

Icons of Russia: The Book Russia Begins From

Alexander Pershikov

Alexander Sapov

FriesenPress (Apr 25, 2016)

Softcover \$51.49 (216pp)

978-1-4602-6159-0

This book successfully embodies a proud perception of a powerful nation and its long and complicated history.

Alexander Pershikov and Alexander Sapov's *Icons of Russia* is an informative, lavishly illustrated, and detailed view of Russian cultural heritage and its influence on other parts of the world.

The titular icons don't just refer to glorious Byzantine religious paintings of saints and madonnas, though those are one aspect of the narrative; rather, the authors use the term to refer to all components of Russia's cultural heritage and national identity.

Pershikov and Sapov examine art, history, popular culture, food, music, scientific discoveries, and other subjects to show how imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and the new Russian Federation have been a dominant power on the world stage. They persuasively and passionately note that this powerful presence happens "not only because of its size and natural resources, but mostly because of the creative genius of the Russian nation."

Icons of Russia begins by decoding some national symbols, like the double-headed eagle and Red Cross, and subsequently dives into such disparate components of Russian culture as its vernacular, architecture, babushkas, matryoshka dolls, ice hockey, and the bogatyrka hat. The authors are unabashed ambassadors of Mother Russia and proudly present their culture in the most positive terms.

Their choices of what constitutes Russian culture are colored through this rosy lens, and some subjects are glossed over in cursory fashion, as in the page on Russian secret police and spies, which glaringly omits the infamous Soviet gulags and KGB abuses. Stalin is inscrutably summed up as a leader with a great sense of humor whose "previously unknown repression of his own people and the great victories under his leadership will be remembered by many generations."

Other Russian cultural icons are also conspicuously absent; there's a page on Russian champagne, but none on vodka. Prose is sometimes uneven, as with a skimpy page given to *Anna Karenina* that leaves the novel's resonance unexamined. The claim placing Mark Rothko, Marc Chagall, and Vladimir Nabokov in the pantheon of great Russian artists is odd, given that most lived as expatriates for reasons of religious and artistic freedom.

Illustrations and photos pop with variously colored backgrounds, good layout, and a nice integration of images and text. There is a luxurious feel on every page, with rich colors, geometric shapes, and asymmetrical composition.

Icons of Russia is a good resource for students, travelers, and anyone wanting an overview of Russian culture and history, albeit with a heavily editorialized and favorable point of view. The book successfully embodies a proud perception of a powerful nation and its long and complicated history.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (August 23, 2016)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.