



Matthew P. Romaniello. *The Elusive Empire: Kazan and the Creation of Russia, 1552-1671.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. xiii + 297 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-299-28514-2.

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A Long Path toward Empire in Russia

In *The Elusive Empire*, Matthew P. Romaniello unpacks the historiographical baggage surrounding 1552, when the armies of Ivan IV (the Terrible) sacked Kazan, bringing the lands and people of the former Kazan khanate under the control of Muscovite Russia. This event has long been subject to a number of interpretations. Tatars, the ethnolinguistic group native to the Volga River region surrounding Kazan, depicted 1552 as the beginning of an era of victimization and subjugation at the hands of Russians. The victors heralded the defeat of the Kazan Tatars as a final triumph of Orthodox Christianity over Islam. Romaniello argues, however, that 1552 initiated a period of empire building for Muscovy that was much more complex than has previously been acknowledged. He wades through the political, economic, ethnolinguistic, social, and even international factors at play to ascertain how Muscovy integrated a non-Slavic, non-Orthodox land into its empire. The process took an entire century, but Moscow transformed the former Kazan khanate from a peripheral holding into an integral part of the Russian heartland.

Romaniello describes Moscow's "elusive" process of creating an empire as "the projection of a powerful state created by a successful conquest, disguising an extremely slow, contingent, and heavily negotiated process by which the state built its authority and knit together existing economic, political, and social networks" (p. 5). Conquering Kazan did little to ensure Ivan IV's control of

the region; indeed, Moscow lacked the military strength, infrastructure, and wealth to administer and protect the lands of the former khanate. Romaniello explains that, rather than admitting this, the tsar and his allies bought time by manipulating the religious and political discourse surrounding the victory over Kazan. The construction of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, along with more subtle linguistic plays found in imperial and Orthodox ceremonies, helped to build a facade of success that was only fully realized a century later. The tsars in Moscow turned physical challenges, such as the distance between the metropole and the periphery, and practical problems, such as the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences of the indigenous population, into instruments of advantage and power. Muscovy's "institutional bricolage" also combined both preexisting and imported methods of governance to manage the Volga frontier effectively (p. 8).

According to Romaniello, Muscovy, like other pre-modern European states, learned to construct its empire according to the principle of "composite sovereignty," which asserted that each periphery required a different style of rule based on local and historical factors. Even if Moscow demanded a particular regime across its empire, that system rested on top of various indigenous practices and social networks, in this case Mongol ones. The compromises and accommodations necessary to incorporate the indigenous population into the empire contributed to its "elusiveness." Yet Romaniello also maintains that

lessons learned in one corner of the empire could be transferred to others. In the Volga region, for example, the tsars experimented with new ways of integrating non-Russians and non-Orthodox subjects into the army, managing international trade along the Volga, and directing the agricultural production of the peasant population. Russia later adapted these experiences for its other peripheries, including the Caucasus, the Baltic region, and Poland. Romaniello suggests that other states employed similar patterns of knowledge transfer; he invokes such terms such as bureaucratization, centralization, cameralism, and mercantilism to prompt a broader discussion about the parallel developments in early modern Russia and Europe.

The Elusive Empire consists of an introduction, six chapters, and a brief afterword. The book's narrative progresses chronologically from the victory over Kazan in 1552 to the Stepan Razin revolt of 1670-71. Romaniello bases his research on a wide reading of published primary sources and secondary literature, along with work in a number of archives, particularly the Russian State Archive of Ancient Records (RGADA) in Moscow. This holding preserves the documents for the Russian administrative system in the former Kazan khanate, an overlapping and competing network of chancelleries that expanded from four in the late sixteenth century to forty-two in 1667. During this period, chancellery administrators squabbled among themselves and with Moscow over money, territory, taxes, and trade regulation. Romaniello devotes particular attention to the Chancellery of the Kazan Palace (*Prikaz Kazanskogo dvortsa*) and its gradual devolution from the primary arbiter of local authority to just one of many bureaucratic institutions clamoring for power.

Romaniello uses these sources to place in dynamic contention what he identifies as the four poles of authority: the church and state leaders in Moscow and their parallel representatives on the periphery, who together were constantly creating friction and providing spaces to pursue competing individual agendas (p. 12). In examining the directives (*nakazy*) from the tsar to local state officials, Romaniello dissects the relations between local governors (*voevody*) and their secretaries (*dâiaki*) as they strove to build their own wealth while also meeting the demands of the center. Simultaneously, Russian Orthodox Church representatives pursued their own objectives of gaining land and opening monasteries and convents. In petitioning Moscow to block local governors' attempts to requisition monastic privileges and property, abbots protected the non-Orthodox and non-

Russian people living on their lands. Money and power were potent motivators for collaboration and support, regardless of ethnic or religious identity. Indeed, Romaniello's interpretation of the elusiveness of Moscow's empire is at its best when he shows how interactions between the four poles facilitated a checks-and-balances system on imperial power. He notes that, as in other areas of early modern states, the patchwork of competing interests and institutions with real, if not de jure, administrative power, produced enough fiscal involvement to improve and develop the region, and enough chaos to prevent any true challenge to the tsar (p. 82). The empire was steadily coming together.

In later chapters, Romaniello chronicles the shifting approaches to governing the region's non-Orthodox and non-Russian populations. The construction of the Arzamas and Simbirsk defensive lines, along with the outposts, towns, and monasteries that supported them, reflected Moscow's obsession with internal security and border control. To defend the frontier after the sacking of Kazan, the tsar relied on a cavalry force of elite Tatars who had formerly served in the Kazan khanate. Specialists will appreciate Romaniello's careful analysis of the Muscovy system of social rank (*mestnichestvo*) and the attempts to incorporate these Tatars and other indigenous nobles into its categories. In demonstrating loyalty to the state through military service, non-Russians could maintain their former status and prestige without any notable pressure to convert to Orthodoxy. Many also accepted land grants (*pomestâe*) in exchange for their service. Nonetheless, as Moscow consolidated its vertical authority over an expanding bureaucratic system, and as military reforms reduced the need for cavalry, the value of non-Russians to Moscow waned. Romaniello indicates how the Law Code (*Ulozhenie*) of 1649 in particular upended the privileged position of non-Russian elites. Subsequently, conversion to Orthodoxy alone could facilitate social and political mobility. Only at this moment, Romaniello suggests, did Moscow decisively defeat the Muslims of Kazan, relegating them from valued enemies to local undesirables.

Thus, by the late seventeenth century, the Volga region had been transformed into an extension of Muscovy, bound by the same administrative system as the rest of the heartland. Local governors and secretaries lacked the independence they once revealed in; strict trade regulations from Moscow directed trade along the Volga; and universal legal codes managed all the tsar's subjects in an equal fashion. A long period of peace between 1630 and 1670 was broken only by the Stepan Razin revolt,

which in turn sparked domestic disturbances and a security crisis in the region. That the revolt, however, was easily put down indicates to Romaniello the success of the tsarist security policies: "All of the sacrifices, investigations, and paranoia had finally proven valuable" (p. 179). Romaniello argues that that Russian and non-Russian peasants alike took part in the rebellion not to protest their new legal and economic status, but rather to take revenge on local governors, particularly those who abused privileges, enacted restrictive trade policies, and administered forced migration orders. Their anger was directed at these local figures, not at the Muscovite state. In response to the revolt, Moscow adjusted some administrative, military, and economic policies, but primarily stayed its course. At least for a moment, the colonization of the Volga region was complete, with the local population integrated into a unified system of Muscovite rule.

The Elusive Empire is a rewarding read for a number of reasons, two of which merit mention here. First, Romaniello makes a significant historiographical contribution in drawing attention to the many ways in which the metropole accommodated and relied on the local population to meet its objectives, a practice employed by other early modern European states as well. Additionally, Romaniello demonstrates that, with the exception of the Mordvins, who were forcibly relocated, Moscow treated

similarly the various non-Russian ethnolinguistic groups in the region, co-opting elites into the Muscovite social hierarchy and exploiting all others for their labor. This is an important departure from other historiographical trends that treat each non-Russian ethnolinguistic community separately, often projecting current political and national divisions into the past.

Romaniello makes his strongest arguments when drawing from his original research from RGADA in Moscow, revealing how various petitions, instructions, and reports reflected complex and overlapping power structures on the Volga frontier. Unfortunately, the location of the research notes at the end of the book makes it difficult to distinguish when Romaniello is making a claim based on his own archival work from when he is taking a stance in a particular historiographical debate. I wish that he had brought more critical reflection about his reading of the sources and the relevance of these historiographical questions into the body of the text. This also would have helped readers note when Romaniello draws from a comparative imperial framework. Nonetheless, *The Elusive Empire* is an engaging read that will inspire much thought and reflection among both specialists of Muscovite Russia and scholars of empire more generally. I recommend it highly.

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