

Marjorie L. Hilton. *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. x, 339 pp. \$27.95 (paper). ISBN-13: 978-0-82296-167-3.

Marjorie L. Hilton's work joins those of Elena Osokina, Julie Hessler, Amy Randall, Sally West, and others who have significantly enhanced what we know about the history of retail practices in Russia. And while those authors have treated the late imperial era and the first decades of Soviet power separately, Hilton crosses the revolutionary threshold to show how Russians interpreted and debated the significance and meaning of retail trade from the 1870s to the end of NEP. Rather than presenting "hard" data on the volume and nature of retail commerce, this monograph concentrates almost entirely on what that commerce reveals about the development of modern social and cultural norms, the relationship of merchants to the state and vice versa, gender roles, attitudes toward consumption, and the position of minorities in the Russian economy.

Readers of this journal will be primarily interested in Hilton's discussion of retail in the post-1917 period, yet the most satisfying parts of her book are the first five chapters, which cover the late imperial era. These detail the transition from the traditional market-stall approach to trade, in which merchants aggressively called out to passersby to enter their small, dark, and often dirty shops and then engaged in extended bouts of haggling until the deal was made, to modern "magazins" (as she calls them) such as Petrokokino or Muir and Mirrielees in Moscow, with their spacious and antiseptic display rooms, refined service professionals, and fixed prices. Hilton offers some treatment of developments in Odessa (especially the Odessa "*Passazh*" retail arcade) for comparison, but the bulk of her study concentrates on Moscow and, in particular, the evolution of the upper trading rows that sat opposite the Kremlin on Red Square from a congeries of loosely organized shops to the bright, clean arcade that we know today by its Soviet-era acronym, GUM.

With a ruthlessness worthy of the Stalin era, Moscow municipal authorities in the 1880s demolished the historic upper trading rows, displacing most of its merchants, while the local press branded the old rows as backward, squalid, and inappropriate for a modern European country. Indeed, the fact that the rows were destroyed before a contest for their replacement was even announced suggests the eagerness with which local leaders sought to transform retail culture. Proprietors in the historic center strenuously opposed the unilateral decision, and here Hilton contributes to the discussion on the emergence of civil society in late imperial Russia by pointing out that opponents objected to the move not in the "language of supplicants" but on the grounds of "protection of rights and adherence to existing laws" (p. 44).

When the rows reopened in 1893, high rents and strict rules against calling out to customers or haggling kept many of the former proprietors out of Moscow's historic center. Like Sally West, Hilton sees a merchantry that deliberately kept one foot firmly in tradition while encouraging a new understanding

of retail's function in modern society. While some objected to the new practices of buying and selling, she shows how those who endorsed the changes worked to shape the perceptions of their role in Russian society by integrating symbols and rituals of Orthodoxy and the autocracy into their businesses. Proprietors organized elaborate consecrations of new stores, incorporated icons and other religious symbols into their shop fronts, and took advantage of religious and state holidays to display new products or offer sales on selected goods. Thus, whereas traditional associations of merchants with dishonesty and artifice (both of which traditional trading practices emphasized) were deeply rooted in Russian culture, modern capitalists sought to solidify their standing through Church and state endorsement and by making their stores "institutions, fixtures in the community, places where consumers not only purchased goods but also organized their daily activities and their lives" (p. 95). Merchants and their advocates in the press hoped that the new retail environment would be, in effect, schools for acculturating Russians to "values of beauty, prosperity, culture, rationalization, transparency, benevolent paternalism, and progress" (p. 96).

The process implied changes in gender roles as well, for whereas the adversarial exchanges of the old marketplace made it the domain for masculine contests, the modern department store was a space that catered to middle- and upper-class women who expected to be waited on by professional and polite *kommersants* (businessmen) rather than cajoled by insistent *kuptsy* (merchants). The change increased anxieties for some, such as one writer who complained that such an environment "promoted idleness, rampant individualism, social turmoil, and unbridled consumption, primarily among young women" (p. 124). These concerns reappeared after the Bolsheviks secured power and sought to wrest the feminized retail space from its bourgeois form and reclaim it for working men (p. 186).

Though women in the Soviet system were represented as benefitting from goods purchased through state retail outlets and consumption was ostensibly democratized, Bolshevik values held no quarter for the pampering or self-indulgence of capitalist consumerism. Nevertheless, the new state did embrace the pedagogical function of modern retailing, seeing in it a means of creating "model Soviet citizen-consumers who supported state enterprises and learned ethical and courteous behaviors while making their daily procurement rounds" (p. 196). In this capacity, then, GUM was to become the "preeminent merchant and universal provider," symbolically uniting all citizens "in one, big imagined department store" (p. 211).

The reality, however, failed to live up to the ideal. In her final chapter, Hilton points out that, in the Soviet era, attention shifted to the protection of workers' rights rather than those of customers. Despite efforts to cultivate an idealized set of behaviors in the marketplace, the shopping environment devolved into a struggle between consumers, who insisted on the right to equitable treatment and access to goods on the one hand, and employees who coveted their right to protection from the caprices of insistent consumers on

the other. Moreover, goods shortages and the inefficiencies of state stores and cooperatives turned shopping into a “straightforward matter of meeting material needs” rather than the “leisurely pastime” envisioned by late-imperial retailers. The introduction of complaint books (*knigi zhalob*) in 1926 was meant to help adjudicate disputes but, instead, it further contributed to what Hilton calls a “culture of complaint” in which, as the title of the chapter puts it, “the customer is always wrong.”

Hilton has presented a rich and rewarding analysis of the attitudes and policies that shaped retail commerce in late imperial and early Soviet Russia. She provides useful points of comparison by consistently keeping an eye on analogous developments in Western Europe. Although I would have liked a more thorough and explicit rationale for the chronological scope of her analysis, she nevertheless makes the case clearly that in both the late tsarist and early Soviet regimes merchants and cultural elites looked to the retail sphere as a site for the reworking of social behaviors. The realization of such hopes was at best partial, but Hilton has made a strong case for seeing this sector of modern mass society as a field for debate and the shaping of gender, class, and urban identities.

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