

Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals

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How does one empire differ from another? Why do empires rise and fall? What has made empires flourish in some eras and regions of the world but not in others? In this broad and ambitious book, Dominic Lieven explores the place and meaning of empire from ancient Rome to the present. The central focus of the book is Russia and the rise and fall of the Tsarist and the Soviet Empires. The overwhelming majority of works on empire concentrate on the European maritime powers. Lieven's comparative approach highlights the important role played by Russia in the expansion of Europe and its rise to global dominance. The book contrasts the nature, strategies, and fate of empire in Russia with that of its major rivals, the Habsburg, Ottoman, and British empires, and considers a broad range of other cases from ancient China and Rome to the present-day United States, Indonesia, India, and the European Union.

Many of the dilemmas of empire persist in today's world, and Lieven throws new light on some of the most intractable current examples, including the crisis in the former Soviet Union, the troubles in Ulster, and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. This major examination of the imperial experience presents history on the grandest scale, combining formidable erudition with stimulating readability.

Walter Liedtke is curator in the department of European paintings and Michiel C. Plomp is associate curator in the department of drawings and prints at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Axel Rügger is curator of Dutch paintings at the National Gallery, London.

Dominic Lieven, a former Kennedy scholar at Harvard University, is professor of Russian government at the London School of Economics. Among his many publications are the highly praised *Nicholas II* and *Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime*, published by Yale University Press.

Lieven's compelling assessment of the forces behind the decline of political imperialism tend to sink from view in his dense, far-reaching historical investigation. The first chapter's discussion of the shifting definitions of empire, though at times taxing to the reader's attention, is astute and evenhanded. With the czarist and Soviet empires as his primary focus, Lieven (*Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime*) bolsters his study with treatments of various empires, beginning with ancient China and Rome. His expertise on czarist Russia informs the book's outstanding section on this period. Lieven, professor at the London School of Economics, argues that the Russian empire was stronger than the declining Ottoman and Hapsburg empires and, in the 19th century, exerted power comparable to that of the British Empire. He explicates the role of World War I in the downfall of the czarist regime cleanly and convincingly: wartime preoccupation and weakening of Russian elites and of capitalist Europe precluded significant counterrevolution. And while a variety of external and domestic forces contributed to the demise of the Soviet empire, Lieven attributes much to the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. In the end, he says, the U.S.S.R. was likely the last empire in the strict sense of the word: "The lesson of Soviet history is that empire does not pay in today's world, even in terms of its own narrow priorities of power." The book's broad, scholarly worldview will appeal to a readership of academics and lay historians. (Mar.)

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Other Books

Empire of Nations. When the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, they set themselves the task of building socialism in the vast landscape of the former Russian Empire, a territory

populated by hundreds of different peoples belonging to a multitude of linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups. Before 1917, the Bolsheviks had called for the national self-determination of all peoples and had condemned all forms of colonization as exploitative. After attaining power, however, they began to express concern that it would not be possible for Soviet Russia to survive without the cotton of Turkestan and the oil of the Caucasus. In an effort to reconcile their anti-imperialist position with their desire to hold on to as much territory as possible, the Bolsheviks integrated the national idea into the administrative-territorial structure of the new Soviet state. In *Empire of Nations*, Francine Hirsch examines the ways in which former imperial ethnographers and local elites provided the Bolsheviks with ethnographic knowledge that shaped the very formation of the new Soviet Union. The ethnographers—who drew inspiration from the Western European colonial context—produced all-union censuses, assisted government commissions charged with delimiting the USSR's internal borders, led expeditions to study "the human being as a productive force," and created ethnographic exhibits about the "Peoples of the USSR." In the 1930s, they would lead the Soviet campaign against Nazi race theories. Hirsch illuminates the pervasive tension between the colonial-economic and ethnographic definitions of Soviet territory; this tension informed Soviet social, economic, and administrative structures. A major contribution to the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, *Empire of Nations* also offers new insights into the connection between ethnography and empire.

❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ . Some of the most insightful works about the Soviet approach to the nationality question were written before the ... empires that avoids such typologizing see Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven, 2000)."