

TO THE EDITORS:

Multidisciplinary "area" study provides insights ordinarily not revealed through the efforts of a lone scholar working in his discipline. At the same time, the "area" approach to Soviet (as well as Middle Eastern, or South Asian, or any other) research also creates its peculiar set of by-products, as every area specialist is aware. Not the least of these is the resistance which this relatively unorthodox type of study meets as it makes its way into the existing body of scholarship. The publication of *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), which I edited and coauthored, has, surprisingly, focused anew some general questions relating to the handling of this not-so-new phenomenon, multidisciplinary "area" research.

When a team of scholars moves together into chosen terrain and topic, they usually aim at identifying previously unobserved connecting links between aspects of life, experience, or environment significant in that particular zone. By converging upon the target along a variety of (disciplinary) routes, they expect to reveal important new patterns of cause and effect. These often take the measure of the area, define its social personality, and may evidence the extent and quality of uniformity or variation between the particular civilization under consideration and its compeers.

A purely economic study of nineteenth-century Transcaucasia, for example, might well miss factors affecting the nomadic society of that expanse in the field of government or the arts which in turn influenced the economy. The broad understanding of an area's internal development in recent times (the general purpose of much multidisciplinary area study), therefore, can be assisted by juxtaposing parallel findings developed through the various disciplines, or by means of interdisciplinary comparisons, directed toward a common theme.

Confronted by such a published study, the American apparatus of current evaluation and registration (made up of those who attempt systematically and regularly to select, categorize, and assimilate new contributions into the fund of knowledge)—abstracters, journal editors, reviewers, library acquisitions specialists, library cataloguers, bibliographers—often today face unfamiliar silhouettes. Identifying the shape of a new work is especially difficult if the area with which it is concerned has not yet become either well enough known or sufficiently represented in published materials issued by American or European scholars to make a kind of omnibus approach to the region unproductive.

The journal editor, book reviewer, and librarian are key figures in the process of scholarly communication. They all encounter the same demanding task: how to accommodate a book about a particular region produced by a number of authors in their separate disciplines. Classifiers and cataloguers in our libraries lean to the geopolitical for their solutions. *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* has entered the Library of Congress subject classification system, and consequently those of many other American libraries, listed simply under a regional designation, without acknowledgment within any of the separate disciplinary divisions. For the editor, finding a reviewer to analyze such a book, regardless of the likelihood that works of this sort may restrict themselves to a rather narrow subject and period, is taxing. Probably it is not fair to expect that, say, a geographer of the Soviet Union should be willing to risk reviewing a study of the USSR which, besides geography, includes chapters on history, politics, art, and language. Nevertheless, the usual solution to this puzzle, if it is attempted at all by some courageous editor, involves finding and employing a man for all seasons who will consider materials and findings in every discipline brought before him in one broad study.

An alternative to this procedure might well be to parcel out sections from such a book to specialists in the appropriate disciplines; four different fields would require a quartet of reviewers for the same volume. Ideal. But what editor could afford to expend his manpower in book reviewing so prodigally? How many scholars reviewing books would be willing to bother with a percentage of recognition and responsibility? Finally, where are the publishers who would supply the requisite number of review copies to the journals?

No, for practical reasons in an overburdened profession the multidisciplinary area study will be assigned to one individual. At this point in the process the strains usually begin to develop. The reviewer of this kind of work often is unaccustomed to dealing with the genre. Nevertheless, he will have to accept his limitations and grapple with the lessons and values of disciplines not his own. Especially will he have to exercise self-restraint and avoid overemphasizing his own field. One thing is imperative in reviewing this kind of work: that the reviewer deal equably with the different parts of the study in hand if this sort of effort is to receive balanced treatment. He should, furthermore, go much beyond this in order to provide readers with insights concerning the study's internal linkages, and its revelations resulting particularly from the association of several disciplinary investigations of the subject. Logically, he should provide a reasoned judgment regarding the general development of the core topic as it is exposed through the several disciplines. Once having accomplished these tasks, he may also, of course, direct the reader's attention anywhere in the book. Unlike the critic of a unitary work in one discipline written by an individual author, this reviewer, unless he explicitly demurs, may not opt to concentrate upon only a part of the multi-study's attack upon its subject.

Maintaining objectivity between the disciplines under these circumstances is not easy, but when it is lacking in a review the consequence is a predictable imbalance. A case in point is the review of *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule*, by Richard A. Pierce, which appeared in *Slavic Review*, September 1967. The book approaches a coherent region within the USSR through simultaneous separate studies in history, language and people, demography, economic geography, government, intellectual currents, literature, music, art and architecture. The reviewer discusses the contribution in one of the fields (government) represented in the book, without disclaiming responsibility for the remainder or characterizing his choice as typical of the whole.

Omitted from the review are any substantive observations about Chapter 2 by Karl H. Menges, which analyzes the position and importance of the Iranian, Turkic, and Slavic languages and ethnic groups in Central Asia along with their distribution during and after the migrations to the area. Likewise, no analysis is attempted of Ian Murray Matley's detailed exposition of the problems of demography and economic development of the area from 1865 to 1965. These essays and the pioneering sections by Johanna Spector and Arthur Sprague concerning peculiarities of Central Asian music, art and architecture, respectively, are probably unique in scholarship performed anywhere—and certainly within the United States nothing approximating them has been published in this century. Something similar might be said for the lengthy chapters regarding the writer-intellectuals of Central Asia, written by myself. None of these four was reviewed.

All these contributions comprise more than 60 percent of the text of the book. To be sure, this study undertakes a broad treatment of the subject; yet a review of the entire effort could have been essayed, one concentrating upon the theme announced in the book's title. Such a review could have shown, for example, the recurring importance of religion throughout all aspects of Central Asian relations

with Russia. The reviewer might also have noticed the central importance given in the study to the elucidating of community, as opposed to diversity, a method differing strikingly from techniques employed by Soviet writers on the same subject. Among many other choices, the reviewer might have pondered upon the success or failure of the book's persistent attention to Tashkent as the focal point of recent Central Asian developments, but he did not mention it.

Instead, he became preoccupied with Mme. Carrère d'Encausse's section about political events from the fall of Tashkent onward. This concentration upon roughly 25 percent of the text also led him into several difficulties. Thus, he imagines that the book has a chronological arrangement, "historical sequence," whereas the sections are organized according to function or discipline. Similarly, because the reviewer looks at a fraction of the whole, he considers the documentation "inadequate," though the work is heavily footnoted (762 notes) and each author is a writer of experience for whom further progress in this direction would have been unwieldy and pedantic.

Attention to the footnotes shows also that Mme. Carrère d'Encausse relies a great deal upon Russian, Tajik, Uzbek, or Turkish sources, many of them original or significantly close to it, rather than leaning unduly upon secondary materials issued here or in Europe. Notwithstanding Mme. Carrère d'Encausse's laudable effort to draw upon available basic documents, the reviewer complains (page 487) that in the book "contributions to this field by . . . Western writers . . . are not mentioned." That remark confirms the other evidence suggesting that the reviewer has ignored the major remaining part of this study. Directly contrary to what he avers, in this work Geoffrey Wheeler and also his journal, *Central Asian Review*, have been cited repeatedly (pages 54, 111, 295, 297, 333), as has Richard Pierce's own writing (pages 104, 274, 281, 328), as well as the excellent research produced by Alexandre Bennigsen, Johannes Benzing, E. H. Carr, Olaf Caroe, Joseph Castagne, G. N. Curzon, Henry G. Farmer, K. Grönbech, Baymirza Hayit, W. A. Douglas Jackson, Lawrence Krader, R. A. Lewis, O. Olufsen, Alexander Park, Eugene Schuyler, R. N. Taafe, Zeki Velidi Togan, Thomas G. Winner, and many other specialists in Soviet or Central Asian affairs.

Both the review which treats a broad-gauged work as if it were simply another monograph of the traditional genre and the library card catalogue which offers but one territorial, subject approach to a multi-study obstruct advances in modern scholarly communication—each in its own way. This process of communication becomes more vital by the day to the success of all our efforts; yet the system appears so cumbersome and imperfect that either it will fall under its own weight or become quite rigid, serving principally to sustain itself. Not only can the essential business of linking researcher to resources even now be wonderfully improved in its old framework by better performance, but new departures may yet be instituted before it is too late and scholars are buried under the avalanche of books. But I am a pessimist in this regard. Inertia will soon have us talking only to ourselves, and each will then have the satisfaction of seeing a return to the exquisite delights of medieval scholasticism, a trip which I am confident some practitioners of foreign area studies will be only too happy to make.

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TO THE EDITORS:

It is always refreshing to observe a young graduate student who has just cut his critical teeth and is out to make his first "kill" in a letter to the editor. But it is not