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Al'bert Baiburin. Sovetskii pasport: Istoriia, struktura, praktiki. Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2017. 488 pp. ISBN 978-5-94380-232-4.

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"The Soviet passport," reads the blurb on the back cover of this original and valuable new book, "is not only a document. The fate of a person, the trajectory of his/her life depended on its presence or lack thereof and on what information it contained." Despite its exceptional significance as the quintessential "super" document of Soviet power, scholars have devoted remarkably little attention to understanding the passport's role in historical time. Taking a panoramic view and exploiting a wide array of sources, Al'bert Baiburin of the European University at St. Petersburg, a prolific author of works of ethnography, anthropology, and history and editor-in-chief of *Anthropological Forum* (*Antropologicheskii forum*), published in the Russian capital of the north, has produced a remarkably comprehensive book on the Soviet passport and the system surrounding it, which may well be the most multifaceted work on the subject to date. It is an essential starting point for anyone interested in the topic.

Interdisciplinary by design, the monograph examines the Soviet passport from three perspectives, each of which is reflected in the subtitle and constitutes a separate part of the book. Based on state-generated documents, on other historical sources, and on the secondary literature, part 1 chronicles the emergence of the passport in Europe, its peculiar features in tsarist Russia, Soviet power's initial rejection of the document and then reintroduction in 1932, changes made to the passport and passport regulations through the end of the Soviet era, and the features of the new Russian passport enshrined after the passing of the Soviet Union. In part 2 Baiburin taps archival sources and instructions aimed at officials to interrogate the document as a bureaucratic construction of immense propaganda value that constrained and enabled its owner's identity. Perhaps the most original section of the study, it sheds light on the passport application and the importance of the information the applicant needed to include such as name, sex, and what the author felicitously calls "passport nationality"—that is, ethnic origin, which may differ from the passport owner's "real" nationality. Adding a personal and human dimension to the Soviet and post-Soviet passport systems, part 3 makes effective use of oral history and memoirs to suggest the myriad ways in which passport owners ascribed meaning to them and to their use.

The author poses—and answers—some critical questions: Why did the passport take on such importance? Why did the Bolsheviks abolish the passport system when

they came to power only to reintroduce it in 1932? Why did the living, or residential, permit (*propiska*) become such a defining feature of Soviet life? What is the meaning of the term “passport regime” and of the 101-kilometer rule? Why didn’t Soviet peasants receive passports until the 1970s? How did people contrive to sidestep the rules to obtain a living permit and passport? How and why did the physical appearance of the passport and its content change over time? Why did nationality, which at first was determined by the applicant, later become determined by the nationality of their parents? What distinguishes the passport photo from others? What motivated some religious communities to reject the passport altogether?

To be sure, many of Baiburin’s answers will not surprise the informed reader, but it is their totality, the sum of the book’s parts (essentially the question regarding how the Soviet passport system functioned officially and unofficially), that distinguishes this work. As the author concludes, “a person, having received his/her passport, discovers in it her/his second ‘I,’ which corresponds little to his representations of herself/himself,” because the passport is more than just another document; it is “an agent rendering unquestionable influence on our self-identification” (p. 449); it served to mediate a citizen’s bureaucratic relationship with the state and the tension between the establishment of one’s official identity and one’s self-identification.

In part 1, following his discussion of the formation of a passport system in tsarist Russia, the author surveys the 15 years of early Soviet rule in which the document fell out of favor, only to be reestablished during the cluster of crises at the beginning of the 1930s. Introducing a Soviet passport in 1932 curbed the flow of rural people fleeing starvation into the largest urban centers and also ridded the cities of “socially alien elements.” What one did before and after 1917, one’s “social position”—in effect, class—now determined everything. As is well known, because they fell outside the passport system, Soviet peasants were the big losers. There were others. The state categorized the urban centers into zones with different passport regimes reflecting different standards for “cleansing” the cities of kulaks and other alien elements. The criteria for expulsion changed over time to include spongers or parasites (*tuneiadtsy*) in 1961, a categorization later famously applied to some members of the dissident community. Considerations such as controlling the flow of cadres of workers, interagency bureaucratic rivalries, and scenarios for growing the economy, as well as a post-Stalinist vision for constructing a homogenous society with a new Soviet identity, resulted in the introduction of a single passport system—but only in 1974, nearly coinciding with the promulgation in 1977 of a new Soviet constitution. In the author’s words: “The passport itself became for some Soviet citizens a privilege and for others—a source of information about their social inferiority (*ushcherbnost’*)” (p. 188). In other words, “the passportization of the population of the country began as a social filter but ended as a social stamp” (p. 452). Importantly, the post-Soviet passport guaranteed freedom of movement, replacing the living, or residential, permit with registration. Moreover, the elimination of point five on the passport application form—nationality—triggered wide-ranging debate.

Calling the passport a kind of “consummation of the bureaucratization of an individual identity” (p. 276), in part 2 Baiburin underscores how the Soviet passport

differed from the Russian imperial one, especially the replacement of religious belief with nationality and institutionalization of the mandatory living permit, as well as the less provocative question regarding on which documents the passport is issued. As elsewhere in the book, Baiburin tells a story of negotiation, arbitrariness, and evasion, as well as of the agency of those applying for passports; their behaviors could effect changes in the passport system itself.

Based on memoirs and 64 interviews carried out between 2007 and 2010 as part of the National Identity in Russia project, representing members of age cohorts born in each decade of the twentieth century after 1910 and before 1990, part 3 adds an impressionistic human dimension to understanding how one went about obtaining a passport and the significance one ascribed both to the process and to the document. Quoting George Bernard Shaw's astute remark that "a healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones," Baiburin here suggests how the Soviet experience proved Shaw right. In Baiburin's words, the practice of determining one's passport nationality represented "the result of agreements and compromises with oneself, with one's closest surroundings, and with officials in the passport offices" (p. 367). His final chapter offers informative forays into preserving and carrying one's passport, the vicissitudes of the state's verification of documents, how one went about changing his/her name, the role of a "clean" passport (one without limiting entries), fictitious marriages, what happened when someone lost a passport, several religious communities' refusal to obtain the document, and an ironic reflection on this "most important document" and why it was needed. I particularly benefited from the discussion of how various practices not foreseen by officialdom nonetheless provided the possibility for Soviet citizens to attempt to play out their concrete living strategies.

This is a major book by an accomplished and mature scholar with which it would seem churlish to find fault. But I have several criticisms and suggestions. For one, the book would have benefited from a rigorous editing: it is repetitive and chock full of lengthy quotes from documents, memoirs, and oral interviews that could be pruned and synthesized. Second, the book spotlights the experience of the Russian republic and would have been enriched by two or three case studies of practices in a Central Asian, Baltic, or Caucasian republic. Although examination of passports for foreign travel falls outside the purview of this book, I would have appreciated a brief discussion about the relationship between the two documents. In addition, Baiburin's treatment of religious communities that flatly rejected the Soviet passport system by choice would have benefited from further research, from adducing statistics, and from providing case studies. One on the Jehovah's Witnesses, in particular, would have been welcomed—and doable, given the recent book on the Witnesses in the Soviet Union by Emily Baran (2014). Finally, I believe the author would have profited from using the fully digitized Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System in part 3 of his book: the online search I conducted of the word "passport" yielded 190 "hits."

That said, *Sovetskii pasport* represents a major contribution to the field that highlights the valuable work being carried out at the European University at St. Petersburg on everyday life in the Soviet Union. "Without a document there is no per-

son,” quipped Soviet writer Mikhail Bulgakov. As Baiburin makes clear, Bulgakov could just as easily have replaced the word document with “passport.”

REFERENCES

Baran, Emily. 2014. *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah’s Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach about It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.