

to re-apply her deconstructivist arguments about President Reagan's "triumphalist diplomacy" to Washington's present-day policies vis-à-vis the Kremlin. The increasingly revanchist and revisionist Russia sends its "peacekeeping missions" to independent Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine just like its predecessor, the Soviet Union, sent its forces to preserve communist peace and stability in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Following Fischer's arguments, it is completely unnecessary to carry a big stick when talking to Russia, as all previous attempts to push the Kremlin to reform, to observe human rights, and to respect the territorial integrity of its neighbors had proved counterproductive.

The lessons of the Reagan Administration convincingly demonstrate that diplomacy alone could not work. As President Theodore Roosevelt once put it, "a big stick" and "decisive action" were also needed. Paradoxically, Beth Fischer's study only makes its readers support "triumphalists" even more and conclude that her attempts at their demystification have largely failed.

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Victoria Donovan, *Chronicles in Stone: Preservation, Patriotism, and Identity in Northwest Russia*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2019.

The ancient cities of Novgorod, Pskov, and Vologda are dubbed the birthplaces of Russia, yet Western scholars have rarely researched them. Victoria Donovan looks at their "onion-domed churches, kremlin walls, and austere monasteries" as "chronicles in stone" (3). She discusses how the past that they encapsulate was read, interpreted, and exploited between World War II and today. She continues the traditions in modern research on architectural heritage preservation in Soviet Moscow and Leningrad established by

Stephen Bittner, Catriona Kelly, and Steven Maddox. Donovan draws attention to the Russian province not merely to fill a gap on the map, however; she skillfully weaves her rich and detailed discussion of local dynamics into the national context of the past and present.

The fusion of local and national is key to her argument: The Soviet state “upcycled” the architectural monuments of the Northwest to cultivate popular patriotism and the identity of “russified sovietness.” The “chronicles in stone” have been potent symbols of local and national identity since the end of World War II. They were endemic to each city, rendering Novgorod the cradle of Russian democracy, Pskov a heroic border fortress city, and Vologda a spiritual center complete with “unadulterated” nature (6). Diverse and subject to evolving attitudes toward their preservation, these monuments constructed a narrative of the Russian people’s genius, heroism, and strength (4).

The devastation of the war, the ensuing psychological crisis, and disorientation after Stalin’s death premised the production of a tempered ideology that gifted a second life to architectural heritage. Its preservation was a panacea for the reunification and patriotic education of a distraught population. Yet, Donovan’s methods speak to more nuances than the formal limits of her argument. Preservationists, residents, and tourists participated in this state project and internalized the understandings of “Russian” and “Soviet” in a variety of ways. One could be a chauvinist, a nationalist, or a patriot, or all in one; what the author reveals—individual knowledge of one’s history and culture, love for art and architecture, and respect for the cultural environment—is a neglected but important result of Soviet preservation work (18).

Donovan breaks down the persistent top vs. bottom approach: she employs the concept of “Heimat” after Alon Confino to show that the feeling of the nation was de-centered and personal, informed by immediate experiences of a familiar world (4, 15–16). The combination of archival and socio-anthropological research, oral history, and observation work (the author toured many heritage

sites with her hosts and friends) provides a firm basis for understanding architectural reconstruction and its consequences through local voices and memory, as well as the reception of nation-building discourse on the ground. For the citizens, preservation was not an instrument of the state: “the towns’ historic monuments were not perceived as museicized relics of an irrelevant past, but rather as an intimate part of the lived environment” (161). Such was the feeling of the Soviet people finding home at Novgorod’s St. George’s Monastery which provided them emergency accommodation after the war—one of many fascinating stories in the book.

Divided by the collapse of the USSR, the structure effectively reinforces the argument and its complexity. It lays bare the limits of Soviet identity-making, reflecting on what was local, what was national, and what endured into the 1990s, and viewing the history of Soviet architectural preservation and its legacy from a human perspective. Part 1, “The Northwest in Soviet Imagination,” digs into archival sources on Soviet architectural preservation and heritage tourism. Part 2, “The Northwest in Lived Memory,” looks at the legacy of Soviet preservation work and heritage debates through a social lens. Case studies enter each chapter, sometimes making it difficult to remember the national and patriotic context while simultaneously remaining attuned to the uniqueness of each place. However, despite this, the author keeps us focused on the overarching picture, and the argument’s exposition ultimately could not be clearer.

Donovan begins with succinct overviews for each city’s pre- and early-Soviet histories and landmarks; among them, St. Sophia Cathedral (1050) in Novgorod, Kremlin (*krom*) in Pskov (tenth century), and imperial wooden mansions in Vologda. After the war, the monuments under restoration symbolized resistance and renewal (55). Preservation leaders emerged as influential figures in heritage debates, and yet, Khrushchev-era urban growth and religious persecution halted their efforts. The monuments backed the framework of socialist construction. The mid-1960s were a turning point: In 1965, the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and

Cultural Monuments was formed (182). Citizens and the cultural elite grew more outspoken. Residents demanded care for cultural heritage, often privileging the local over the national. Preservation workshops debated whether “city-museums” could sustain tourism (the same debate as around nature reserves). Even religious relics gradually shed their negative political connotation and were exhibited for their artistic value (67). With the addition of the state-sponsored folklore festivals, these developments helped manage late-Soviet nationalist sentiment (104).

Was the project of the Soviet state successful? After 1991, regional authorities, the resurrected Russian Orthodox Church, and businessmen shared cultural preservation managing the fragmented Soviet identities. Citizens often blamed authorities for preservation failures, now with the help of mass media, and castigated “new Russians,” instead of external enemies, for destruction of heritage (132). Preservationists advocated for its handing by the state, rather than by a church or a private owner, which prompts an affirmative answer to the question. On the contrary, such initiatives as the “Alternative Kraevedenie Website of the Novgorod Region” mocked rather than reinforced the stereotypes of Soviet-born patriotic discourse (160). Today, Donovan argues, on par with historical reenactments and the formation of anti-liberal think-tanks such as Izborsk Club, cultural preservation constitutes Putin’s “politics of spectacle.” On the wave of the war with Ukraine, it frames Russian identity around military strength, Orthodox spirituality, and political unity (153). It was too early for the author to comment on the new Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces (2020), but her insights explain this creation well.

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