all land belonged to the tsar, and ignominiously beating their heads upon the stones
before the grand duke; 2) a binary we-they outlook in which Europe always seemed
preferable to Muscovy; 3) accepted Aristotelian models of good and corrupt forms of
rule; and 4) ambiguities in the Muscovite language of deference, all combined to cre-
ate a false impression. The result was a near consensus on tyranny and natural slav-
ishness, which observers saw because they were programmed by their education and
earlier observers to seek them. Preconceptions molded the views of observers, who in
turn informed the theoreticians, who in turn created public perceptions of slavery and
tyranny read by successors, which in turn have come down to us.

Finally, Poe’s book, considered as an invitation to future research, clearly demands
that these sources be confronted with religious questions. Poe addresses the possibility
that Russians were either slaves by nature, or were made slaves by their tsars. Equally
important is the question whether the Muscovites and their Tsardom had been cor-
rupted because they inherited a debased Christianity, or whether they had rendered
their Christianity idolatrous and servile because they were already a corrupt race.
Likewise it may be still be possible for a future Europeanist to learn something sig-
ificant by grouping visitors not by the length of stay, not as generic Europeans or
Renaissance humanists, but by pre-modern “nationality,” by thinking about the post-
feudal differences between Britons, “Germans,” and Frenchmen in the creation of im-
ages of Muscovites. As invitation, Poe’s careful groundwork, here and in his bibliog-
raphy, opens new vistas for future scholars.

All three books between these covers are a credit to Poe’s formidable talent and re-
sourcefulness, establishing his preeminence among the younger generation of Musco-
vite scholars.

Max J. Okenfuss

Thomas M. Barrett. At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Cauca-
$55.00.

In this imaginative and detailed ethnographic portrait of Cossack life in the North
Caucasus region, Thomas M. Barrett succeeds wonderfully in his effort to de-center
our understanding of Russian expansion and empire-building. By shifting the empha-
sis from military conflict and the political dimensions of imperial rule to the social,
cultural, and economic factors that framed Cossack life and the interactions that
bound Cossack communities to their ostensible enemies in the mountains, Barrett pro-
vides a useful corrective to the narrow preoccupation with division and difference that
has undergirded much historical writing on this area. Expanding on his influential ar-
ticles published over the last few years and making agile use of comparative materials,
this book will occupy a central place in a growing historiography that seeks to under-
stand processes of empire construction in their more localized settings.

In large measure, the strength of Barrett’s account lies in its descriptive dimension
– its attempt to account for the ways in which demands of state service, labor scarcity,
poor land, and formidable enemies all shaped Cossack life. Barrett argues that the various imperatives of life "at the edge of empire" compelled Cossacks to adapt substantially to local cultures and practices, thereby transforming themselves into something new and decidedly distinct from the communities of central Russia. In this reading, Cossacks were agents of Russian expansion, but not of Russian civilization. Even in terms of expansion, Barrett's analysis shows, Cossack commitments were equivocal: while the state sought Cossack participation in a set of trade policies designed to foster the mountain peoples' economic dependence on Russia, Cossacks themselves were prepared to subvert these policies in order to secure the free flow of goods across the Terek River. Cossacks retained an ambivalent attitude toward Russian power, celebrated rebels like Stenka Razin, and at times even deserted to the mountains. Substantial numbers of Cossacks in the North Caucasus were Old Believers, which served not only to split local communities, but also to politicize marriages and to exacerbate existing antagonism with the state. In short, the North Caucasus represented not a clear border in the empire's south, but rather an indeterminate zone of mixed populations and nebulous allegiances.

Aside from offering a refreshing thesis about the empire's indeterminacy along its Caucasian frontier, this book breaks new ground in a number of other ways as well. First, Barrett provides an enlightening consideration of the environmental impact of Cossack settlement and its consequences for Cossacks themselves. Deforestation helped to make Cossacks dependent on the mountain peoples for timber and firewood, while also contributing substantially to the flooding of the Terek River. This flooding, exacerbated also by projects of crop irrigation, in turn created ideal conditions for the spread of malaria, thus greatly worsening the health of communities on the lower Terek. Second, Barrett considers the Cossack economy in great detail, demonstrating how the difficulties of settlement on the North Caucasus frontier forced Cossacks to diversify their economy by adopting viticulture, distilling, fishing, and animal husbandry. Even so, many Cossacks remained so poor that they were unable to equip themselves for state service and in some cases lacked even horses and weapons. Third, Barrett commendably analyzes the crucial role of women in Cossack society, concluding that women in fact performed almost all of the work in the Cossack economy, with the result that their status and power were accordingly higher than that of most women in central Russia. Moreover, to the extent that economic well-being was crucial to Cossacks' performance of their service duties, the state worked hard to promote marriage and to alleviate a chronic gender imbalance that plagued the region at least until the nineteenth century. Cossacks sometimes took matters into their own hands and raided not only the mountains in search of brides, but even Russian provinces to the north. In short, Barrett's careful attention to issues of ecology, economy, and gender distinguishes his account from most literature on the Russian empire.

In a sense, though, Barrett succeeds almost too well in de-centering his account of the North Caucasus frontier. Indeed, his study essentially lacks a systematic consideration of the visions, motives, and aspirations that imperial officials in St. Petersburg (and to a degree even more locally) had for this region, aside from the obvious concern for its pacification and integration into the empire to one degree or another. To be sure, much of this information can be obtained from other works that are far less at-