

from displaying grand histories of nation states to experiences and memories of ordinary individuals. The Dresden City Museum allows visitors to construct their own understanding of the events, and, more importantly, critically analyze their ancestors' responsibility for what happened during the Nazi period. The moral tone of the Dresden museum differs from the one observed in St. Petersburg and Warsaw in its concern with the actions of ordinary people, not "heroes" or "victims."

The Enemy on Display is a very timely account of the important role played by cultural institutions in making their societies more democratic, plural, multicultural, and tolerant. It demonstrates that some cultural clichés and traditions of exhibiting, interpreting, and educating about "the enemy" prove to be longstanding and difficult to eradicate. The present analysis should no doubt be continued by the students of museology in post-Soviet republics, where great symbolic battles between various ideologies and the perceptions of the communist period are still underway.

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Boris Minaev, *Boris Yeltsin: The Decade that Shook the World*. London: Glagoslav, 2015. 569 pp.

Yeltsin Center, *A Man of Change: A Study of the Political Life of Boris Yeltsin*. London: Glagoslav, 2015. 544 pp.

The two volumes under review are published with the support of the President B. Yeltsin Center Foundation. *A Man of Change: A Study of the Political Life of Boris Yeltsin* is a collective effort by four historians. Minaev's *Boris Yeltsin: The Decade that Shook the World* is a translation of his 2010 biography (published by Molodaia Gvardiia, but available as a free download on the Yeltsin Center's website). It has been edited and the text reorganized to some extent. Most notably the foreword to the Russian original has been taken out. It's probably good commercial sense not to have a foreword by Putin in an English language book at the present time, particularly if the most notable thing about that foreword is Putin's recollection

that Yeltsin's parting shot as he left the Kremlin and the presidency was to order Putin to "Save Russia."

As one might expect from their pedigree, neither volume presents a searing critique of Yeltsin. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Yeltsin's press is usually bad and some correction of an exclusively negative view of Yeltsin is useful. That said, Yeltsin has not been badly served by his biographers already. Leon Aron's *Boris Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (2000) was very positive, overwhelmingly so in fact, casting him as the founding father of a new democratic Russia, and comparing him to Charles de Gaulle. Timothy Colton's 2008 biography was more measured, but not still not unsympathetic. Colton argued that most of Yeltsin's actions were "affirmative," designed to produce positive change, but that execution of his plans was never good and that he was often temperamentally unable to manage the Russian political system. As he got older, and sicker, Yeltsin's flaws deepened and his positive impact diminished. One can quibble with this picture depending on one's views of Yeltsin's policies, but it is broadly fair as an assessment.

Since Yeltsin has been treated well (and sometimes too well) by his biographers the question that any new pro-Yeltsin biography faces is does it add anything new to our understanding of the man or his times that previous authors missed? The answer in the case of these two books is, unfortunately, no.

A Man of Change is described in the foreword as "a gift to the libraries of the United Kingdom" and a random search of some UK libraries does indeed turn up a few copies. It is, again as the foreword describes it, "a comprehensive collection of facts pertaining to the late President." The book is a fairly straightforward narrative account of Yeltsin's life. It draws from a wide range of sources and these might be of use to some researchers interested in finding some archival sources on Yeltsin's life or tracking down regional publications that record his work as a construction manager or party secretary.

Unfortunately, the book shies away from analysis in favor of a chronological record of events. What analysis is presented is often partial since not much context is given and there is no deep

discussion of the times, of the problems that Yeltsin faced, the balance of political forces etc. For example, Yeltsin's speech at the 26th CPSU Congress in 1986 is described, fairly, as being a mixture of traditional themes with some more revolutionary and critical comments. However, it was also an attack on Yegor Ligachev's earlier speech to the Congress, and one of the first public salvos in their struggle with one another that would lead to the scandal of 1987 and Yeltsin's removal as Moscow City Party Secretary. This incident is a relatively minor thing to miss in the grand scheme of things (Minaev doesn't mention the speech to the 26th Congress at all). However, it is illustrative of the main problem with the collectively authored book: it is just about Yeltsin and what he did, rather than a full interpretation of Yeltsin as a political actor. Such a portrait would have required more focus on other people and actors, and a more rounded, and on occasion less Yeltsin-centric, view. To paraphrase Kipling, what should we know of Yeltsin who only Yeltsin know? As it is Yeltsin-centric the book alternates between being interesting (for example, parts of the discussion of the August 1991 coup) and useless (for example, there's nothing of substance on the decision to launch radical economic reform or any acknowledgement of what role the economic issues played in the development of the Russian political system in 1992-93).

Minaev's book is a more discursive account of Yeltsin's life and politics. This makes it a more satisfying read. Minaev is a novelist by trade. But Minaev too does not aim for penetrating depth. This often makes the book little more than a whitewash. The discussion of why Yeltsin won re-election to the presidency in 1996, for example, is a reasonable account of the ins and outs of the campaign but is insipid on why people voted for Yeltsin and whitewashes the media bias in Yeltsin's favor. Minaev has an unfortunate tendency to blame the victim, to put Yeltsin's failures down to weaknesses in the Russian people or their character. For example, on page 267 Minaev complains about "the reaction to private ownership in the popular mentality." Given the scandals and missteps of privatization might it not be the case that if people rejected "the new reality," as Minaev calls it, it was because the new reality was not that good? On other occasions there is some blame

shifting or attempts to excuse Yeltsin by presenting him as a victim of history. There is quite a bit of this in the section on the first invasion of Chechnya. Yeltsin is presented as noble for shouldering blame for the early disasters of the war. This is easily turned on its head. If he was not to blame he did a disservice by protecting the blameworthy in the army who took it to war when it was not ready; and if he let the army invade when it was not ready or capable he was to blame for not insuring that no military action was taken until it was ready. Nobility looks more like face saving. The retrospective excuse offered for Yeltsin's Chechnya debacle—that the war was a first shot in the “war of civilisations’ ... that would manifest itself again in Afghanistan, New York, London and Madrid”—makes Yeltsin a victim of circumstance rather than an active agent in the Chechen disaster, and it rings hollow (371).

On the plus side, and albeit indirectly, Minaev's book does give an idea of why a part of the Russian intelligentsia stuck with Yeltsin through the 1990s as their best hope for change. There is a nostalgia in the book for the possibilities for change that were still alive under Yeltsin but that have since disappeared. But this just makes the excuses for Yeltsin all the more glaring; lost opportunities will stay lost if past errors are not accounted for.

It's unlikely that either of these books will replace Colton's as the main biography on Yeltsin. The publishers could have made the books, especially *A Man of Change*, useful as reference works by giving them indexes. *A Man of Change* has a list of “individuals mentioned” at the end but there are no page numbers given for any entry so it is useless. If you want to know about Yeltsin's relations with anyone you have to scroll through the whole book. Minaev's volume has no index at all. Like Russia's 1990s: an opportunity missed.

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