

Introduction: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation

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What has been the history of women in Russia? How have they lived their lives during the centuries since their people first appeared on the eastern frontier of Europe? In what ways have they changed as their society grew from an insignificant principality within the Mongol Empire into the super-power of today? The essays in this book address these questions by examining the history of Russian women from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries.

Questions such as these have only begun to be asked in the last two decades. Earlier Russian historians, like historians of Western Europe or the United States, worked within a long-established tradition that defined history as the actions of great men and of governments. In the study of Russia this tradition endured well into the second half of the twentieth century, even after historians of other nations had developed social history, a subdiscipline that includes the study of previously ignored groups such as workers and women. Russian historians continued to concentrate on political elites, partly because Soviet authorities denied access to many of the documentary sources necessary to social history and partly because these same historians remained fascinated by the considerable power of Russia's long-lived autocratic state.

The preoccupation with political history, and even more narrowly with the history of the central government, began to fade in the 1970s. A new generation of scholars, inspired by the rise of social history, searched through the documents for material on the lives of peasants, factory workers, and women. They quickly found that even in Russia, a country where politics, fire, and flood have taken their toll on the historical record, there remains a wealth of published and archival sources in which the history of ordinary people is preserved. Historians of women began to publish the results of their work in these sources in the mid-1970s. First came studies of prominent

feminists and revolutionaries; examination of less-exceptional women followed. Peasant women and factory workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the masses of Soviet women in the 1920s, even elite women in the medieval period—all these found their historians.¹ This scholarship laid the foundations for the present volume.

This book, in surveying the history of women in Russia, makes a contribution to the study of Russian history in general. It reinforces the current tendency to look out to the provinces, away from the court circles of St. Petersburg and Moscow. By so doing, it enriches our knowledge of Russian social history, particularly the history of the family, and, perhaps more surprisingly, helps bring into being a more panoramic yet also more finely detailed picture of political history. Exploring the roles women have taken in Russian politics forces us to analyze not only the decisions of the male leadership but also the ways in which those decisions were shaped by the will of the people, whether expressed directly through petition and protest or indirectly through pressures rising from the bottom of Russian society to the top, from the ostensibly powerless to the ostensibly all-powerful. Thus the study of women's lives brings us to reconsider some of the oldest questions in the historian's trade even as it provokes new ones.

Several of the newer questions must be asked at the outset of this survey. Does Russian women's history divide into definable periods, and if so, what are they? It is well known that Russian culture, like culture throughout Europe, was patriarchal. How did this patriarchal system shape women's lives? And how did women respond to the demands the patriarchy made on them? In what ways did women, living within the constraints of a society that wished them to be powerless, affect the history of that society by responding creatively to its attempts to control them? The essays published here address all of these issues and taken together suggest a number of conclusions.

It is apparent that there have been two great periods in the history of Russian women. There was the period of traditional society from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, when values, folkways, and political and economic structures changed slowly. In the late seventeenth century influences from Western Europe began to flood into Russia, but for more than a century they primarily affected elite women at court. Provincial noblewomen lived much as their medieval ancestors had until the mid-nineteenth century; for peasant women and the women of the urban poor the patterns of traditional society continued little altered until at least the 1880s. These facts must stand as a reminder that the chronological boundaries of "traditional society," as a tool of analysis, will necessarily remain somewhat fluid.

The second great period of Russian women's history is the last hundred years, when rapid change resulted from westernization, industrialization,

1. For references to this scholarship see the bibliography at the end of this volume.

urbanization, war, and revolution. Even here, however, change came to women unevenly, altering life in the cities first and making inroads into the countryside more slowly. For throughout these two periods Russian patriarchal institutions remained strong, influencing women's lives in a myriad of ways, defended more than once when under siege by women themselves. Women supported patriarchy in part because it was not so oppressive as a simple reading of its didactic literature might at first suggest.

These essays show that in both periods patriarchy provided rewards and some limited opportunities to women who obeyed its dictates, making it possible for Russian women to be more active members of their society than has been previously thought. Russian patriarchal values, in their essentials, differed little from those of Central and Western Europe. At their core was the injunction that women subordinate themselves to men, an imperative justified by a definition of woman's nature that was applied to all women regardless of social rank. Russian folk sayings and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox church agreed that women were physically and morally weaker than men and therefore more prone to sin. Men had a responsibility to govern them for their own good and for the good of society. Women were obliged to submit to male authority, follow male guidance, and serve their families. But as in most patriarchal societies, the power men held over women was not absolute; it was subject to dilution by other traditional claims such as those of social status and age. Elite women could command lower-ranking men, and older women could exercise authority over the younger men in their families, at least in concert with their husbands. Older women also governed younger women, particularly their daughters-in-law, whom they were permitted to control with an absolutism rivaling the patriarch's. And widows could sometimes wield considerable independent authority.

Thus the injunction that women obey men was not unqualified. Nor were patriarchal institutions immutable. Across the centuries since Kievan times Russian patriarchy has changed in ways that sometimes benefited women and at other times increased their burdens. The transformation of patriarchy, particularly over the last hundred years, attracted the attention of women's historians from the first, but there have been few attempts to generalize across the various social classes about the impact of all this change. Earlier scholarship and the essays here permit us now to venture a certain distance down this path.

As we proceed, however, the reader should keep in mind that our focus is on Russian women, not the women of other nationalities that have lived within the steadily expanding borders of the Russian Empire. Although it is highly likely that much of what is presented here is true of other European women within Russia as well, we make no claims for the universality of our generalizations.

TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Institutional Arrangements

From the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries there was no centralized political authority among the Russians. There had been a grand prince to whom all the lesser princes answered in the Kievan Rus' era (the tenth to the thirteenth centuries), but Kievan unity, always minimal, had disintegrated as Rus' princes spread out across their vast land and as ties within the princely dynasty became attenuated. Mongol rule from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries exacerbated the internecine violence inherited from the Kievan period. Princes fought princes for hegemony, backed up by alliances among elite families, particularly the families of the boyars, the richest and most powerful members of the elite. Within this world of clan-based politics princely and boyar women sometimes were important power brokers, but they were barred from holding political authority in their own right.

Centralized power began to emerge in the fifteenth century as the princes of Moscow built significant support within the other principalities. Rulers from Ivan III to Ivan IV (1462–1581) succeeded in creating an autocratic state, but it differed significantly from the nation-states then emerging in Western Europe. Russia had no prosperous, ambitious middle class to support its kings' bids for power, nor could its sovereigns base their claims on feudal prerogatives. Instead the Muscovite monarchy grew by harnessing the entire elite—the old boyar clans, the lower-ranking military officers, and the expanding civilian bureaucracy—to the service of the crown. The tsars rested their claims to legitimacy on a patriarchal conception of the monarch as the divinely ordained father of all his people, the great lords included. The Orthodox church often seconded this claim of divine right. Never did the church form an effective alternative locus of power in Russia, as the Roman Catholic church did in Western Europe.

The tsar was assisted in his power building by the fact that, for a variety of reasons too complex to elucidate here, the boyars and lower-ranking military officers did not develop the corporate unity and the class prerogatives possessed by the nobles of the Germanic states, Poland, or England. Those who supported the tsar were rewarded with power, land, and other riches. Those who rebelled were isolated and destroyed. And the entire elite was offered a lucrative payoff for its submission to royal power—the enserfment of the peasantry. Gradually, over the centuries, the peasants were bound for life to the estates where they worked.

It has often been argued that in Western Europe the position of aristocratic women declined as the kings increased their authority. This was so because the kings drained power away from elite families (where women had been accorded influence derived from their importance as wives and mothers) and channeled it instead into public institutions, chiefly the bureaucracy and the army, from which women were excluded. The latter

aspect of this process did not occur in Russia as centralized monarchy emerged, for public institutions were weakly developed there until the reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725). Thus the palaces of boyar families remained stages on which the political drama was played out, and women remained important actors, deriving influence from their position as liaisons between their natal families and the families into which they had married as well as from their power to oversee the arranging of the marriages through which alliances within the ruling clans were solidified.

Peasant women also arranged the marriages of their children; but unlike elite women, peasant women's primary occupation was grueling physical labor. They grew vegetables, made and washed clothes, cooked the family's food, worked in the fields, cared for small livestock, manufactured and sold handicrafts, tended the sick, and bore and nursed babies. As yet we know far less about the workings of the village in the medieval period than we do about the politics of the elite, so it is difficult to say what part women took in community governance or in decision making within the peasant family. We can make inferences from the nineteenth century, however, when traditional practices were still strong in the countryside. What we find then is that across most of Russia women were excluded from membership in the *skhod*, the village assembly of heads-of-household that made decisions about land distribution among families and about the growing and harvesting of crops. The *skhod* also elected male village elders, who negotiated with the serf owner and his agents (until the emancipation of serfs in 1861), mediated conflicts among peasants, and performed a variety of administrative duties. Women were generally not permitted to vote or even speak at assembly meetings, though as widows they might head households. Within the family, peasant custom formally relegated women to a position of almost complete subordination to their fathers, husbands, and mothers-in-law.

Women's Responses: Accommodation and Resistance

Russian women, elite and peasant, dealt with the institutions of their world in ways that may be understood broadly as accommodation. That is, they generally accepted the dictates of society and conformed to its demands. Women seem to have accepted the truth of what they were taught by their parents, the elites, and the priests, that men had a God-given right to rule over them because of their sex's natural moral frailty. But the authorities' messages to women were not wholly negative. They also taught that women, despite their weaknesses, were loved by God and could achieve virtuous lives on earth and eternal bliss in heaven. In other words, the authorities promised rewards to those who accommodated themselves to the social order. The most virtuous path a woman could take was the path to the convent, and over the centuries thousands of Russian women, many of them widows with grown children, became nuns. Many more women, however, remained in the secular world, pursuing the rewards that Russian society offered to those who

lived respectable married lives. If a peasant woman performed her household tasks efficiently, if she had the strength to toil long hours in the fields, if she survived the hazardous years of childbearing, and if she was dutiful toward the men in her family, then in middle age she could rise to a position of honor and some power as matriarch within a large household. For elite women and women of the tiny merchant population in the towns the demands and rewards of life were much the same as those for peasants, save that such women did not perform heavy manual labor. Instead merchant women worked in their family businesses and elite women managed their households. That Russians recognized the importance of women's contributions to the survival and prosperity of the family, especially of peasant and serf families, is attested to by a wealth of proverbs that sang the praises of the hardworking wife: "A good housekeeper's house is like a brimming cup"; "A good housekeeper will save the house, a poor housekeeper ruin it." David Ransel argues in his analysis of infant-care practices that Russian peasants valued women's productive work in the family economy even more highly than their reproductive work of rearing healthy babies.

Accommodation and the rewards a woman could earn from it are discussed at length in several of the essays in this collection. N. L. Pushkareva demonstrates that marriage law in the medieval period provided fairly remarkable protection to women, even extending to the right to divorce or legal separation in the event that a husband forced his wife to have sexual relations. Another example of the benefits of accommodation comes from Nancy Shields Kollmann's analysis of seventeenth-century court cases in which women won judgments against men who had insulted them. Under certain circumstances peasant women could also derive power from their importance to the family, as Rodney Bohac demonstrates in his analysis of serf widows in the early nineteenth century.

But women occasionally fought societal constraints; sometimes, rather than accommodate themselves to men, they resisted them. Usually this resistance was more sidelong than direct, thanks to the power of male authority and control. Perhaps the most frequent manifestation of resistance came in women's refusal to obey unquestioningly, a refusal reflected in folk sayings enjoining men to maintain control over their wives: "Sad is the house in which the cow instructs the bull"; "Giving in to foolish women makes the chickens laugh." Women responded to such barnyard criticisms with their own proverbs. One acknowledged that "if there's no husband, there's no head," but continued, "If there's no woman, there's no brain." Women's questioning of male governance may also be inferred from certain ecclesiastical court cases from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here the records recount occasions on which women thwarted the authority of their natal and marital families by leaving home to make their own way in the world.²

2. I would like to thank Eve Levin for bringing these court cases to my attention.

Several other types of female resistance are discussed in the essays in this volume. Resistance could take gentle, unobjectionable forms when women drew on the prevailing sexual stereotypes to justify the establishment of spheres of activity from which men were excluded. Eve Levin discusses one such sphere, that of childbirth, and Rose Glickman shows how throughout Russian history women have made a niche for themselves in folk medicine. Such female-dominated activities may be considered forms of resistance rather than forms of accommodation because they enabled women to achieve independence from male control. Accommodation, as we have defined it, entailed submission to male control.

From time to time women also joined men in resistance movements against Russia's rulers. These movements loosened the grip of custom, permitting women to participate far more actively than usual in the public world beyond the family. Although such participation became much more common during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when resistance to tsarist rule was endemic, there were instances of it in earlier centuries as well. Valerie Kivelson analyzes a rare but in some ways archetypal example—witch hunts. Women also played prominent parts in far larger, more important resistance movements, such as the Great Schism that rent the Orthodox church in the seventeenth century and the peasant revolts led by Sten'ka Razin (1667–71) and Emel'ian Pugachev (1773–74).

Resistance was never a course favored by many Russian women, however, because it was too costly. Until the revolution, and indeed afterward, women who rebelled risked imprisonment and death. For individual women who resisted the patriarchs closer to home—their husbands or neighbors—punishment could be severe as well. Tongue-lashings, gossip, shaming, and ostracism were all employed to keep the disobedient in line. Men encouraged one another to beat their wives, perhaps sensing the shared value of the exercise. "The more you beat the old woman," ran the proverb, "the tastier the soup will be." It thus becomes easy to understand why throughout Russian history the difficulty and futility of most forms of resistance have made it the last resort of the desperate. It was far safer for a woman to choose accommodation, maximizing the opportunities available to her without challenging the status quo.

TRADITION VERSUS TRANSFORMATION

Peter the Great's decision to reform Russia by adapting Western institutions and ideas ushered in three centuries of turbulent, sometimes violent change. First affected was the aristocracy, which eagerly took up the clothes, manners, and amusements of the French. Soon the nobles were reading German philosophy, French drama and poetry, and even the political tracts of the English and Americans. This new, imported culture was accessible also to

noblewomen, a minority of whom was becoming literate by the middle of the eighteenth century. Their cultural opportunities were further extended by the Empress Catherine (1762–96). A devoted student of the Enlightenment, Catherine encouraged the development of education for women by setting a fairly cultivated tone at court and establishing the Smolnyi Institute, Russia's first boarding school for women.

The tsars who followed Catherine to the throne viewed women's education with suspicion. But the nineteenth-century rulers of Russia did agree on the need to strengthen the country's economy, and by the nineteenth century this task required industrialization. Until 1855 change proceeded slowly, as two cautious brothers, Alexander I (1801–25) and Nicholas I (1825–55), shrank from genuine reform for fear of upsetting the status quo. Alexander II (1855–81) had such fears too, but he embraced reform, most notably the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, out of the conviction that further stagnation threatened the power of the monarchy and nobility even more than change did. In addition to encouraging reforms in local government, the courts, the military, and the educational system, Alexander also promoted the development of the economy. He initiated the building of a railroad network in Russia; his successors, Alexander III (1881–94) and Nicholas II (1894–1917), presided over the rapid expansion of the railroads and the construction of huge, modern factories.

By 1914 many of the tsars' hopes and fears had been realized. The nation had its industrial base: steel and textile mills employed thousands of workers; railroads and telegraph lines linked the urban centers to one another. In the cities Russian culture shone brightly, illuminated by the accomplishments of brilliant writers, composers, and artists. But despite Russia's progress in modernizing, it was seething with discontent in the early twentieth century—discontent with the continuing poverty of the peasants, with the misery of life in the urban slums to which the peasants migrated looking for work, and with government incompetence and repression, which had seemed to grow worse over the course of the nineteenth century. The anger boiled over in 1905, when people from all sectors of the population—peasants, factory workers, businessmen, white-collar workers, professionals, soldiers, and sailors—rose up to demand political reform. Grudgingly Nicholas allowed the establishment of a legislature and granted limited civil rights, but these concessions were not enough to solve the accumulating social problems of his country. When he blundered into World War I in 1914, Nicholas heaped on his unwilling people and his inept government a burden too great for them to bear. The result was revolution in 1917.

Women of all ranks of Russian society were actively involved in the social and political turmoil caused by Russia's entry into the modern world. Merely surviving often required all their powers of accommodation, as Alfred Meyer demonstrates in his essay on women in World War I. The war increased the

difficulties of women's lives, intensifying the struggle of working-class women in the cities to support themselves and their children and forcing women in the countryside to take on more and more of the work once done by sons or husbands. But the instability caused by rapid social change also made resistance more possible than ever before. In the nineteenth century upper-class women joined reform movements, working in charity projects among the urban poor, in peasant schools, and in the *zemstva* (provincial councils established in 1864 to promote the local development of education, medicine, and the economy). Gentry women and the women of the growing middle class were active in illegal revolutionary organizations, making up one-third of the leadership of the People's Will, the group that plotted the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, and some 10 to 15 percent of the Social Democratic party on the eve of World War I.³ In fact, it was a protest march of working-class women on February 23, 1917, that is credited with setting off that greatest of all acts of resistance—the Russian revolution.

Yet despite their participation in the efforts to reform Russia, despite their work in the factories, shops, offices, and schools that was integral to Russia's industrialization, women did not reap all the benefits that men did. Throughout the transformation men gained first and more substantially than women. In the eighteenth century young men of the aristocracy traveled abroad to study in German universities, whereas young women learned needlepoint at the Smolnyi Institute. In the nineteenth century peasant boys went to work in the factories and discovered there the heady world of political protest, whereas peasant girls remained in the villages, under the control of their fathers and mothers-in-law. Even when new manufacturing enterprises opened up in the countryside in the second half of the nineteenth century, men quickly monopolized the better-paying jobs, as Judith Pallot shows in her essay on rural manufacturing. After the revolution male metalworkers joined the Communist party, studied engineering, and moved into important managerial positions, whereas female textile workers earned high-school diplomas, found jobs as clerks in Soviet offices, and married the engineers. At every stage of these developments women had to fight for the benefits they did gain, for education and access to the professions in the nineteenth century, higher wages and better working conditions in the early twentieth century, and job-training programs and contraception after the revolution.

Women lagged behind men because the sweeping social changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite their ability to transform the political and economic systems of Russia, did not substantially alter those

3. These figures come from Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York, 1983), 107; Barbara Evans Clements, "The Enduring Kinship of the Baba and the Bolshevik Woman," *Soviet Union* 12, pt. 2 (1985): 165; and Barbara Evans Clements, "Working-Class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution," *Signs* 8 (1982): 233n.

most fundamental of patriarchal values, the allocation of power to men and the requirement of service from women. To be sure, Russia was hardly unusual in this. Patriarchalism survived the industrial revolution across the European continent—albeit in weakened form, for the contemporary era is hostile in many ways to older practices of hierarchy and submission. In the twentieth century parents no longer have the rights they once did to control adult children, and the authority of husbands over wives has diminished. But contemporary patriarchalism still contains the injunction that a woman should subordinate herself to the men in her family. In Russia the survival of patriarchalism has meant that although certain opportunities and rights available to women—for education, employment, recreation, divorce, and abortion—have expanded significantly since 1900, the opportunities for men, particularly their access to political and economic power, have expanded far more.

There were also significant differences in the ways industrialization, urbanization, and Western influences affected privileged and poor women. Elite women had long lived more comfortably than had the masses of Russian women, but in the second half of the nineteenth century the gap between the two groups grew steadily. Improved diet and better medical care meant longer, healthier lives for upper-class women. Educational opportunities expanded, so that by the end of the nineteenth century most noblewomen and many middle-class women were completing secondary school, and a few were even enjoying university educations. Some of these women joined the intelligentsia, becoming members of that bright community of writers, artists, professionals, and social reformers that flourished in the late nineteenth century. As elite women seized their new opportunities, they widened the cultural distance between themselves and the peasants. These growing differences in values and in standards of living made it difficult for reform-minded women of the intelligentsia to win the trust of the uneducated, and they therefore inhibited the formation in Russia of a broadly based feminist movement. Nor was there a consensus even among elite women about how women's lives should be improved. Like the peasants, many conservative upper-class women felt deep allegiance to their religion, their traditional customs, and even those patriarchal institutions that encumbered them but from which they derived what security they had. Thus the transformation of Russia increased the possibilities for resistance but also accentuated the divisions among women.

In the twentieth century the revolution reversed this trend toward greater class differentiation by bringing to power the Communist party, which was pledged to ending gender inequality. The party never accomplished this high objective; patriarchalism proved to be too strong an enemy, with a fifth column even in the camp of the Marxists. But the party did preside over, and to

some extent direct, the establishment of a new social definition of womanhood. The "new Soviet woman," an ideal promoted by the government from the 1930s onward, was to be man's equal, working with him in building bridges, flying airplanes, and managing factories. At the same time she was to continue to minister to the emotional needs of her husband and children. In practice this meant she was responsible for most of the housework and child care and was expected to defer to her husband. Communist party leaders were too wedded to Marxist feminism to endorse openly the survival of patriarchy's core idea—woman's subordination to man in marriage—but neither did they take strong action to eradicate it. And so traditional ideas insinuated themselves into the emerging Soviet value system. This complex process is analyzed in some detail by Elizabeth Waters in her discussion of the images of women employed by Soviet graphic designers and by Wendy Goldman in her study of abortion in the 1920s and 1930s.

The revolution and the Communist party that rode it to power did more than break down class differences in the conceptions of womankind that had grown during the nineteenth century. They also abolished the privileged position of the upper classes, ushering in a time when virtually all women were subject to the same set of economic demands. Primary among these was the fact that, beginning in the 1920s, women were required to find paying jobs. Communist ideology demanded that women join the paid labor force, but the government was also motivated by dire necessity to push women into work outside the village. All hands were needed to build the Soviet economy. Driven by poverty and in many instances inspired by calls to enlist in the great campaign to build a new, socialist world, women flocked to work in the factories, in government offices, and in the fields of the collective farms. No longer did privileged origins guarantee an easy life or promote values different from those that governed the lives of the masses of women. Therefore by 1940 the revolutionary process begun in 1917 had minimized the role of social origins in structuring women's lives and had made gender once again the primary determinant, as it had been earlier in Russian history.

The transformation of Russia from medieval monarchy to modern superpower has had mixed results for women. On the one hand, women have benefited. Their standard of living has improved. However inadequate the Soviet economy—and its shortcomings are now publicly proclaimed even by its leaders—it does provide better food, housing, consumer goods, and health care for women today than was experienced by their great-grandmothers in the villages at the turn of the century. Furthermore, the Communist government did establish legal penalties for the worst excesses of patriarchy, such as wife beating, and during most of the Soviet period it has guaranteed women the right to divorce and abortion. The government has also provided considerable educational and employment opportunities for women. These im-

provements have been accompanied by a flood of propaganda proclaiming the equality of women and men.

The accomplishments of the Soviet Union attest to the capacity of a powerful centralized government to change women's position in society, even over opposition from the population. But they also suggest how great was the age-old capacity of the Russian autocracy to thwart impulses for change originating among women themselves. Only when convinced that programs beneficial to women would also serve the interests of men has the Russian government, whether in its tsarist or Communist phase, proven willing to give priority to those reforms. When not so persuaded, the government has turned down requests for reform. Laura Engelstein provides a graphic example of this intransigence in her analysis of the long, ultimately futile lobbying of physicians and lawyers to rewrite the abortion laws in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Thus the emancipating potential of revolution for women has been limited by the continuing hold of patriarchy on Russian and Soviet values and institutions. It bears noting, however, that this is true throughout the Western world. Government remains the preserve of men in Paris and Washington just as in Moscow. Nor have the majority of European or North American women managed to redraw the division of labor and power within marriage and society to create true equality for themselves.

Nineteenth-century reformers who decried the often dreary lives of peasant women were wont to quote the poet Nikolai Nekrasov. In his 1863 poem "Red-Nosed Frost" he wrote:

Three hideous portions to woman Fate gave:
The one: to a slave to be mated;
The second: the mother to be to a slave;
The third: to a slave subjugated.
And each of these burdens has heavily lain
On the women of Russia's domain.⁴

Our findings bear the poet out. Russian women, particularly peasant women, were overburdened by a society that asked much of them. Soviet women continue to be so burdened today. But the history of Russian women is more than a dirge keened across the centuries. It contains accomplishments, victories large and small, refusals to submit, joy, love, self-sacrifice, and conflict. Closely studied, it reveals itself as a complex story not easily told but well worth every effort to understand.

More than eighty years ago American historian Henry Adams wrote in his autobiography, "The study of history is useful to the historian by teaching

4. N. A. Nekrasov, *Poems*, trans. Juliet M. Soskice, reprint of the 1929 Oxford University Press edition (Wilmington, Del., 1974), 143.

him his ignorance of woman; and the mass of this ignorance crushes one who is familiar enough with what are called historical sources to realize how few women have ever been known. The woman who is known only through a man is known wrong."⁵ We would add that the past that is known only through men is also known wrong but that historians are well on the way to finally getting it right. We offer this history of the women of Russia to the growing story.

5. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, in *Novels* (New York, 1983), 1042.