

Quinquereme

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that the reader knows exactly what an autonomous republic is, and can see from the colour reproduction of a 1980 poster who are the members of the Politburo, although regrettably the print below the photographs is too faint to read even with the aid of a magnifying glass. This is followed by 'Soviet Society' and then by 'Military Power and Policy' which discusses in some detail the Soviet Armed Forces, Civil Defence, the Warsaw Treaty forces, and the military uses of space.

The final section is arguably the most ambitious. Entitled 'The World Role', it seeks to trace the influence of Russia on international affairs from the days of Muscovy and Imperial Russia to the rise of Soviet power and the present role of the Soviet Union in world affairs. The crises of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Cuban missiles, the split with China, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, East-West tension and the rise and fall of détente are all treated, but one would have liked to see something a little weightier on such crucially important events.

Altogether a very worthwhile and ambitious attempt to introduce the general reader to Russia and the Soviet Union — the distinction is important and well made — in a manner not too difficult to digest, and very attractive in appearance. As a work of reference it obviously has its limitations, but the more serious student will easily find his way to further reading, listed by sections as a tailpiece.

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

J. O. LEWIS

THE LANGUAGES OF THE SOVIET UNION. By Bernard Comrie. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981. xxi + 317 pp. Hardback. O 521 23230 9. £27.50. Paperback. O 521 29877 6. £8.50.

This work covers a huge subject — about 130 languages, from Russian, with over 140 million speakers, to Kamas, which had one speaker in 1970. Comrie investigates the way in which the languages of the Soviet Union interact in a multilingual society and presents their salient linguistic features. Chapter one is devoted to the sociolinguistic background; it is a sympathetic but not rosy account of the Soviet linguistic achievement. The remaining five chapters deal with the languages family by family, with information on the number and distribution of native speakers and the language retention rate, followed by a description of the most interesting features of phonology, morphology, and syntax. The chapter on the Altaic languages includes a revealing account of vowel harmony, data on agglutination, and a description of languages which (until recent borrowings) had no finite subordinate clauses. In the presentation of the Uralic languages, the accounts of consonant gradation and subject and object agreement are particularly interesting. The next chapter is concerned with Indo-European,

REVIEWS

which can be seen in a new perspective, being treated in parallel with the other families of the Soviet Union. Here, too, we find remarkable data, particularly on Indo-Iranian languages. The Caucasian languages, dealt with in Chapter five, are well known for their unusual traits and their reputation seems to be merited. For example, Georgian boasts an eight consonant cluster while a dialect of Tabasaran has 53 cases. Quite apart from such entertaining details, the chapter is noteworthy for the accounts of polypersonalism, ergativity, and relative clause formation. By this point in the book many of the reader's ideas about language are likely to have been radically altered. The last chapter, devoted to Paleosiberian and other languages, contains even more surprises. Paleosiberian does not refer to a normal family but to all the languages of Siberia that do not belong to any of the major families. Besides the Chukotko-Kamchatkan and Eskimo-Aleut families, it includes no fewer than three isolates — Yukagir, Nivkh and Ket — the last of which differs markedly from all the other languages of Siberia. An excellent feature of the book is the sample texts provided for each language family, with detailed grammatical information and a translation. Every chapter concludes with references to sources, which are listed in a full bibliography. With help from Hewitt, who wrote the chapter on Caucasian languages, and Payne, who wrote the section on Iranian languages, Comrie has produced a remarkable survey. His command of the wide range of data is impressive. One is left with the feeling that the languages of the world are even richer in variety and even more challenging to the linguist than one believed before.

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

GREVILLE CORBETT

THE ENIGMA OF GOGOL: AN EXAMINATION OF THE WRITINGS OF N. V. GOGOL AND THEIR PLACE IN THE RUSSIAN LITERARY TRADITION. By Richard Peace. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981. viii + 344 pp. 0 521 23824 2. £22.50.

With this well-written, thoughtful, and often challenging study Richard Peace has made a distinguished contribution to the lively debate that has been conducted in recent years on the inexhaustibly fascinating 'enigma' to which his title refers. His main conclusions are not original. They are that the works reflect a unique combination of medieval and modern sensibilities ('laughter and tears'), and that they should be regarded as representing a form of catharsis, as oblique explorations of Gogol's personal neuroses, in which the personal and the national are inextricably intertwined, and which paved the way for the development of the Russian psychological novel. The case for these conclusions, however, has never been more skilfully or persuasively argued.

Examining the works in chronological sequence, Professor Peace provides an illuminating commentary on the manner in which Gogol's