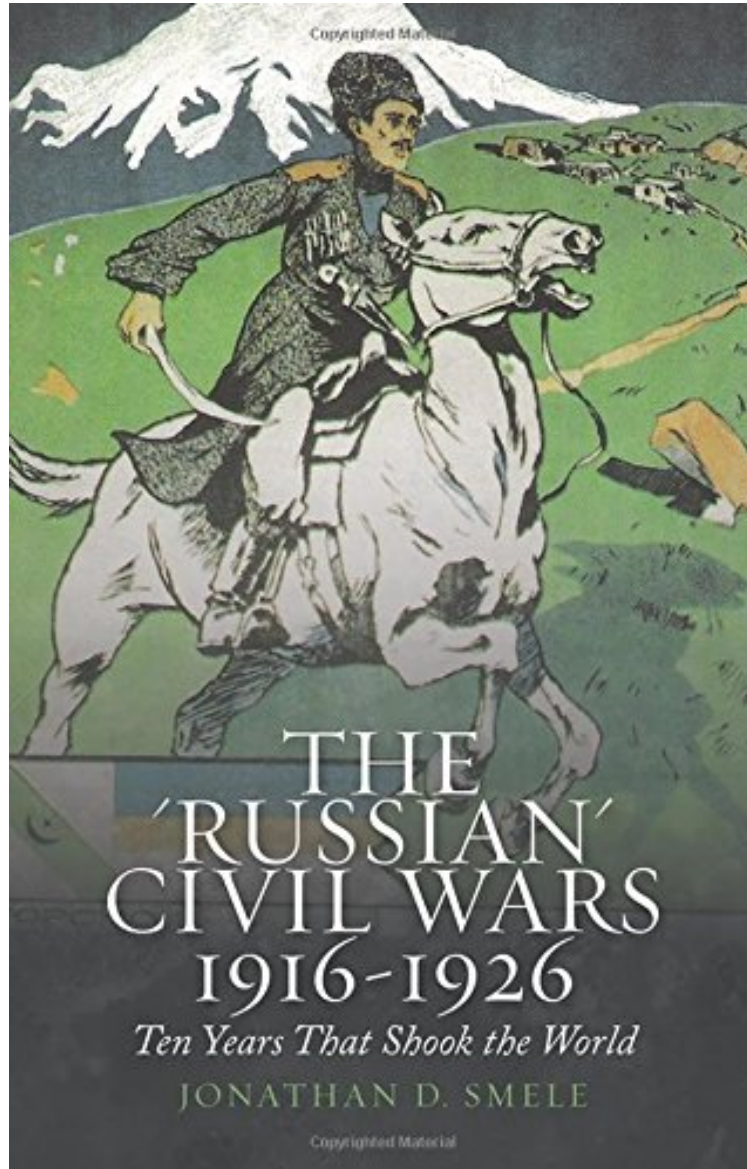


(Library ebook) The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World

The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World

Jonathan Smele

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Jonathan Smele : The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World:

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22 of 23 people found the following review helpful. A treasure trove – of the sort that leaves me wanting more
By Lost John
The title of this book brings to the fore three points of contention: – the plural of Civil Wars; the placing of Russian in inverted commas; and that the extent of the wars was from 1916 to 1926. Those points are all central to Jonathan Smele's argument: it isn't true to speak or write of only one Civil War following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917; neither is it true that they only began with the Revolution, or in early 1918, nor that all the wars ended with the major White defeats and withdrawal of intervening foreign troops in the very early 1920s (or the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921) – some of the wars went on well beyond that; and it isn't true that all the wars took place in Russia, or even primarily involved Russian combatants. Jonathan Smele sees the 'Russian' Civil Wars as having both begun and ended with the Basmachi (Muslim rebels) of Central Asia. During the summer of 1916, a large number of the Tsar's Muslim subjects rebelled against forced mobilization into labor battalions to service the Imperial Russian Army and the armaments industry. The rebellion was brutally suppressed, broke out again the following summer, and in February 1918 an anti-Soviet Muslim assembly established in November 1917 was put down – this time by Red Guards – with great loss of life. The formation of the guerrilla Basmachi movement followed. Their anti-Soviet resistance continued into the 1930s, but Smele draws a line in June 1926, after which policing of the Central Asian Military District became a civilian matter, not one for the Red Army. In between, and mostly in the period 1918 to 1920, the three big names of the White Army campaigns, Kolchak, Denikin and Wrangel, were active, also many others such as Skoropadsky, Petliura and Makhno; troops from Britain, France, the United States, Japan, China, Australia and others were involved – also Germany and the other Central Powers all played a part; and the Baltic States and Finland secured their escape from the Russian Empire and independence. Admiral Kolchak headed, as a dictator, the Provisional All Russian Government centered on Omsk, Siberia, but proved a weak leader and was ultimately delivered into Bolshevik hands and executed. Denikin, with others, raised an anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army in the Northern Caucuses, operated in the Don lands and the Kuban, and in summer 1919 pressed as far north as Orel, threatening Moscow. The Red Army successfully pushed back and Denikin retreated eventually to Crimea. Wrangel, who had earlier been subordinate to Denikin, took over from Denikin and managed to break back out of the Crimean peninsula and challenge the Red Army as far north as Aleksandrovska (Zaporizhia) and as far east as Mariupol. However, the Red Army held firm and soon pushed Wrangel and his army back to Crimea, from whence he sailed into exile, taking with him – to his credit – most of those who also wished to go. All of this and vastly more is covered in Jonathan Smele's book. I was surprised not to find dedicated biographical sections on the principal players, but with such a wide field and so much information he presumably decided to leave such things to those who have already written histories and biographies (plus Wikipedia) and use his limited space for newer material and the wider view – and I am sure he was right. Even so, a lot of ground is covered very quickly. One campaign of which I would have liked to read more is the North West Army's advance through the summer of 1919 to take (in October) Tsarskoe Selo, only 12 miles from Petrograd, and Trotsky's successful (if perilously last-minute) counter-offensive. But I can no doubt read up on it elsewhere, and Smele provides many pages of detailed notes, plus an extensive Bibliography that includes sections on Internet Resources, Fiction (Babel, Blok, Bulgakov, Grossman and Sholokhov) and Film. This book is a treasure trove – of the sort that leaves me wanting more.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Broad yet narrow
By R. L. Huff
Jonathan Smele is one of the distinguished "Glasgow cadre" of Russian/Soviet historians that have colonized much of post-Soviet historiography. His offering here is a very in-depth accounting of that "Time of Troubles" across north Eurasia a century ago. An impressive amount of detail is compressed into one volume. Reading it is like walking over a familiar field with a trained archaeologist, who manages to pull something fresh out of familiar earth before your eyes. That said, I have a few constructive criticisms that I hope won't detract from the book's overall impressiveness. In putting the Russian civil wars in quotation marks, he seems to give the nationality aspect a bit too much play. Russia was understood as both an empire and a nationality, and in the imperial sense the term "Russian" is appropriate and was so used by the overwhelming majority of its participants. I can't quite see this period as beginning with the Basmachi revolt in Turkestan in the summer of 1916, and conveniently ending there a decade later. That seems a historian's too-obvious deck stacking. Reversals at the front had much longer-term impact, including distribution of needed materiel, leading to the demoralization and breakdowns in the rear. I do not recall anyone arguing Russian soldiers were marched against German tanks with pitchforks, as Smele alleges; but troops were "voting with their feet" as early as 1915 and never really stopped. I also believe he oversimplifies in saying that nearly all 20th century history revolves around the Russian civil war - though much of it obviously does. Socialism and revolution were in the air all over Europe and rose together out of the war, in Germany and Italy and Austria-Hungary as surely as in Russia. Without the Russian precedent these outbreaks might have been successful, rather than contained by a forewarned Europe. Spain, for instance, had a long tradition of civil war - republic vs. monarchy, intersected by socialism and anarchism - and to posit this as irrelevant to its own civil war of the '30s, in favor of Russia's, seems a broad over-reach. Smele's account seems somewhat detached from the social passions motivating these apocalyptic protagonists. Their mysticism, on all sides, appears a bit beyond British historians. I also can't agree that the struggles in the streets of Petrograd were only "partly" related to the civil war. While it's true that it

took the Red Army to put "Soviet Power" across - workers' and soldiers' soviet rebellions were too easily reversed in the early post-October months - the civil war openly grew out of the polarization in the capital and spread across Russia in gathering momentum as surely as Bleeding Kansas led to the American civil war. To put it another way, revolution meant seizure of power, civil war its consolidation from challenge; the first as seed, the latter reaping its fruit. Which leads to a passing point: an important "front" of this war was the Volga famine of 1921 that drove the central Russian peasants into rebellion against the Soviet state. This took as many lives as claimed for the Ukrainian "holodomor" a decade later; yet is largely forgotten as no political capital can be squeezed out of these particular corpses. Another issue, for me, is Smele's characterization of the Constitutional Democratic Party (The Kadets) as "radical-liberal." Maybe in the post-Maggie UK they may qualify as such, but the Kadets' alleged radicalism dates solely from the 1905 era. After the Duma's creation, the Kadets became a strictly legal organization composed (as he states) of socially conservative professional men. Their political liberalism waned throughout the inter-revolutionary years, especially after the socialist and populist eruptions of 1917. Here I must agree with the Kadets' primary English-language historian, William G. Rosenberg, who has them as a party of the Right by 1917, a pseudo-liberal magnet for all those opposed to social revolution. Along these lines Smele insists on referring to the underground activists of the Socialist Revolutionary Party - the "Greens" - as the "democratic counter-revolution." Here he betrays his Brit/Western bias: for all conscious SR/Greens considered themselves democratic *revolutionaries*, with Whites and Reds alike the true "contras." And, the final question - which Smele somewhat avoids - is why a Russian civil war at all? One might ask this of any country undergoing such tragic upheavals, yet there are cogent reasons besides human nature as to why they erupt. In the case of Russia, was it at all possible that a middle of the road democracy could emerge out of March 1917? And the answer must be no, which Smele gives at least indirectly. There was too great a social gulf in Old Russia, and a weak middle class "civil society," afraid of the "dark people" below and captive to the army - at least its rightist commissioned officers, who tolerated the revolution on condition its leaders didn't go too far and stayed in the war. Said leaders had no loyal forces of their own; it fell to others to recreate new ones (per Lenin's "State and Revolution.") So, for all my picking, I do find this book a worthwhile addition to the literature, and will recommend it over the partisan accounts of Vladimir Brovkin or Richard Pipes.

This volume offers a comprehensive and original analysis and reconceptualization of the compendium of struggles that wracked the collapsing Tsarist empire and the emergent USSR, profoundly affecting the history of the twentieth century. Indeed, the reverberations of those decade-long wars echo to the present day - not despite, but because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which re-opened many old wounds, from the Baltic to the Caucasus. Contemporary memorializing and 'de-memorializing' of these wars, therefore form part of the book's focus, but at its heart lie the struggles between various Russian political and military forces which sought to inherit and preserve, or even expand, the territory of the tsars, overlain with examinations of the attempts of many non-Russian national and religious groups to divide the former empire. The reasons why some of the latter were successful (Poland and Finland, for example), while others (Ukraine, Georgia and the Muslim Basmachi) were not, are as much the author's concern as are explanations as to why the chief victors of the 'Russian' Civil Wars were the Bolsheviks. Tellingly, the work begins and ends with battles in Central Asia - a theatre of the 'Russian' Civil Wars that was closer to Mumbai than it was to Moscow.

"The work is well written and the scholarly apparatus is peerless Highly recommended."--CHOICE "Adds a valuable dimension to our understanding of what is conventionally depicted as the Red-White civil war of 1917-21."--The Financial Times "The most ambitious account on the subject since Evan Mawdsley's magisterial *The Russian Civil War*...Assiduous and voracious, [Smele] is also intrepid...It is a bracing achievement: this is a book that will long be required reading."--Robert Service, *The Times Literary Supplement* "Ambitious and thought-provoking new book...offers an interesting corrective to depictions of a unitary Russian civil war...This work presents a masterful synthesis of the best English and Russian language scholarship on the subject."--Times Higher Education "Jonathan Smele has written a very important and ambitious book. He puts the Russian Civil War in the broadest possible context, demonstrating how it determined not only the course of Soviet history, but also the way the twentieth century played out. The product of enormous learning, it is well written and intelligently argued."--Peter Kenz, Professor Emeritus, University of California Santa Cruz, and author of *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* "Analytical, colourful and not only clearly researched but beautifully written, Smele's work is vivid and important, expounding as it does the acute significance of the Russian civil war for the history of the world today."--The Spectator "Jonathan Smele tells the history of what he calls the 'Russian Civil Wars' with admirable clarity, offering an original and consistently thought-provoking interpretation. He makes a compelling case that the many-layered developments that took place across the former Russian empire between 1916 and 1926 were of paramount significance for the history of the twentieth century. The book is engagingly written and impressively researched, the analysis is discerning and dispassionate, making this study easily the best to date."--Stephen Smith, Professor of History, All Souls College, University of Oxford and author of *The Oxford Handbook of the History of*

Communism" A stupendous book, as readable as it is scholarly. A leading authority presents an engaging narrative and a penetrating analysis of a key episode in Russian and world history."--Paul Dukes, Emeritus Professor of History, University of Aberdeen "Smele sets out a good case for treating the October Revolution as only one among a whole complex of events, the 'Russian civil wars,' which lasted some ten years and determined much of our life throughout the twentieth century. He has marshaled a huge amount of information derived from other, more restricted accounts, and created a coherent narrative out of them. Should become standard reading for students of twentieth century world history."--Geoffrey Hosking OBE, Emeritus Professor of Russian History, University College London "Iconoclastic but erudite, provocative but convincing, this is a study of the 'Russian' civil wars for the 21st century. Smele is right: the demise of the USSR makes the civil wars more not less important: more than a struggle between Reds and Whites, the foundation myths of all post-Soviet states are centered on these struggles."--Geoffrey Swain, Alec Nove Chair in Russian and East European Studies, University of Glasgow and author of *Eastern Europe Since 1945* About the Author Jonathan D. Smele teaches Russian and European History at Queen Mary, University of London and has published extensively on the Russian revolutions and civil wars. For a decade, he was Editor of the journal *Revolutionary Russia*. His most recent work is the two-volume *Historical Dictionary of the 'Russian' Civil Wars, 1916-1926*.