During the last twenty years, many observers have focused on the changes in Russian historiography of the turbulent, dramatic and tragic twentieth century. Also in this field, the political and social history of the Stalin period, that is, from the 1930s to the 1950s, has dominated over the new approaches of Russian and Western economic historians to the interpretation of the Soviet command economy. Less attention has, in general, been paid to revisions concerning Russia's history up to the early 1900s.

Many of the themes in economic history that formerly had been written within a more or less strict Marxist or Leninist paradigm had already been under scrutiny since the late 1960s. Against hard opposition from official Communist Party ideologues, historians of the so-called ‘new direction’ (novoe napravlenie) advanced new interpretations concerning the nature of the Tsarist social formation. Their analyses were based on extensive empirical work in the archives, and their conclusions ran counter to an established tradition based in a superficial way on what Vladimir Lenin in particular had written on these subjects.

Under the influence of a strong cliometric striving, Russia's economic historians had by the mid-1980s already freed themselves from many of the dogmatic and ideologic frames that restrained the understanding of the Tsarist economy. Since the glasnost period in the late 1980s, however, economic history has definitely made further progress at the university level and in basic research. Just as in political history, one part of this development has been the reinterpretation of such aspects of the past that were tendentiously tainted by a scholastic Leninism. Yet, it also concerns the solid biographies on economists, entrepreneurs and statesmen. All this is reflected in the Economic History Yearbooks (Ekonomicheskaia istoriia. Ezhegodnik) that have been published since 2000. An interim report on the changing interpretation of Russia's economic development was the anthology published at the turn of
the millennium, *Russia's economic history in the 19th–20th centuries. A contemporary view*¹, with several articles outlining the major shifts in interpretation in comparison to the Soviet period as well as pointing at those areas, in which empirical and theoretical work was called for.

This is the background of the project to create a comprehensive encyclopaedia on all relevant aspects of Russia's economic history suggested by Andrei Sorokin (then director of the publishing company, Rosspen, and today also director of the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, RGASPI). An editor of historical literature, Sorokin, who had defended his Ph.D. on Russian business history in the early 1900s in the last Soviet years, concluded that there was a deep need for a résumé of the research in progress and for a reformulation of the major topics in Russia's economic history.

The research project was supported by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the editorial group was led by professor Iurii Petrov, today director of the Institute of Russian History of the Academy of Sciences (IRI RAN) and a specialist on Russia's business and banking history in the late Tsarist period. The advisory board for the Encyclopaedia included well-known academics, the late Aleksandr Fursenko, Boris Ananich, Venjamin Aleksejev and Vladimir Vinogradov, as well as leading researchers such as Leonid Borodkin, Iurii Vorobëv and Andrei Sokolov. Their broad perspectives and long experience in the international scholarly community set the targets for the Encyclopaedia's high standards. On many topics included in the Encyclopaedia, the project has also provided the opportunity for substantial research in central and regional archives on little-known matters. The result is most impressive and a stimulating reading with hundreds of fairly long and exhaustive articles. It goes without saying that the editors themselves advance the proposition for comments and for suggestions for an enlarged and revised edition.

The Encyclopaedia comes in two volumes with almost 3,000 pages. It has the general aim to present descriptions of the stages of development of the national economy of Russia from oldest times, with separate articles on the major events through the centuries. The main sectors of the economy are covered in numerous articles, with some treating a sector (agriculture, handcraft, industry, etc.) and others dealing with particular branches or individual enterprises. There are specific articles on Russia's colonisation from the conquest of Siberia to the early 1900s, on the transport industry (waterways, canals, roads, railroads, etc.) as Russia's geography had been a great challenge to economic progress, or on the extraordinary role of the state even in comparison with Western countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The Encyclopaedia provides information on the administration of the state-controlled sectors, as well as articles on the changing jurisdiction for the manufacturers, factories and other enterprises, or for banks and foreign trade companies. The role of the respective tsars for the economy, their initiatives in lawmaking and reforms, as well as Russia's economic relations with other countries are also described in a succinct manner.

Numerous articles cover quite a few traditional disputes, for example the hotly debated issue of the role of foreign capital for the development in the late nineteenth century or the effectiveness of the reforms of tsar Aleksandr II and the Stolypin projects launched in the first

decade of the 1900s. General articles on the aristocracy, merchants, manufacturers, and workers and their associations and unions deal with social aspects of Russia's economy. Other articles cover the higher education system with respect to the economic professions; also Russia's economists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and their thinking and writing are covered in the Encyclopaedia.

The Encyclopaedia with its general and theoretical articles can be used as an introduction to a modern economic history of Russia. They do not only provide information on the particular topics but also treat the respective themes in relation to historiography by comparing how Soviet historians used to present the themes and how debates among historians have changed the understanding of certain processes. The detailed articles on individual enterprises and businesses, trade companies and merchants are all very rich in empirical and biographical details.

In editorial aspects, the Encyclopaedia is up-to-par with reference works; it informs about cross-references and provides extensive lists of literature, including primary literary sources from a certain epoch and recent research. The volumes are richly illustrated with well-chosen photographs and portraits. An English translation of this collective work on the development of Russia's economy up to the great watershed of the 1917 revolution, with its substantial knowledge based on recent archival studies and theoretical reflections, would be of great value for international economic history.

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Reference