

Bankrupts and Usurers of Imperial Russia: Debt, Property, and the Law in the Age of Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. By Sergei Antonov. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. viii, 387 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. \$49.95, hard bound.
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Nikolai Gogol's mortgaged dead serfs. Fedor Dostoevskii's pawnbroker with her greasy hair. Lev Tolstoi's Vronsky, desperately short of money but honor-bound to pay his gambling debts first. After reminding readers of the prevalence of borrowers and lenders in nineteenth-century Russian literature, Sergei Antonov sets out to reconstruct and analyze the history of credit and debt as windows into social, economic, and legal relations. Although Antonov draws examples from as far back as the eighteenth century, he focuses mainly on the first half of the nineteenth century, when serfdom and the estate system underlay economic relations, and Russia's legal system still awaited reform. Moscow commands the greatest attention, with the bulk of Antonov's case studies from that city's archives. With its mix of nobles and peasants, merchants and townspeople, nineteenth-century Moscow provides a suitable foundation for his argument about how credit worked to blur estate boundaries, cultivate legal savvy, and offer opportunities for ordinary people to defend their interests even within the notoriously authoritarian system of Nicholas I.

Bankrupts and Usurers pursues an assertively revisionist agenda. Antonov sets out to refute two dominant "myths" or "stereotypes" about pre-reform Russia: its economic backwardness and corrupt, ineffective legal system. Employing a well-researched comparative perspective to reject Russian exceptionalism, he argues that imperial Russia's thriving informal credit networks bear important similarities to contemporary ones in Europe and the US, demonstrating Russians' economic sophistication. Antonov is especially energetic in his efforts to rehabilitate the long-maligned pre-1864 legal system. Claiming to be the first scholar to examine how the pre-reform courts worked in practice (290), he rejects standard characterizations of them as "dysfunctional," and compares Russia's laws and legal institutions favorably to their European and American counterparts; "it is important to remember," Antonov admonishes readers, "the many failures of the rule of law in other major legal systems" (17). The pre-reform court system worked to provide Russians with effective legal redress, he claims, even sometimes against the police. At times his revisionist agenda leads Antonov to make somewhat exaggerated characterizations of what he identifies as accepted historical interpretations. Is the prevailing stereotype of Russians really that they "were either unable to get wealthy or did not want to" (311)? The assertion (without attribution) that "[m]uch like capitalism, law is often seen as an importation alien to traditional Russian culture" (14) also seems overstated.

Antonov's goal of dispelling myths and refuting the "narrative of failure" that underlies Russian historiography influences the book's organizational structure. Part One, titled "The Culture of Debt," is devoted to disproving the standard narrative of economic backwardness. Antonov reconstructs and analyzes the complex and robust web of informal credit relations that underpinned and sustained private property, promoted wealth acquisition and transfer, and crossed estate, class, and economic boundaries. This research demonstrates, he argues, that Russia's system of credit and debt was not an obstacle to its capitalist development. Part Two, "Debt and the Law," argues that the characterization of Russia's credit and legal systems as backward is based on idealized models drawn from European or Anglo-American history. In fact, the Russian credit system relied on effective legal arrangements whose intent and effect were to protect private property.

These arguments are grounded in Antonov's broad-ranging research, which includes not only contemporary memoir literature and legal studies but also rich archival sources. He mines the Central State Historical Archive of Moscow for dozens of individual legal cases documenting deadbeat debtors, determined creditors, fraudulent claims, and the perils of lending to relatives. Some are extremely complicated, and at times Antonov devotes several paragraphs, even several pages, to narrate one case. (The convoluted story of a General Buturlin and the alleged usurers who preyed upon his feckless son takes up almost fifteen pages.) Antonov's skill at reconstructing such stories is admirable, but his painstaking and at times excessive attention to archival details sometimes results in letting the evidence take control, and obscuring broader implications and trends. Overall, however, Antonov succeeds in illuminating the important influence of private credit networks on social relations and legal culture. *Bankrupts and Usurers* makes a valuable contribution to understanding property, social relations, and the law in Russia before the era of reformed courts, modern banking, and full-scale economic modernization.

ADELE LINDENMEYR
Villanova University

The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years that Shook the World. By Jonathan D. Smele. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2015. xxiv, 423 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$74.00, hard cover.
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I enjoyed this book and learned many things from it. The author's erudition and assimilation of a broad array of sources is astounding. The 108 pages of endnotes and 47-page bibliography are extremely useful to scholars and a fascinating read in their own right. At its best the narrative is full of unfamiliar details, quirky excursions, bold assertions, and colorful anecdotes. Scholars interested in this period should add it to their shelf.

Jonathan Smele is a divider, not a lumpner. He repeatedly takes on simple interpretations and reveals contradictions and complexities. His strongest argument is that we should not see this as a single civil war, but rather as many overlapping, sometimes interrelated, sometimes unrelated civil wars. He effectively brings the non-Russian regions into the story—with particularly strong sections on Ukraine and the Caucasus and the incredibly complex array of contending forces in those regions. His depictions of the devastation of urban life throughout the Soviet Union and the raw violence of all sides in the war are powerful. I appreciated his sprinkling of rarely used words through the text: my favorite for promotion to a key word in revolution and war studies is ochlocracy. His chapter on the home front is a gem. The conclusion includes a convincing argument that the Bolsheviks did not really "win" the civil wars. Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland defeated the Reds and all of Europe staved off revolution and spread of the communist model. The Bolsheviks retreated from the countryside where 85% of the population lived. In a more cosmic sense, "the Soviet government, in the terrible violence it exerted against its erstwhile most fervent supporters . . . had tragically forfeited its moral right to rule and to represent the prospect of human progress that the Russian Revolution had seemed to offer" (241).

While the book effectively challenges many commonly held views about the period, it would be difficult to name the "Smele" interpretation of the civil wars in terms of what they were rather than what they were not. The title and introduction make a big deal about expanding the chronology of the civil war. This is a promising