
Professor Bergholz's work is a general history of the steppe nomads of Middle Asia and their relations with the expanding empires of Russia and Manchu China from the early seventeenth century to the final destruction of the last great nomad confederation, the Jungars, in 1758. He has produced a comprehensive compilation of the information available from general histories and secondary studies in English, Russian, and Chinese. This rather detailed work clearly describes the nature of the quickly-formed nomad confederations and their equally rapid collapse. Located between two aggressive states, Manchu China and Tsarist Russia, the nomads had a significant role in the foreign relations of both powers. China sought to control its northern marches; Russia looked to developing trade with China with the aid of the nomads, through whose territory they had to travel to reach China. The nomads themselves also desired trade with China but also sought aid outside to resist China's aggressive move into the steppe.

These sometimes powerful confederations of horsemen threatened empires and frequently played Russians off against the Manchus. However, by the middle of the eighteenth century the technological revolution caused by gunpowder reduced their power to proportions that made possible their eventual destruction by Manchu China.

This treatment is a convenient account of a very complicated story, but it has a number of limitations that could have been avoided if Bergholz had had one or more knowledgeable persons read his work before it was published. Some of my criticisms are trivial; for example, Bergholz states in the introduction that he is going to solve the impossible task of transliteration into English from such an array of esoteric languages by transliterating them from the Russian form of the names. He then produces the name "Zunghar." More important, the book frequently backtracks and is repetitive and confusing. Also important is the lack of a clearly stated thesis. One is not evident in the introduction nor the first chapter, and the conclusions are not sharply tied to the material discussed in the preceding chapters, nor are his conclusions striking or original.

Nevertheless, it is a useful and convenient narrative history of the steppe nomads of Eurasia in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries.

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Republic vs. Autocracy is a publication of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute's series in Ukrainian Studies which, during the past score of years, has admirably furthered the study of Ukrainian history and culture. The history of Ukraine is integral to the history of Poland-Lithuania and Muscovy, especially during the seventeenth century, and knowledge of the former is essential to understanding the latter. Republic vs. Autocracy makes valuable contributions to understanding the early modern history of this vast territorial and multi-cultural expanse.
Neither a monograph nor a synthesis, this book is nevertheless steeped in scholarship and reflection by a historian of considerable experience. However, because of its ambivalent structure, a forina inixa, it is challenging to read, study and use effectively. Not every graduate student will immediately grasp its nuances; not every scholar will discern its convoluted interpretations. Certainly, not every reader will agree with the author’s penchant to represent Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth institutions and structures — in the hope of making them more intelligible — in English constitutional terms: for example, Izba poselska becomes Commons. For Muscovy, Zemskii sobor becomes Representative Assembly.

Although the book is dedicated to the period 1686-97, from the Eternal Peace between the Commonwealth and Muscovy, which codified the cession of the Left-Bank Ukraine to Muscovy, to the eruption of the destructive Northern War, Professor Kamiński does not limit himself to that chronology. In a lengthy opening chapter, "The East European Rivals," the author schematically addresses what few other historians would attempt. He selectively compares the political, social, and cultural essentials of both countries, and tells us: "While Poland-Lithuania was hampered by the ineffectiveness of a central administration limited by the rights of its citizens, the Russian autocracy, ruling over a vast territory and a large population, left no room for the development of a civil society. In the Commonwealth, the state was treated as a servant of many quarrelsome masters, while in Russia it was conceived of as clay in the creative hands of the tsar." Kamiński argues that Ukrainians formerly claimed by the Commonwealth made an important contribution to the development of Muscovy. "Teachers, clerics, printers, and bureaucrats, they were a powerful community in Moscow... Aside from their technical expertise in the service of the church, administration, and army, their main contribution came from their combination of Orthodoxy and Westernization. Without the Ukrainians, the Russian course toward modernization would have been slower... No people in all of Russian history rivaled the industrious Ukrainians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in enhancing Russian power."

In his chapters on the respective Russian and Polish diplomatic residencies, Kamiński provides an extraordinarily detailed discussion of the Commonwealth’s and Muscovy’s administrative structure and the function of diplomacy, a subject not widely known in English. The exchange of ambassadors between the two countries established firmly their diplomatic relations with each other, and these closer contacts revealed "the confidence of Poland-Lithuania was not based on the condition of their army, but was rooted in their conviction of the superiority of their political system. It was only after this discovery that the Russian politicians learned how to use the Commonwealth’s political institutions to promote Russian interests."

Warsaw was Muscovy’s "window on Europe," and Muscovy’s Department of Foreign Affairs was multiculturally staffed, confirming the penetration of Western culture prior to Peter I. But Polish diplomats in Moscow were "in virtual imprisonment" and prevented from communicating with Muscovites without permission. Yet, Kamiński also informs us that Jerzy Dominik Dowmont, who was sent by King Sobieski to Moscow as the Commonwealth’s resident with instructions concerning the proposed Polish-Muscovite campaign against the Tatars in 1688, was able to send "very accurate dispatches" to Sobieski "with important data on Moscow’s strategic plans... Dowmont’s reports on palace feuds, gossip about the tsar’s immediate entourage, and secret initiatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs were also extraordinarily accurate." Where did Dowmont obtain this information? From high-ranking military officers, fellow Catholics, Polish expatriates, and Russian agents. Clearly, the stretnay who guarded the foreign