



Russia's First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty

Chester S. L. Dunning

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The Time of Troubles was a period of great upheaval in Russian history. It began when the ancient ruling dynasty died out in 1598 and Boris Godunov defeated rival boyars to become the tsar. For more than a decade thereafter, Russia was plagued by dynastic struggle, devastating famine, widespread uprisings, and invasion by Polish and Swedish armies. The Time of Troubles finally ended in 1613 with the establishment of the Romanovs as the ruling dynasty. Russia's state crisis had been so severe that it nearly destroyed the country and seriously delayed its emergence as a great power. Ever since then the Time of Troubles has occupied a unique place in Russia's collective memory. Russia's First Civil War is the first major post-Marxist reassessment of the Time of Troubles and the first detailed study of that tragic era in English. Historians have long misinterpreted popular uprisings during the Times of Troubles as the first social revolution of the Russian masses against serfdom. Dunning overturns this view and demonstrates that at the heart of the "Troubles" was a long and extremely violent civil war that divided Russian society vertically instead of horizontally. He shows that serfs did not actively participate in the civil war and that the abolition of serfdom was never a rebel goal. Instead, most rebels were petty gentry, professional soldiers, townsmen, and cossacks who were united in fierce opposition to tsars they believed to be illegitimate usurpers. Based upon exhaustive research, Russia's First Civil War is a masterful mix of social and military history, firmly placing the Time of Troubles in the context of the waves of wars and rebellions that swept through early modern Europe and Asia.

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