Stasi presence in Dabel resulted in a “culture of silence.” Yet Palmowski’s conclusion—that the potential reach of the Stasi and the party demarcated more sharply the line between “insider” and “outsider” and thus reinforced community identity—is not fully convincing given the multiple roles that villagers often assumed in relationship to the Stasi, the party, and their locality. Still, this is a must-read book for scholars interested in the power dynamics of the GDR, Heimat and national identity, socialist states, and the application of anthropological theory to local history.

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Asif Siddiqi is one of several historians of science and technology who has written extensively on the Soviet space program. Here, he adopts an approach more capacious and inventive than previously, one that is both social historical and intellectually revisionist. He takes on what he regards as the overly sanitized and teleological narrative of the development of Soviet space science culminating in the successful launching of Sputnik on October 4, 1957. That narrative begins with Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, a provincial schoolteacher who in 1903 mathematically demonstrated the possibility of spaceflight with the aid of liquid-propellant rockets. It continues with Tsiolkovskii receiving support from the Soviet government, thereby enabling him to inspire a new generation of scientists—genuinely Soviet scientists—to build rockets. Under the leadership of Sergei Korolev, a “noble” survivor of Stalinist repression, Soviet designers and engineers absorbed what they could from the defeated Nazi German rocket program and eventually persuaded the Soviet government to use the intercontinental ballistic missile they had developed to launch a satellite into space. The emphasis throughout, Siddiqi contends, has been on a few heroes’ “triumph over adversity” at the expense of contingency, context, and “the contributions of hundreds of thousands” (4).

Red Rockets’ Glare starts by discussing “three different intersecting strands” (41) present in early twentieth-century Russia: science fiction, theoretical work by lone individuals such as the “eccentric amateur” (25) Tsiolkovskii, and popular scientific works and societies. The point Siddiqi wishes to make, and it is an important one, is that “science from below” (8) was the crucial medium from which space science emerged in Russia. Symptomatic of an expanding bourgeois public, popular interest in the cosmos was sufficient to create a space for a science of space that neither the tsarist state nor the academy did much to promote. As for Tsiolkovskii, denied the academic plaudits he craved, he turned to alternative networks among voluntary scientific societies, laypersons, and international correspondents. Thanks to the prodigious efforts of several publicists, he did eventually attract the attention of Soviet political authorities, and just before his death in 1935 was canonized as one of those home-grown heroes like Aleksei Stakhanov and Trofim Lysenkov who had emerged from the people to confound the experts.

Rounding out the contextualization of Soviet space science is a chapter on two dialectically opposed popular currents of cosmic enthusiasm—technological utopian-
ism and Cosmism—that Siddiqi identifies as “a small but important part of the wild cultural explorations of the New Economic Policy (NEP) era of the 1920s” (75). Technological utopianism has figured prominently before in historians’ accounts of the NEP era, most notably in Richard Stites’s incomparable Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution (New York, 1989). Siddiqi follows the path blazed by Stites and others in seeing it as part of the “‘fantasy of liberation’ . . . from the signifiers of the past” (78) made possible by both the Bolshevik revolution and technological breakthroughs in aviation and ballistics. His identification of Cosmism’s search for human perfection with totalitarianism also may not be new, but his location of its characteristically loopy ideas in Tsiolkovskii’s œuvres and, more generally, his argument that the occult made a significant contribution to popularizing the idea of spaceflight are noteworthy and provocative. Some historians of science and technology may regard the asserted connections as far-fetched or irrelevant, but they worked for me.

Having taken the reader to exhibition halls, art galleries, and the outer reaches of mystics’ fevered imaginings, Red Rockets’ Glare also attends to the early organizational infrastructure of the Soviet space effort. Its revisionist argument—that amateur rocket enthusiasts of the 1920s and ’30s were as vital to the future of Soviet space exploration as the fledgling military-industrial complex—is made by tracing the formation and parallel activities of the Group for the Study of Reactive Motion (GIRD) and the Gas Dynamics Laboratory (GDL). The narrative at this point runs the risk of losing the reader in an alphabet soup of experimental engines, organizational departments, and other acronyms, but is rescued by its empathetic treatment of such “apprentices in the cellar” (136) as Fridrikh Arturovich Tsander who was so taken with extraterrestrial possibilities that he named his daughters Astra and Mercurii and encouraged Korolev and other colleagues with cries of “Onwards to Mars!” (141).

What follows is a reinterpretation of the relationship of Soviet rocket research to the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s that shifts the narrative from researchers as hapless victims of political repression to a concatenation of internal rivalries in which researchers opportunistically employed political denunciation to eliminate rivals. Coupled with the succeeding chapter on Russian appropriation of German V-2 rocket technology (long-range ballistic missiles fueled by liquid propellants), this section of the book seeks to replace notions of continuity and inevitability with an argument stressing the contingent nature of professional ambition, politics, and technology. The social history falls away at this point, and the narrative reverts to a rather conventional recitation of technical decisions, as illustrated in the following sentence: “After a thorough analysis of all the options, Korolev’s engineers decided that for the R-3, the most rational choice would be a single-stage missile, largely because of the inefficient mass-to-thrust ratios of the multi-stage versions” (252).

This is perhaps inevitable given that during World War II and especially with the onset of the cold war the state regarded rocket research with the utmost seriousness, making it an essential part of its military R&D program. With engineers working in the hothouse atmosphere of secret installations, it is hard to make the case for social inputs or the impact of “science from below.” Yet, Siddiqi argues plausibly that the Council of Ministers’ decision on January 30, 1956 to launch a satellite with an ICBM “would not have been possible without deliberate action to popularize the notion of space exploration” (291). This action included the Zhdanovist resurrection of Tsiolkovskii as a national hero, and a new burst of science fiction publication replete with magazine covers illustrating space exploration. These and many other images adorning the book are reproduced from Asif Siddiqi’s own collection, the assembly of which probably
would make a fascinating story. Based on massive research in the Russian Academy of Sciences archive; the economic, military, and scientific-documentation archives of the Soviet state; and a huge amount of published material, *Red Rocket’s Glare* not only tells its fascinating story well, but is of such high intellectual rigor as to transcend the boundaries of several historical categories and genres.

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**All the Tsar’s Men: Russia’s General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898–1914.** By John W. Steinberg.


The early twentieth century was a critical period for the Russian Empire. As Tsar Nicholas II struggled to surmount growing challenges, he faced two sizable conflicts, the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) and the First World War. John Steinberg argues in *All the Tsar’s Men* that the officers of the Russian General Staff understood these challenges better than most but that their failure to deliver military success led to the empire’s collapse. He examines the reasons for this failure through a study of the education, training, and performance of General Staff officers, along with an investigation of their attempts at reform. Ultimately, he blames the autocratic system, arguing that the power and authority of military leaders was restricted by the political and social environment in which they operated.

In 1898, a talented and reform-minded officer, A. N. Kuropatkin, became minister of war and highlighted weaknesses in the General Staff, arguing that its officers’ education in the Nicholas Academy was outdated and that they lacked effective practical tasks to foster operational skills. Military exercises failed to prepare officers or soldiers for the modern battlefield, since maneuvers took on a ceremonial character in the presence of the tsar. Steinberg examines these issues in two detailed chapters. He regards Kuropatkin’s proposed reforms favorably but notes that the improvements they produced were insufficient. The Nicholas Academy struggled amid internal conflict and was unable to wield complete control over its own activities; at the same time, Kuropatkin’s attempt to introduce large-scale training exercises to replicate the extent of modern battles was resisted by prominent figures, especially M. I. Dragomirov. Kuropatkin’s authority relied on the tsar’s support but this started to evaporate in the face of influential opposition to his proposals.

The Russo-Japanese War was an unmitigated disaster, particularly given Japan’s status as an emerging Asian power that Russia was expected to defeat easily. Steinberg outlines the problems bluntly: against a background of long supply lines, political meddling, and poor communications, officers lacked initiative, demonstrated inflexible tactics, and disregarded the need for intelligence. Russia suffered embarrassing defeats in several major battles on land and sea, and just when its numerical superiority promised to yield results, it was forced to sue for peace due to political turmoil in St. Petersburg. As Steinberg concludes, it was clear that the military was woefully unprepared for modern warfare.

The post-1905 period saw furious debates over reforming the General Staff, but these produced few results. When a Council of State Defense aimed to provide an independent, unified military leadership, its efforts so inflamed bureaucratic infighting that it was disbanded. Attempts to strengthen the links between lectures in the Nicholas