

Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s. By SUSAN GRANT. Pp. 260. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. £ 85.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9780415806954.

In this short volume, historian Susan Grant mounts an archive-based investigation into early Soviet sporting institutions and their programmes designed to generate mass appreciation for and replication of physical culture's 'clean living' ethos. Central to her approach is an understanding of Soviet *fizkul'tura* as a 'programme for identity' and as an 'important part of the overall struggle to impose socialist ideals on Soviet society' (p. 3). Using Régine Robin's four-part model for analysing the acculturation process (cognitive, axiological, symbolic, practice), Grant examines the ways in which physical culture served as a vital tool for creating the New Soviet Man during the 1920s and 1930s. The first chapter briefly touches on the international fascination with the human body and physiology, which began in the late nineteenth century. The second chapter moves on to consider the institutional organization of Soviet physical culture. The next three chapters examine the various ways in which authorities sought to engage certain groups in *fizkul'tura* – targeting primarily youth, women, villages, and members of non-Russian nationalities. The remaining two chapters take up the final two stages of Robin's model by examining the manner in which authorities sought to symbolize and ritualize the idealized body in celebrations, parades, and *spartakiads* (a socialist reimaging of the Olympics), as well as exploring existing problems on the ground.

The institutional story told here echoes themes found in the histories of other post-revolutionary Soviet cultural institutions. During the 1920s, experimentally-inclined sporting bodies debated and largely failed to implement various schemes due to competing interests and limited resources. Stalin's consolidation of power resulted in a greater centralization of party-state authority over *fizkul'tura* organizations. By the mid-1930s, *fizkul'tura* took on a more public character, as it left the factory gates and walked onto the national stage via the establishment of volunteer societies, GTO qualifications, and other competitions. Despite this, physical culture programmes maintained their flexibility, serving different ends when dealing with individual groups targeted for modernization. Concerning youth, participation in sport sought to draw this group away from ostensibly 'hooligan' activities and sublimate and channel sexual energies. The mission changed slightly in regards to women. Instead of preventing misbehaviour, these programmes sought to create strong and healthy bodies ready for motherhood, as well as 'ensuring that they were physically capable of taking the new role which the revolution had assigned to them' (p. 72).

Grant closely examines cultural artefacts, such as the texts of agit-plays (*agitki*) and folk rhymes (*chastushki*) preserved in Russian state archives, in order to study the ways in which authorities attempted to attract worker and peasant audiences to physical culture. These projects aimed not only to educate and inform, but also to serve as a vehicle for the remaking of individuals into idealized New Soviet Men and the forging of new identities. Yet as demonstrated in her chapters on youth, women, the village, and national republics, significant barriers existed to the practical

implementation of these programmes. Material deficits persisted throughout the 1920s and 1930s, rendering access to sporting equipment and suitable spaces off limits for most individuals. In the countryside, Grant argues that by the close of the 1930s, 'physical culture was not in a strong position' as only fourteen percent of all *fizkul'tura*-related spending left major urban centres (p. 120). Even in the comparatively well-supplied urban centres of Moscow and Leningrad, participation remained less than optimal. Securing an adequate number of qualified and dedicated physical culture instructors also proved near impossible. The human element, according to Grant, played a significant role in turning the masses off of Soviet visions of physical culture. Many drank, smoked, and engaged in other unhealthy or 'un-Soviet' behaviours – thus providing poor examples for emulation. Furthermore, women often complained that they felt embarrassed in front of male *fizkul'tura* instructors or feared improper advances. Recruiting instructors from the ranks of non-Russian nationalities proved even more laborious.

Yet, this is not solely a story of failure to engage with the masses. Some urban, working-class women did take up physical culture, inspired by its liberating message. Athletic training and conditioning held the promise to free them from the exhausting work-birth cycle of peasant life. Grant also successfully demonstrates the elasticity of physical culture programmes, as authorities adapted in order to draw greater numbers into their acculturation schemes. Pre-existing sporting traditions and games in the village or national republics such as *lapta* and *gorodki* were incorporated (at least in part) into Soviet physical culture programmes as a means of gradually acclimating the masses to revolutionary values concerning hygiene and bodily discipline.

Other types of accommodations, however, presented authorities with an ideological and moral quandary. Factory leaders doled out material rewards for participation in factory *spartakiads* – a practice temporarily successful for increasing the numbers involved, but with serious costs. Payments of this type undermined the supposed moral superiority of socialist sport and undercut distinctions between it and its capitalist counterpart. Even so, mass participation in demonstrations of this nature remained essential to the task at hand, as it served to 'disseminate official ideals and concepts of Soviet identity to the wider public' (p. 128). In more extreme cases, this situation generated a class of journeymen athletes, chasing the rouble between sporting societies as managers were eager to set ever-greater records. The desire to forge the New Soviet Man through physical culture fell to a two-tier sporting system, privileging elite athletes capable of remarkable performances.

Grant's impressive command of archival materials and secondary literature results in a thoroughly grounded and well-argued study and is recommended for advanced students and researchers in Russian history, as well as the history of sport.

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