Many textbooks of Russian history have been published in the West, and some display a very high standard. Even the best are nevertheless textbooks, and with a few exceptions the chapters on modern Russia are noticeably superior to the earlier chapters. This fact reflects the primary interests and training of most Western historians of Russia, so it is hardly surprising. The unfortunate result, however, is that a good introductory account of the earlier phases of Russian history intended for scholars and not for undergraduates does not exist. The first volume of this new German series is an attempt to fill such a gap, and it succeeds very well at the task.

The parts of volume one reviewed here include the final pages of Robert Werner’s account of prehistory (which has been dealt with by other reviewers), the complete section by Hartmut Rüss on Kiev Rus’, and all but the last few pages of Carsten Goeckrke’s chapters on Novgorod. The aim of the series is to be brief and informative, providing a lengthy bibliography as well as a narrative and discussion. Each author admirably surveys both sources and political, social and economic history as well as some special problems. The selection and emphasis of material is sensible, proper, and with no unnecessary excursions into minor matters. The authors present such major controversies as the Varangian question, the social-political structure of Kiev, and the Novgorod “constitution” with great objectivity, giving a brief history of each controversy, but at the same time presenting their own views firmly and carefully. It is a particular virtue of the authors that they present the results of both Soviet and Western research quite fully, giving credit where it is due. They do not waste space in ideological disputes with minor Soviet polemists, nor do they fall into the trap of opposing all notions that sound Marxist. Rather, they pick and choose carefully in a vast literature with unfailing judgment and objectivity.

In evaluating a book of this kind personal tastes and judgments inevitably play a larger role than usual. Everyone wishes that his favorite topic or point of view were given more space. Rüss is excessively skeptical about archeology (pp. 230, 236); but is is to his credit that at least in some crucial areas, such as the problems of Slavic settlement on the eve of the formation of the Kiev state (pp. 240-48), he does bring archeological evidence fully to bear. Goeckrke treats the Novgorod ‘empire almost exclusively as a Russian affair (in spite of the statement that it was a “multinational state,” p. 447) and devotes almost no space, even in the bibliography, to the Finno-Ugrian peoples. Admittedly if one focuses on the town itself and its environs this is natural, but this reviewer would have preferred a more detailed account of the North and the Finno-Ugrian peoples of the Novgorodian state. A listing of at least Russian and German-language literature on them would have been useful.

On issue of interpretation it is hard to find fault. Rüss’s argument that the princes and boiars/druzhina of the Kiev period had essentially identical interests, and that therefore no resistance to the prince should be expected seemed especially well put. On the other hand, his description of the boiar estates as market-oriented (p. 365) has an excessively modern sound, even with a fuller description of what is meant by this farther on (p. 384). Coupled with the assertion that the peasant economy was entirely natural (p. 406), he seems to be drawing a picture that has some validity but is far too rigid. These however, are matters where data are scanty and many interpretations are legitimate. Goeckrke’s answer to the arguments over the Novgorod “constitution” (democratic or
oligarchic) seems convincing, and not just because it is a middle position: undoubtedly it was a bit of both, with a tilt toward oligarchy.

This series is an important achievement, and if it maintains the current high standard, it will be a basic work of reference for a long time to come.

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One of the most important auxiliary disciplines to which students of medieval and early modern Europe have been devoting attention in recent years is that of codicology—the study of the history of manuscript (and to a lesser degree, printed) books in order to establish their provenance, date and authorship, and in order to determine where, when and by whom they were owned and read. The codicologist studies the evidence of handwriting and paper, colophons, owners' inscriptions, bindings, and anything else that may provide clues about the history of the individual codex. Library inventories may also be examined and the attempt made to identify the books they list with the codices that have been preserved. Codicology is essential source analysis for the study of cultural history, especially where manuscript books form a significant part of an area's cultural legacy.

The book under review, by a prominent specialist on Greek manuscripts in Muscovy, Boris L'vovich Fonkich, is a codicological study which deserves close attention from scholars interested in post-Byzantine Greek culture and from students of Muscovite cultural history who, like this reviewer, do not know Greek. Greco-Russian Cultural Ties in the Fifteenth-Seventeenth Centuries unites four rather specialized essays concerning extant Greek codices known to have been in Muscovy in the three centuries indicated. The author does not deal with manuscripts about which we know only from secondary sources, nor does he deal with all the extant Greek manuscripts available in Muscovy in the seventeenth century, although the collections he discusses contain the great majority of them. Printed Greek books are only a partial concern of the author. Furthermore, as he is careful to indicate, the reader cannot expect to find in the book (the rather broad title notwithstanding) a general cultural history. There is sufficient generalization to attract the non-specialist, but the main purpose of the study, and one which it accomplishes in exemplary fashion, is to provide a basic building block for further study.

Fonkich acknowledges his debt to noted scholars such as S. A. Belokurov and A. A. Pokrovskii, but he has improved upon their work in important ways. In examining de visu the vast majority of the manuscripts he discusses, he has been more careful and employed more sophisticated techniques than his predecessors. Thus he has corrected their errors and expanded considerably the source base for our knowledge about the ways in which Greek culture penetrated late Muscovy. His is the first attempt to bring together in one place what we know about the history of the collections discussed.

Chapter One examines the twenty-two Greek manuscripts which Fonkich has identified as having been copied in Muscovy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Of particular interest are his comments on four connected with the circle of Archbishop Gennadii in Novgorod at the end of the fifteenth century. They contain evidence suggesting that Russian (presumably) members of that group learned Greek but apparently never well enough to translate without the assistance of foreigners. The largest group of manuscripts discussed in this chapter were copied at the end of the sixteenth century by Greeks who had come to Moscow in connection with the establishment of the Patriarchate. Several members of a "school" of copyists were involved, including Archbishop Arsenios of Elasson and Matthew, Metropolitan of Myra.