

Muslims (Bosniaks) began with the myth of Bosnia as a *serhat* or *Islamic antemurale* against the West. Then there was the Bogomil Myth and the myth of the ‘good Bošnjani’, the latter a misunderstood legal term signifying in reality the *boni homines* of late classical law. All Bosniak mythology aimed to establish the autochthony, identity, antiquity and moral excellence of the Bosniak people. Albena Hranova examines the myths of *sui generis*, antemurale and antiquity in Bulgarian textbook historiography between 1878 and 2001, but beginning with Georgi Rakovski’s writings in the period 1858–1867.

These are all well written, well researched, profound and detailed studies by outstanding scholars. Where appropriate, the articles are lavishly illustrated with black-and-white and colour plates. No student of South-Slavonic history, mythology or nationalism can afford to ignore this volume.

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Andreas Umland (ed.), *The Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights in Russia. Philosophical, Legal, and Empirical Studies*, Proceedings of an International Conference Held at Yekaterinburg on 6–7 April 2001 (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2004), 224 pp.

This book, the first in a series on Soviet and Post-Soviet politics and society, comprises fifteen papers, most of which were presented at the conference named in the subtitle. With the exception of three essays in English (by Arnold, Burkov and Hussner), the volume, including an Introduction and forward-looking Conclusion by Andreas Umland and Oksana Stuppo, is in Russian. Yekaterinburg was pointedly selected as the conference venue for its reputation as a centre of juridical education and research, the relative political diversity of the Sverdlovsk region and because Russia’s main centres are not representative of the state of affairs in the regions (17). The conference was envisaged as a ‘progress report on the implementation of the ECHR in Russia’ (219), three years after its ratification by the Russian Parliament in 1998. It was planned in the spirit of optimism and brought together such diverse constituencies as academics in law and social sciences, government officials, human rights activists and former dissidents. The crackdown on independent media in 2001 by the new Putin administration, how-

ever, made for divisiveness among the participants over a topical human rights issue – freedom of speech.

Common themes that emerge from these studies taken as a whole are ignorance of, and non-compliance with, Russia's treaty obligations in regard to human rights. The papers are grouped into four sections. In the first, Sergei Alekseev observes that individual rights gained primacy in national and international law in the aftermath of twentieth-century dictatorships, while the authority of the state remains paramount in Russia; Valerii Mikhailenko, Dean of International Relations at Ural State University, decries violations of citizens' rights resulting from resurgent xenophobia and ethnic separatism in former Soviet states; Rainer Arnold of the University of Regensburg analyses the harmonization of rights protection under two documents: the EU Charter and the ECHR.

In a section entitled 'The Social Context of Human Rights in Russia', Iulia Kharlamova of Stavropol University argues that the ECHR – as the Western model of liberal democratic government – is fundamentally incompatible with Russian ethical values and worldview, whereby freedom is regarded with suspicion and authority readily accepted. An analysis of the media in Tatarstan by Ekaterina Khodzhaeva of Kazan University demonstrates how shortcomings in meeting citizens' social and economic rights (access to housing, pensions, employment, health care) receive more news coverage than do violations of civil and political rights, and that such accounts are not identified as infringements of rights, nor rarely entail more than neutral reporting. Anatolii Azarov of the Moscow School of Human Rights condemns reigning 'legal nihilism, disrespect for rights and law', as evidenced by frequent violations of the Russian Constitution (80). He declares the Russian Federation a 'disingenuous partner and two-faced state' (84) for disregarding its treaty obligations, and finds the Ministry of Education especially culpable for 'depriving its citizens of the right to know their rights' (86).

In a section of six papers with focus on legal issues, Marat Salikov of the Ural State Juridical Academy documents cases in which the Russian Constitutional Court cites international conventions in its decisions in defence of personal liberties: against discrimination in voting rights and employment; in support of just compensation for requisition of property and wrongful sentencing; and in defence of the right to legal representation and transparency of procedure in detention. The remaining papers in this section describe violations of the ECHR. Manja

Hussner of Leipzig University concludes that the implementation of international treaties into Russian law, established in theory, is hampered in practice by a lack of independence and professionalism of the judiciary and by ignorance – even on the part of lawyers and the courts – of the international treaties Russia is signatory to. Ol'ga Selikhova of the Ural Legal Institute documents discrepancy between the Russian Constitution (which is in compliance with the ECHR) and legislation and practice on regional and local levels that condone routine and severe violations of personal liberties – from legislated gender discrimination in employment and allocation of inheritance, to arbitrary arrest, police brutality and unlawful detention for vagrancy, panhandling and treatment for alcohol and drug addiction. The Head of Jurisprudence of South Ural State University, Igor' Shirmanov, explains how vague formulations in the Russian Criminal Code, together with a culture that prefers mistaken convictions to mistaken acquittals, violate Russia's obligations under the Convention to observe legal precision and the primacy of rights. Anton Burkov of the Ural State Legal Academy and Essex University documents the non-compliance of Russian legislation and practice with international norms in regard to the detention of the mentally ill. The work of Human Rights Commissions in the Rostov region, where compliance with the Convention has been complicated by proximity to the Northern Caucasus and attendant security concerns, as well as by economic hardship, is considered by Ol'ga Aleksenko.

Finally, three papers present case studies on the example of the Sverdlovsk region. Elena Goncharova of the Ural Centre for the Defence of Human Rights compares internationally recognised criteria for a fair trial with practice in the region. The activity and prospective development of the Regional Commissioner for Human Rights, whose mission it is to monitor compliance with the law by authorities, is examined by Tat'iana Gladkova of the Ministry of Economics and Labour. She finds that the Commissioner's work is thwarted by a lack of cooperation from officials in investigations, and the lack of authority to compel compliance with its judgements. Andrei Liamzin examines human rights violations by investigatory bodies and in the penal system. In his study, systemic delays in hearings and detention in severely overcrowded and unsanitary conditions – the result of insufficient funding and staffing of the courts and prisons – emerge as more ominous than cases of arbitrary arrest and illegal incarceration or torture.

Lest some of the studies in this volume appear of limited relevance for their focus, or the book as a whole seem dated as a snapshot of human rights issues in Russia at the start of the millennium, this informative book remains of interest for researchers and retains its relevance – as does the fundamental question of human rights in Russia.

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Mark Stanley Swift, *Biblical Subtexts and Religious Themes in Works of Anton Chekhov*, Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature, 18 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), xi + 196 pp.

In its scope and intent, Mark Swift's useful study is more modest than its title might suggest. Wisely sidestepping the question of Chekhov's personal religious beliefs, it focuses on faith (or the lack of it) as a factor in the life of his fictional characters. Its elucidation of biblical subtexts relates for the most part to the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes ('the most unorthodox book in the Bible', 78–9), and its exposition of religious themes concerns itself with those adduced as evidence of Chekhov's affinities with this and the other books of the Solomonic tradition: the quest for meaning in the face of the 'vanity' of life and existential despair, the nature of evil, suffering and love. It confines itself (almost by definition) to works (as opposed to *the* works) of Chekhov's 'mature' or 'serious' period, devoting closest attention to a relatively small number of stories of the late 'eighties and 'nineties ('In the Ravine', 'In Exile', 'The Bishop', 'A Dreary Story', 'The Steppe', 'Happiness', 'An Attack [of Nerves]', 'Ward No. 6'), with passing reference to other prose works and to some of the plays.

Within these parameters, Swift constructs, defends and illustrates a strong case: that both Chekhov and Ecclesiastes 'presented a radical challenge to literary and ideological convention of their respective times':

With the same skeptical outlook and the same method of objective observation, Chekhov and the biblical sage made similar observations: changing circumstances make rigid truth difficult; much depends on chance; the world can be described, but not explained...[;] human beings often fall short of their capabilities (179).