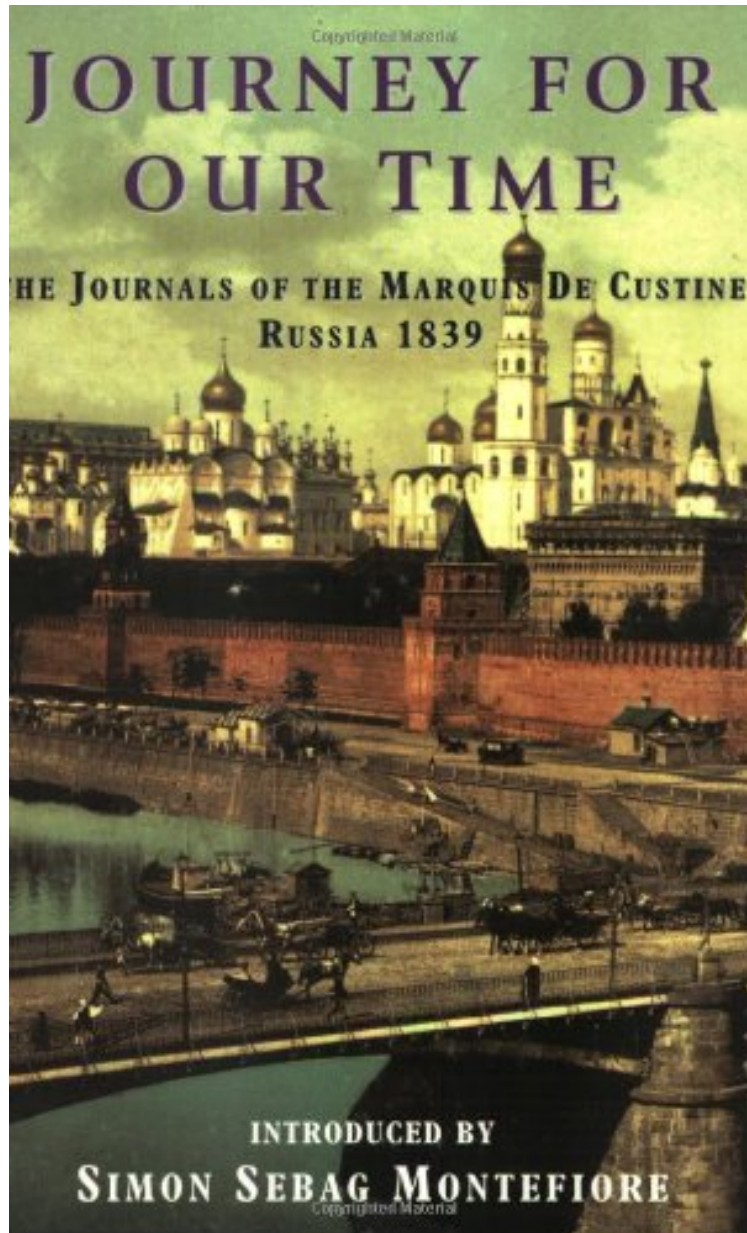


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Journey For Our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine Russia 1839

Marquis Astolphe de Custine

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Journey For Our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine Russia 1839:

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A sobering and prophetic view of Russia (book details)By Patrick W. CrabtreeIt's hard to believe that an individual could visit a country for only three months and exit with not only a precise appraisal of the culture, but accurate and prophetic advice to the world about that country as well. The Marquis de Custine was just such a person.The French Marquis made his journey to Russia in 1839 at a time when it was being ruled by a particularly despotic Tsar: Nicholas I. (You can read all about him in: Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias.) The Marquis went in with an agenda of sorts which was to acquire justification for monarchical rule, as France had recently undergone much upheaval over this issue, (and there was much more to come in 1848!) When he eventually "escaped" from Russia, the Marquis had completely reversed his sanguine views on the benefits of living under the reign of a monarch.George W. Bush would have been well-served to have had the Marquis de Custine at his side when he, "...looked into Vladimir Putin's soul." The Marquis would have provided the U.S. President with a far superior assessment than the one which Bush took away from the experience... and that is the genius of both The Marquis's perceptiveness of human thought and behavior, as well as of his notable power with a pen. Even his most casual comments seem astonishing today, considering that they were made in 1839 -- here is but one of many examples:"Either the civilized world will, before fifty years have passed, fall again under the yoke of the [Russian] barbarians, or Russia will undergo a revolution more terrible than the revolution [1789-1799] whose effects are still felt in Western Europe." (Page 71.) Well, the Marquis missed the mark by a mere 30 years because the Bolsheviks (Communists) effected their horrific revolution, beginning in 1917, completing the job by the following year.I have read all the major Russian literature and have studied Russian culture for many years and I'm compelled to say that, subsequent to his brief visit, the Marquis was able to encapsulate not only how Russian culture came to level out but additionally WHY oppression of the masses by despots was endured by the people there for so many hundreds of years. There are a few factual mistakes in the book, (e.g., the myth about Prince Potemkin having "painted fake cities" along a river tour to please the Tsarina Catherine [II] the Great on her tour of the region), and The Marquis tended to paint people with a broad brush. He also envisioned the solution to the "Russian barbarianism problem" via the possible supplanting of the Greek Orthodox faith by the Universal Catholic Church! Still, the Marquis somehow managed to capture the essence of Russian culture of the period and for many decades to come in this remarkable 240-page journal.If the work has a flaw it is perhaps the ad nauseum emphasis on four or five negative aspects of Russian society, particularly as it concerns the appalling and gruesome hubris of the various tsars. I suspect that this emerges so redundantly due to the Marquis's own paranoia concerning his ability to eventually egress from the country. The secret police and other spies pretty much monitored his every move during his entire visit and another traveler, much like himself, was arrested and detained in a Moscow dungeon just shortly before the Marquis's own excursion concluded.This 2001 work includes a nice introduction by Simon Sebag Montefiore, (author of: Potemkin: Catherine the Great's Imperial Partner), and was artfully translated from the French into English by Phyllis Penn Kohler. The book probably has somewhat limited interest to a specific market but if you have a particular curiosity of either Russian history or the politics of monarchies then you'll find lots of treasure here.Highly recommended to readers of history.8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Excellent primary sourceBy J. MireYes, Custine's writing is swarming with stereotypes, unverified reports, and exclamations stemming from ignorance. But, the virtue of this book is not in the quality of its writing or the accuracy of its portrayal of Russia under Nicolaus I. Together with all of its faults, this book is a historical artifact, a part of history and not the retelling of it. When it is read with this in mind, Custine's account is compelling, funny, surprising to anyone who is at least roughly familiar with 19th century Russia. Not to mention that it is one of the rare published primary sources about the subject that can be read and enjoyed by a non-historian.

Blacklisted by the Soviets, these journals have long been recognized for offering the most fascinating and revealing impression of the country by a foreigner. The Marquis' writings abound in observations on Russia's social, political, and religious states--leading Custine to dire forebodings. "he...records the...jokes, complains, anecdotes of innkeepers, princelings, engineers and customs officials...we accompany him on a journey of exploration in more ways than one, and he is always good company."--Roy Foster.

Language NotesText: English (translation) Original Language: FrenchAbout the AuthorAstolphe de Custine was born into the French aristocracy in 1790, during the period of great civil war upheaval in France. Both his father and grandfather were guillotined during the Terror. Long established in his anti-revolutionary and pro-monarchical instincts, Custine went to Russia in 1839 'to find arguments against representative government'. In doing so he achieved remarkable feats of travel and observation, and was dubbed by many 'the Tocqueville of Russia.' He died in 1857.