.²³ Mironov deplors the legacy of Soviet historiography and its antecedents in writings of political radicals. He rejects them not only for their hide-bound categories, overemphasis on economic factors, presentism, and other sins but even more because they painted Russia before the revolution in such dark colors of backwardness, greedy exploitation, and illegality that no one could have any reason to be proud of such a country or to defend it. The inferiority complex that many writers have attributed to Russians as a people has its roots, according to Mironov, in this self-inflicted misrepresentation of the country and its history. Instead, Mironov seeks to instill in his compatriots the belief that their history has endowed them with an ability to sustain an open society based on the rule of law and that its evolution through the imperial period has moved Russia toward a modern western civil society and legal state. Russia can achieve this goal, he believes, if Russians understand their history in a new light. They need to stop comparing their progress at every point to that of the west and to give themselves more credit for the impressive achievements they have forged on their own, including the reform of serfdom and the introduction of constitutional government. It is necessary, he writes, "for us, citizens of

sent problems for Mironov's notions of direct takeovers of foreign models. "Rossiiskii staryi poriadok," 60, 85–86.

21. Comment by Gregory Freeze, "Rossiiskii staryi poriadok," 48–49.

22. See especially Rieber, *Ob Imperio*, 433–37, and Daniel Field, "Rossiiskii staryi poriadok," 81.

23. This cathartic purpose is noted in passing, however, by Mikhail Karpachev and Nikolai Bolkhovitinov in "Rossiiskii staryi poriadok," 51, 53, and by Willard Sunderland in this forum.