



Mikhail Panteleevich Lepekhin. *Zdobnov and His History of Russian Bibliography*

Mikhail Panteleevich Lepekhin. *Zdobnov and His History of Russian Bibliography*. Edited and translated by William E. Butler. Idyllwild, CA: Charles Schlacks, 2014. viii, 198p. ISBN 1884445837. US \$20.00 (paperback).

Not only is Nikolai Vasil'evich Zdobnov (1888-1942) a leading figure in the history and study of Russian bibliography, but the author of this study, Mikhail Panteleevich Lepekhin (a senior research associate at the Russian Academy of Sciences Library in St. Petersburg), and its editor and translator, William E. Butler (John Edward Fowler Distinguished Professor of Law and International Affairs, Dickinson School of Law, Pennsylvania State University), are equally illustrious and bring an exceptional aura to this publication. Although other biographies of Zdobnov exist, Lepekhin and Butler provide what should now become the definitive biography. The seven chapters in this book supply the following information: an extensive review of Zdobnov's publications; an account of his life (1888-1921); a discussion of the Moscow years (1922-1931, 1932-1937, and 1938-1941); details on the three editions of his *История русской библиографии до начала XX века* [*History of Russian Bibliography* - hereinafter *IRB/HRB*]; and reactions to his work and his place in present-day Russian bibliography.

In the course of reading this work, we learn important information concerning the subject, who was born in 1888 in the town of Shadrinsk. After completing only four years of school, he is hired as a clerk in the Shadrinsk Zemstvo Administration, where he begins a life-long program of self-education. By 1905, he is a member of the SRs (Socialist Revolutionary Party), which will haunt him for the rest of his life. This causes a break with his family, the loss of his job, and begins a decade of constant moving. He supports himself by being a journalist. In 1911, he enrolls in the Shaniavskii Moscow City People's University, where he completes a degree in socio-history in 1915. It is here that several prominent professors interest him in bibliography. His first prison term is in 1912 for political radicalism. In Moscow, by 1922, he finds work as the Deputy head of the Trade Sector of the Государственное издательство [State Publishing House]. His job is to guide the transition from the Tsarist book business to the new Soviet model, and he is allowed to select and save books and periodicals slated for destruction. The 1920s were the high point of his career. He is recognized as a bibliographical scholar, works closely with the Russian Bibliographical Society at Moscow State University, serves as the executive secretary of the bimonthly journal *Северная Азия* [Northern Asia], starts work on a dictionary of Siberian writers, and



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undertakes many other activities. From 1932 to 1937, he is engaged in several large-scale bibliographical projects on regional history, most of which are never completed. As a new leading specialist, he is appointed to several executive positions.

Chapter six discusses the three editions of Zdobnov's *IRB/RHB* and is interesting for the importance given to Nikolai's wife and the people who helped her. It is a reflection of the whims of political life in the Soviet Union. The USSR Academy of Sciences brought out the second edition, and in 1955 the third edition was published. The final chapter ends with a 1988 jubilee celebration of Zdobnov's birthday held at the Moscow State Institute of Culture. His legacy continues to grow in importance across the country, as various conferences on his work are organized and articles about his life are published. Lastly, there is a discussion of the numerous locations of Zdobnov's archives.

During his entire life, Zdobnov worried about not having a proper education, but one cannot say that this really mattered due to all of his accomplishments. Anyone who has taken a course on Russian bibliography and/or who works in a Slavic/Russian collection has to make use of Zdobnov's *IRB/HRB* almost immediately. Among his many publications are a dictionary of Siberian writers, a bibliography of Buriat-Mongolia, an index to a bibliographical textbook about the Urals, as well as an index to articles in *Северная Азия* [Northern Asia] (1925-1929). Readers of this study will gather that Zdobnov's life mirrors the political events of his time and understand how this turmoil affected the world of publishing, bibliography, book chambers, and the book trade in general. The study contains, moreover, useful biographical information on people who worked with Zdobnov. He studied librarianship and/or bibliography with such prominent revolutionaries as Zhdanov, Vegman, and Azadovskii, who provided crucial support during difficult times. We learn, for example, that Vladimir Ivanovich Nevskii, a devoted Bolshevik, who was made head of the Lenin Library in 1925, acted as Zdobnov's patron until he was shot in 1937.

There are, however, some issues that need to be pointed out. Since Lepekhin's goal was to give a definitive account, it would have been useful to reprint the excellent list of all of Zdobnov's publications as listed in the 1959 biography by Mashkova (99-123). While the index of names is beneficial, a list of abbreviations would have been equally useful (e.g., AKB BAN is often cited, but is this Arkhiv Biblioteka RAN, Akhiv kolleksiis bibliografov, or Assotsiatsiia kraevedcheskoi bibliografii?). Unfortunately, Zdobnov's name is misspelled [Zdodnov] on the flyleaf, title page, and verso of title page. There are a few translation



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quibbles: on p. 7, ft. 40 “fondakh Biblioteki” [funds of the Library] generally is translated as fond(s) or collection. “Kraevedenie,” translated here as local history, is just as often rendered as regional studies. On p. 55, “annex” is used for “Prilozhenie,” usually called a supplement or appendix. It is commendable that the translator generally provides English translations for the Russian titles, but sometimes he forgets (e.g., p. 34, “Siberian bibliography” of Mezhev should be *Sibirskaiia bibliografiia* [Siberian bibliography]). Furthermore, there is no source listed for the photo on the cover. While some imperfections are noteworthy, this remains, nonetheless, an important contribution to research.

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