

## Book Reviews

*Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* by Paul Robert Magocsi. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1993, xiii + 218 pp.

Everyone at Keston Institute wants a copy of this book. Everyone whose work involves Eastern Europe *needs* a copy of this book! It is impossible to explain adequately the various national, religious and political divisions of Eastern Europe, the permutations of borders, the appearance and disappearance of nation states and the competing forms of Christianity along the 'fault-line' which has divided East from West ever since Diocletian split the Roman Empire. Even this atlas will not make it possible to give satisfactory explanations of these phenomena, but it will make the task of gaining and conveying some insight into the frustrating, complex story significantly easier.

Professor Magocsi has previously published *Ukraine, a Historical Atlas*, which is very useful, so one welcomes the present work expecting high quality. One is not disappointed. My main criticism is the arbitrary choice of territory. 'East Central Europe' is a peculiar term, and could be used by those who deny that ethnic groups east of Poland are European. Since the exact geographic mid-point of Europe is at Yasinya, in the Ukrainian Carpathians, this claim is absurd. However, the title was not chosen by Professor Magocsi; the atlas is one volume in a series about 'East Central Europe', which the organisers have defined as the area more or less bounded by the eastern linguistic frontier of German and Italian-speaking peoples on the west, and the political border of what was the USSR on the east. The organisers have decided not to cover the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians, but to include the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians, 'Yugoslav peoples', Albanians, Bulgarians and Greeks.

Like all authors in the field, Magocsi makes arbitrary decisions regarding place names. He attempts to achieve consistency in the names of towns or cities by following the form given in the official language of the present-day country in which the town or city is located. This is actually as good a system as any and better than some. He also makes a serious effort to provide the alternative names (or versions of the same name) by which this or that place is known (often better known) in history. Still, the system produces some anomalies: map 6 (p. 17) provides such cities as Constantinople, Nicaea, Smyrna and Adrianople (for the period c. 1250); map 11 (p. 35) calls the same places Istanbul, İznik, İzmir and Edirne – the latter with no indication of the other name at all. And map 24, p. 76, depicting 'East Central Europe, 1815', includes 'Kaliningrad' (well before Kalinin's birth!) with 'Königsberg' in parentheses and minuscule type! But one should not be overcritical on a matter which does not have an ideal solution. Magocsi does retain those place names which have established English forms ('Athens', not 'Athinaï', and so on).

The maps themselves are beautiful: multicoloured and clearly drawn, with an enviable accuracy. Despite the limitation of 'East Central Europe', many of the maps in fact cover Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States and much of European Russia, so the

researcher looking for those places at various times will find the atlas helpful. The various maps cover political boundaries at different dates from AD 400 to the present, population movements, economic patterns and trade routes, the medieval cities, the complicated developments in the church (in which the question of nomenclature again causes confusion), with ample attention to the complicated relations between Orthodox and Greek-Catholics, education (map 17, p. 54, overlooks the influential Mohyla Academy at Kiev, which has recently been revived), the complicated relationships within and between the several empires which dominated the region until the First World War, the developments in the Balkans as the Ottoman Empire gradually collapsed, ethnic and linguistic patterns, which are essential to any real understanding of present-day conflicts, canals and railways, industrial development, detailed analyses of the geographic events of the two world wars, and now the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

An excellent bibliography refers the researcher to further, more specialised atlases and source materials. And the index, mercifully, does list alternative place names (so that if one looks under 'Adrianople' one is directed to the entry for 'Edirne', and so forth).

The primary attraction of any atlas is naturally the maps, and it is the maps which will induce people to purchase this particular atlas. That said, Magocsi's accompanying text is readable and informative, and novices in the field will find it helpful when confronted with the confusing, convoluted history which the maps illustrate. This atlas belongs in every serious library, and many scholars will want to have their own reference copies as well.

SERGE KELEHER

*Aleksandr Men', pastore e martire* by Yves Hamant. Edizioni Russia Cristiana 'La casa di Matrona', 1993, 176 pp. 19,000 lire. (Translation by Mara dell'Asta of *Alexandre Men, un témoin pour la Russie de ce temps*. Editions Mame, 1993.)

This, the first western biography of Fr Aleksandr Men', is most welcome. It is elegantly written, well organised and illustrated by photographs which convey something of the fascination of the man. Each chapter sets Fr Aleksandr in the context of successive periods of Russian church life, providing essential background for readers who are not familiar with it. Only now are we learning the ramifications of the catacomb church of the interwar years into which, through the conversion of his Jewish aunt and mother, Fr Aleksandr was almost literally born. He inherited, through several strands and contacts, the best of Russian Orthodox spirituality. He was nourished by disciples of the Optina *starsy*, taught to be ready to be open to the world. This fitted in with his own avid thirst for knowledge, his fascination with the natural world, science and culture, and his unparalleled ability to relate to individuals. He was brought up in parishes where on the eve of the Revolution priests had led renewal in what would now be regarded as base communities. The seeds of his future ministry thus lay in a fertile milieu – the ideal of the parish as a community.

Hamant examines the differences within the group of young priests who tried to find a way out of the asphyxiation of church life under Khrushchev and admits the controversial nature of Fr Aleksandr's decision to refrain from criticism of his hierarchy and make pastoral work his priority. Hamant then goes on to prove in chapters devoted to various aspects of his ministry that for him it was the right decision.

What is perhaps most impressively brought out is Fr Aleksandr's ability to inte-

grate his faith, his personal life, his interests and his work to a degree rarely found among great men. Hamant quotes widely from Russian reminiscences of Fr Aleksandr and brings out his sense of humour and fun. This book will, I am sure, inspire readers to further exploration of Fr Aleksandr's life and work such as that projected by the Aleksandr Men' Society.

JANICE BROWN

*Prizyv* by the Society of Ecumenical Christians. Moscow: Izd. Obshchestva Khristian-ekumenov, 1992. Paperback, 320 pp.\*

For some ten years after the revolution of 1917 the most popular genre in Russia was that of memoirs of revolutionaries who wrote about their past lives as members of the underground and in prison. They wrote tolerably well; they were proud of their efforts and did not want them to fall into oblivion. The memoirs were, however, extraordinarily trite, because they were written by the victors, noble thieves now sitting in judgment. Praise the Lord that the events through which we are now living only appear to be revolutionary. Life has turned upside down, but almost no one has fallen out of his seat. The members of underground organisations have remained members of underground organisations and their ideals are embodied in the gendarmes of yesterday. What a success this is for them in a spiritual sense! They are not threatened by the rebirth which so horrified Berdyayev in Lunacharsky. However, the majority of them do not value their happiness and get annoyed. Yesterday's KGB generals and party secretaries, the new democratic leaders, write their memoirs and publish them in luxurious editions, while the genuine heroes continue to vegetate in obscurity, storing up bitter memories.

It would seem that there is only one power which can keep people from a completely rational, justifiable and logical sense of envy and injury and that is the power of faith. The recently published memoirs of Aleksandr Riga, the well known church and social activist, serve as remarkable proof of this. His name sounds a little like a fairytale: a Riga from Riga who lives on Riga Lane. A remarkable Latvian bohemian, he became a Catholic and rallied a small circle of Muscovites around himself. They were Protestants, Orthodox and Christians not attached to any particular denomination, and they were all animated by the idea of church unity. They felt ecumenism to be a 'calling' – hence the title of Riga's memoirs – a personal vocation. The enemies of ecumenism often mendaciously call it a separate branch of Christianity. Riga's friends published a *samizdat* journal, *Chasha* (*Chalice*). They prayed together and were interrogated together. They called themselves 'ecumenists' and were therefore in danger of becoming a genuine sect, which as they were a group of persecuted outcasts would have been understandable in human terms, but an invisible force kept them from falling. They proved by their example that 'ecumenism' is not a particular brand of Christianity but rather a feature that Christians have in common.

That very same invisible force has helped Riga to create a book which is staggeringly chaste. He seems to write accurately about his arrest, the labour camp and the psychiatric hospital where they put him for refusing to cooperate with investigations. You might have expected purple prose of the kind you find in the publications of the *Bogorodichny tseñtr* where there is a real cult of the leader's personality; but no.

\*This review was originally published in *Khristiansky vestnik*, nos 43–44 (57–58), November 1993, pp. 20–1.

There are remarkably exact, sharp and short sketches of members of the society who were taken away for interrogation and about their unpleasant experiences, but about his own experiences Riga writes nothing. The descriptions of camp life and the horrors of the mental hospital are not made an issue of. Riga simply gives a selection of his letters to his mother (he was allowed one a month); inevitably they are brief, but they are heartening and through the cheerfulness which almost exceeds the author's strength the horror of his imprisonment is clearly to be seen. After this you read the author's travel notes, made after he had the opportunity to visit Italy in 1990, without the slightest envy, but rather with a feeling of relief that the Lord has brought this man consolation.

Several times in the book the names of those who betrayed the ecumenists are mentioned. This is done without the slightest censure and in such a way that the uninformed reader does not grasp that he is talking about informers.

Aleksandr Men' is mentioned several times, but without the slightest desire to bask in reflected glory. The book turns out to be a remarkable self portrait in the style of Rembrandt: the portrait of a man thirsty for the truth; but an ordinary vulnerable man, persecuted yet merciful, pure in heart, writing about his own life but helping the reader to know that life as God knows it.

YAKOV KROTOV

(Translated from the Russian by Emma Watkins.)