A. Brian Murphy, The Russian Civil War

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REFERENCES

A. Brian MURPHY, *The Russian Civil War. Primary sources*. Londres-Basingstoke, Macmillan ; New York, St. Martins, 2000, 274 p.

- 1 The access to Russian archives for the Soviet period produced a qualitative shift in the historiography. Over the last decade, many collections of documents from Soviet archives have likewise been published – mainly in Russian, but also in English, French, Italian and other languages. By tradition, documentary collections are recommended of materials that are difficult to access or read in the original place or style, and that are of particular interest, e.g. diaries or correspondences. There is a striving towards completeness of the published documents (whole collections, full documents). In other words, criteria for selection of documents and for omissions in published documents should be made clear to the reader. For a researcher, the documentary's purpose is to facilitate history writing by facilitating access to sources, far away from their repositories.
- 2 The Russian Civil War and peasant uprisings in 1918-1921 have been described in numerous participants' memoirs, in literature (e.g. Isaac Babel and Mikhail Sholokhov), political and scholarly books. It goes without saying that Soviet, as well as émigré Russian historiography tended to be partisan and tendentious. Naturally, a fundamental question is what the post-Soviet perspectives, and the only recently accessible archival sources in Russia add to our knowledge of these dramatic years. The purpose of *The Russian Civil War: primary sources*, written by Brian Murphy, professor emeritus at University of Ulster, seems to be to serve as a companion volume for English-speaking students in history courses. The sub-title would then appropriately be *an introduction to*, or a *guide to the use of* the primary sources about

the Civil War in Soviet Russia. Combined with reading of monographs on the Civil War, e.g. Geoffrey Swain, *The origins of the Russian Civil War* (1996) or Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (2000), Murphy's volume introduces not only the 'living testimonies', but also interesting methodological matters, such as source criticism or objectivity. For these pedagogical purposes, the book is well suited. It adds broad perspectives on what written documents from 1918-1920 can reveal of the historical scenes.

- 3 However, a specialist in Russian history would like to see careful editing of these documents from central and regional archives. The foreword and consecutive comments give too few hints as to the criteria, by which documents have been chosen to *illustrate* historical events. The reader is not informed whether a chosen document is unique, or one of many similar or related ones for each topic. Commentaries to the documents are laconic on substance matters. In many instances, clarifications (even punctuation...) are not given as to which sections have been omitted. On many archival documents, not only the main text is of interest, but also the notes and resolutions written by the recipient side. With few exceptions, these omissions are hard to distinguish in the present volume. This reviewer cannot compare the translation with the Russian originals; the text seems clear and well written. However, important archeographical data, such as the exact names of persons, their titles, organisations as well as places and dates, seem to be 'streamlined' in their English form; probably to facilitate the reading, but to the disadvantage for our further references to the documents in question.
- 4 Given these critical remarks on the form of presentation, *The Russian Civil War: primary sources* does indeed lend itself to an imaginative reading for the interested student or scholar. Those in command of the Russian language will find new inroads to original documents, or to the above-mentioned Russian-language documentaries. The first chapter describes the situation in 1918, after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. The second chapter enlightens the evolution of the White side and the following chapter highlights long-term objectives of the Red side. The crucial military engagements in 1919 that decided the outcome of the Civil War is covered in chapter four. The concluding fifth chapter nicely delves with the myths, and realities, about the famous First Cavalry Army under Semyon Budyonnyi's command. On each major phase, whichever one's periodisation of the Russian Civil War, the documents presented add a new dimension, and can serve as basis for in-depth discussions on topics, where the historiography tended to be partisan, politicised.