

Engel, Barbara Alpern. *Marriage, Household, and Home in Modern Russia: From Peter the Great to Vladimir Putin* (The Bloomsbury History of Modern Russia Series). London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Illustrations (black and white). Notes. Bibliography. Index. xiii+268. \$100.00 (cloth). \$32.95 (paper). \$29.65 (e-book). ISBN 978-1-350-01447-3 (cloth). ISBN 978-1-350-01446-6 (paper). ISBN 978-1-350-01448-0 (e-book).

The prolific historian Barbara Alpern Engel has done a great service to the field by producing this well-written and analytical synthesis of the secondary literature on all aspects of the patriarchal household in modern Russia over the course of three centuries. The book can easily be used as a textbook in Russian history survey and Russian civilization courses, given its attention to changing political, legal, and religious policies regarding marriage, household, and home, and the varying responses to such policies from family members and individuals throughout the long *durée*, which was at times marked by social, economic, and cultural upheavals. Engel deftly uses memoirs and diaries, correspondence, literary sources, prescriptive literature, and newspapers to make the prose come alive, as she charts the ways in which households accommodated, subverted, or reacted against policies.

The first half of the book, stretching from the reign of Peter the Great to World War I, covers materials Engel has written about elsewhere. True to her inquiring mind, she presents new materials, especially about Russian noblemen and noblewomen and male merchants. The threading of individuals' life stories through more than one section acquaints readers with intimate knowledge that supplements statistical data. Engel's superb storytelling keeps the reader engaged and eager to learn more. For example, she introduces Andrei Bolotov's mid-eighteenth-century diary as "a rare personal narrative... a vivid description not only of how a [marital] match might be made in his milieu but also of the considerations that weighed in the balance" (13). Engel delivers on her promise in a later section, noting the ways in which the twenty-five-year-old landowner had "anticipat[ed] happiness in his marriage" and sought in a spouse "a virtuous and submissive character, and competency in household management" and not simply the economic exchange of a suitable dowry (27). These new Enlightenment and civilizing sentiments of happiness and love propounded by Catherine II reflected a turning point among the lives of Russia's social elites of both genders that Engel ties directly to the empress's affirmation of the gentry's release from compulsory service in 1762. Such sentimental ideas, Engel argues, trickled down to the merchant class beginning in the late eighteenth century. In these vignettes, it is Catherine rather than Peter I who comes across as the true revolutionary.

In her discussions of the traditional patriarchal peasant household, dominated by economic and reproductive concerns for survival, Engel charts the dynamics of the more complex household of the extended family throughout the "largely agrarian Russian core" of the empire (vii). Here she pays more attention to the authority of the male head of household than to his wife, who could wield

a considerable amount of power as well. Engel seems to underestimate the ways in which Old Believer serf families and even Orthodox families were able to resist and subvert their serf owners' and bailiffs' marital and procreational demands. Beginning with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and ensuing industrialization and urbanization Engel sees a modernizing trend among peasants toward some forms of individualism and eventually the loosening of patriarchal authority.

The second half of the book deals with the tumultuous twentieth century, punctuated not only by traumatic wars, revolutions, Bolshevism, massive famine, and demographic crises, but also by the Soviet state's reaction of a seemingly obsessive interference in the private sphere and family that often had disastrous repercussions on marriage and family cohesion. The state's legacy of interference, after a short experiment with freedom in the chaotic and ruinous post-Soviet years, resurfaced with Vladimir Putin's regime's insistence on a return to the traditional patriarchal family.

Engel is the first historian to chronicle all these changes in families and intimate life over the long twentieth century and the varying responses of households and individuals, especially on the part of women, to loss, trauma, and other burdens within successive regimes that never questioned traditional masculinity. Her approach is always compassionate. Crediting grandmothers with being critical players within the Soviet household as providers of childcare and other support and charting the ways in which masculinity became increasingly vulnerable because of demographic crises, Engel goes a long way in explaining how Russian women were able to dodge state demands and take control over their intimate lives. A broadly analytical conclusion would have helped to shore up these significant points.

Christine D. Worobec  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, Illinois  
worobec@niu.edu