

# Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia

Featured Reviews

231

*Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia*. By Cathy Frierson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. vii, 247 pp. Index, Plates. \$35.00, hard bound; \$17.95, paper.

The problem of the enserfed peasant absorbed the Russian educated elite for two generations prior to the Emancipation. In the thirty years following the great reforms the non-peasant public redefined its vision of the peasant. Calling the major journals and selected literary works of the time (e.g. Tolstoy's and Uspenskii's) and the paintings of the Itinerant School, Cathy Frierson's *Peasant Icons* examines the development of the images of "the peasant." Each major image—the rational man of the land, the communal peasant, the gray *muzhik*, the peasant as judge, the kulak and the *baba*—is allotted a chapter on the type, its exponents and evolution. The efforts of those who shaped public discourse to define the peasantry were intertwined with the development of national identity and the search for an understanding of Russian society during a period of dramatic change. Most of the elite shed its previous abstract, homogeneous, romanticized vision of the peasantry for a more realistic assessment after the reform. Frierson captures the angst of educated Russians as they witnessed in dismay the development of a market economy, competition and individualism.

Utilizing the intellectual framework of their times, particularly darwinism and the social sciences, publicists probed into the future role of the peasant citizen. In the discussions of agriculture Aleksandr Engelgardt emerged as the champion of the peasant as "rational man of the land," adapting himself to a harsh physical environment, at his best surpassing modern agronomers and gentry landowners in his wise use of the land. However, Engelgardt conceded that most Russian peasants would be destined to poverty and to lose the struggle with nature. By determining that self-interest and the logic of subsistence agriculture necessitated cooperation within the community, Engelgardt rejected the vision of peasant communalism as a moral imperative. To his contemporaries, Uspenskii and Ziatovratskii, the tragedy of late nineteenth century peasants was found not in their inability to master the environment but in the corrupting influence of a cash economy and individualism which severed the peasant organic bond with the land and the commune, with disastrous consequences for Russia as a whole.

Underlying the intelligentsia's quest was the hope that the peasant would save Russia from the pitfalls of modernization and, simultaneously, the tragic realization that the peasant would be incapable of fulfilling that lofty goal imposed on him by the publicists and their audience. Transforming the rural masses into "the Other," non-peasant publicists concluded that the peasant's competence as a full citizen and legal actor was undermined by his perceived propensity to idleness, drunkenness, bribery, violence and greed, all legacies of serfdom. These traits were manipulated by the immoral and greedy kulak or peasant capitalist, who hired and exploited the compliant "gray peasants," uprooting them from land and community. Second only to the kulak, the peasant woman, or *baba*, "had become the recognized culprit in the disintegration of patriarchal family structures in the village"; the *baba* became the repository of misogynist and anti-peasant sentiment. Side by side with the image of the individualistic, materialistic "virago" was that of the downtrodden peasant woman, an ignorant, passive victim, the embodiment of everything backward, oppressed and oppressive in the village. Russia would find no saviors in the countryside.

*Peasant Icons* suggests continuity in the perception of the peasant by the Russian intelligentsia before and after 1917. The image of the "gray *muzhik*," the kulak and the *baba* survived the revolution and continued to inform the discussions of peasant Russia. But this intellectual legacy is only implied in Frierson's book. Similarly, the author might have questioned the extent to which the literary discussion influenced the peasant's own identity. Of course, this topic is beyond Frierson's scope but the issue is important and should be acknowledged. Frierson's eloquent treatment of the peasant as an idea makes a valuable contribution to the booming scholarship of rural life in pre- and post-revolutionary Russia, most of which may be categorized as social

Title, Peasant icons: representations of rural people in late nineteenth century Russia / Cathy A. Frierson. Author, Frierson, Cathy A. Extent, dpi TIFF G4. In the thirty years after Russian peasants were emancipated in , they Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia. Recommended Citation. LeBlanc, Ronald D., Review: Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia by Cathy Frierson. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. Read the full-text online edition of Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia (). Cathy A. Frierson, Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia, New York, Oxford, Oxford University. Frierson Cathy A., Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, xxi +., English, Book, Illustrated edition: Peasant icons: representations of rural people in late nineteenth century Russia / Cathy A. Frierson. Frierson, Cathy A. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia. By Cathy A. Frierson. New York: Oxford University Press. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia. By Frierson Cathy A.. New York: Oxford University Press. Peasant icons: representations of rural people in late nineteenth century Russia Russia -- History -- Alexander II, century. Peasants in literature. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia by Cathy A Frierson starting at. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural .resource]: representations of rural people in late nineteenth century Russia benighted, and simple -- The peasant as judge -- The peasant as rational man. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia by Frierson, Cathy A.. New York: Oxford Univ. Pr, First edition. The Paperback of the Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia by Cathy A. Frierson at Barnes. Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia. Frierson, Cathy A. 54, Overall Rank. Assignment Count. The resulting partial sanitization of nineteenth-century Russian peasant culture Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century.

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