

Preface to Students

Advanced Russian through History: Дела минувших дней is designed to help you improve your reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills while providing you with Russian scholarly texts on historical, political and social topics covering the sweep of Russian history from the days of Kievan Rus' to the post-Soviet era. Our intention in this book is not to present a comprehensive history of Russia: this is the task for history monographs that come in multiple volumes. Instead, we have selected what we believe to be some of the most important issues in Russian history and have arranged texts on these issues, written by Russian scholars, in chronological sequence.

Our textbook consists of 36 chapters, each featuring the following three components:

- a written text (presented in this textbook)
- a mini-lecture (in mp3 format on the CD-ROM accompanying the textbook) of 3–7 minutes in length (not a recording of the written text, but a distinct text on a topic related to that of the written text)
- a series of learning tasks on the website at www.yalebooks.com/advrushist

The authors of all the texts in our book are Russian scholars working in Russia. Their language is the language of Russian scholarly discourse. In reading the texts and listening to the lectures, you will be better prepared to do research using sources in Russian, participate in social science courses taught in Russian, and engage in discussions with Russian scholars and other Russians interested in history, politics and philosophy (many Russians have such interests). The authors of the texts present their own perspectives on Russian history: these perspectives may be different from what you may have read in American or European works on Russian history. One of the goals for our book is to help you understand Russian *perspectives* (note the use of the plural) on important topics in Russian history. It is essential that you understand that there is no such thing as *the* Russian perspective on the cold war or on the revolution of 1917, but rather there exist a range of Russian points of view on these and other controversial topics in Russian history. (Of course, in the Soviet era, it may have seemed that there was only one official Soviet perspective on Russian history, but official Soviet views changed rapidly, such as was the case with Soviet policy on collaboration with West European socialists in the 1930s.) The scholars whose works are featured in this book are experts in their field and we believe that their views on Russian history are well-founded, rigorously argued, and genuinely representative of contemporary (post-Soviet) Russian scholarship.

At first you may find it difficult to understand the texts because they are written in a style with which you may be unfamiliar. If you persist and work through the exercises in the tasks as we suggest, you will find that it will become easier to read, understand, and remember the information presented in the texts. As you read, consult the glosses in the texts for challenging words, historical and geographical terms, and idiomatic

expressions. As you see words and phrases recurring, write them down and create flashcards for them. You will find that many words and phrases are repeated from one text or topic to another; as you master them, you will find it progressively easier to read new texts. It is critically important that you take note of the rhetorical structure of the texts by identifying the words and phrases each author uses to structure his or her argument, especially cohesive devices such as «в первую очередь» or «тем не менее», and so forth. Keeping track of these words and phrases will help you understand the bigger picture of each author's argument as well as the ideological perspective on the events or issues described.

You may read the chapters in the chronological sequence in which they are presented (Chapters 1–36) or in any order, depending on your interests and learning goals. There is no progression from “easier” to “more difficult” texts that one might expect to find in a traditional textbook.

Each chapter in the textbook is accompanied by 25 learning tasks on the website (www.yalebooks.com/advrushist). The tasks are described in greater detail in this volume in the section, “About the Tasks.” You may find some of the tasks on the website more or less useful for you personally; we have deliberately provided a variety of activities and exercises to meet the needs of a broad range of students, including learners of Russian as a foreign language as well as heritage learners of Russian. As you go through the tasks on the website, consider the degree to which you find each kind of activity helpful and focus your time and energies on those you find most productive. You may also find that you will benefit from other assignments, such as translating certain paragraphs or entire chapters, analyzing additional sentences, and so forth. Notice which exercises appear to be most productive—whether they are indicated in the tasks, suggested by your instructor, or of your own design. Be creative in your approach and think about what works best for you.

As you read the texts in this book, you will improve your reading proficiency most effectively if you deliberately try to use a broad range of reading strategies. You may be familiar with some strategies already, but you can improve your reading competency by broadening the range of your reading strategies. We encourage you to make a conscious effort to try at least one new reading strategy with every chapter's text and analyze, after reading the text, whether that strategy was helpful for you. Continue to use newly tested and productive strategies as you try applying strategies you've never used before, in order to gradually enhance your reading comprehension. Use the list of strategies in the Reading Strategy Appendix.

We hope you enjoy using our book and that it helps you improve not only your reading proficiency in Russian, but also your understanding of Russian history and society.

Benjamin Rifkin
Temple University, Philadelphia

Olga Kagan
University of California, Los Angeles