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Evgenij AKEL'EV (ЕВГЕНИЙ АКЕЛЬЕВ), **Povsednevnaia žizn' vorovskogo mira Moskvy vo vremena Van'ki Kaina** [La vie quotidienne du monde des voleurs à Moscou du temps de Van'ka Kain]. Moscou : Molodaja Gvardija, 2012, 413 P.

- 1 The popular Molodaia Gvardia “Living History” book series on everyday life, now approaching 100 titles, is a baggy collection of histories and current events. Some of its history books are not the new social or cultural studies suggested by the series title but merely standard accounts with the fashionable label “everyday life” tacked on. Others are rehashes of gossipy court or high society studies. But a few are genuinely original, powerful works of historical excavation. A recent addition to the series, Evgenii Akel'ev's study of the criminal world of mid-eighteenth-century Moscow, qualifies as one of these groundbreaking investigations. It ranks among the best social history of eighteenth-century Russia ever penned.
- 2 Akel'ev built his account on the figure of Van'ka Kain, a Moscow criminal active in the 1730s and 1740s. Kain, whose real name was Ivan Osipov, grew up as a serf boy on an estate in the Rostov region and in his early teens was transferred to Moscow to work as a house servant. After gaining his freedom for having revealed a hushed-up killing on the property of his master, Osipov remained in Moscow and drifted into a life of crime, acquiring the alias Van'ka Kain. At the accession of Empress Elizabeth, Kain took the opportunity to receive an amnesty in return for turning state's evidence and helping the police round up his former associates in crime. His life was later described in a memoir or, better, pseudo-memoir novel produced by Matvei Komarov in 1775 and

published in St. Petersburg in 1779. Several variants of the story subsequently appeared. Akel'ev uses the latest edition, a French publication, introduced and annotated by Ecatherina Rai-Gonneau, *Vie de Kain, bandit russe et mouchard de la tsarine* (P.: Institut d'études slaves, 2008). The edition has the Russian text produced by Matvei Komarov and a French translation on facing pages.

- 3 Although readers have often regarded the story as invented, historians long ago discovered that Kain was a real person, well-known to the police authorities in Moscow of the mid-eighteenth century. Details reported in his memoir correspond to events documented in police records. Even so, most studies of the memoir-novel have focused on literary and textological questions. Akel'ev decided instead to scour the archives of the Sysknoi prikaz in Moscow and learn as much as he could about Kain and his associates, the milieu in which they operated, and the internal organization and personal dynamics of the Moscow police agencies and jails. The result is a highly textured portrayal of the Moscow underworld of the mid-eighteenth-century and of the government offices whose job it was to protect the citizenry.
- 4 By digging into the documentation of more than 100 cases that Kain was involved in and tracking down locations in confessional lists, Akel'ev is able to describe in vivid detail the methods of the criminals, the principal sites of their activity, their hideouts, their accomplices (often women) in fencing the goods they stole, their seasonal runs to national markets like the Makar'ev fair near Nizhnii Novgorod, and much more. In addition to giving a thorough history of the Sysknoi prikaz, Akel'ev provides capsule histories of other institutions in which the criminals worked and lived. Especially prominent in this regard was the largest cloth manufactory in Moscow, the Big Woolen Court, which harbored numerous serf and military runaways who moved in and out of the Moscow underworld. The Moscow Garrison School, an institution for the sons of soldiers' wives and widows, was another source of street thieves, some who were trying to help their destitute mothers to survive. These women, whether or not they had children, were often in desperate financial straits, and some of them earned money by storing or fencing stolen goods and by housing and giving sexual comfort to criminals. Akel'ev was also able to identify the main sites at which criminals congregated in Moscow, the jargon of their trade, and the fluid dynamics of their cooperation in carrying out complex operations. In this period the criminal underworld had not yet formed the stable gangs that we know from a later era. Instead, groups of thieves would come together to carry out particular operations—robberies, kidnappings, or forays to a national fair—and then disband and work as individuals or form another short-lived group for a new venture.
- 5 While Akel'ev does not devote much space to theorizing his materials, he offers useful contextualization by making occasional comparisons with practices in countries of Western Europe, noting, for instance, that the placement of the Moscow police investigatory office and large prison in the city center between the Kremlin and the main commercial district repeated a pattern of western cities. The Bastille in Paris was characteristic. Akel'ev gives a wonderfully detailed account of how the proximity of the Sysk office and prison to the scene of the thieves' activities and to the lodgings of their accomplices allowed for daily interchange of food, drink, and information between the imprisoned and their associates on the outside.
- 6 Akel'ev also attempts a sociological analysis of the biographies of the criminals. The authorities collected information from arrestees on their social origins, families, places

of residence, and work. In these materials Akel'ev detects a pattern among the thieves of the early loss of one or both parents and consequent descent into poverty without adult supervision, a circumstance that deprived the youngsters of useful connections to honest labor. Though suggestive (and not surprising), it is hard to know if this pattern was predictive, inasmuch as Akel'ev sample, while impressive, represents only a fraction of the many hundreds of cases that passed through the Sysknoi prikaz in the 1730s and 1740s.

- 7 Most fascinating is Akel'ev's discovery and description of the success of Van'ka Kain in corrupting the personnel of the Sysk. Throughout the time that Kain acted as an informant and leader of police dragnet units he was also continuing his own thieving, some proceeds of which he passed on to staff members at the Sysk who, in turn, protected him. The types of gift that Kain provided (Rhein wine, quality gloves, German downy hats, delicate fabrics, and Italian scarves, to mention just a few), Akel'ev suggests, revealed the police personnel's aspiration to a western style of consumption and the display of flashy goods. As further evidence of this ambition Akel'ev found that the clerks at the Sysk were meeting secretly at night to divvy up the goods confiscated in theft cases. As the demands of Kain's protectors for gifts increased (possibly in step with an increase in Kain's crimes), Kain committed ever more risky offenses, including kidnapping and holding young women for ransom. One of his kidnappings finally created a scandal that could not be contained and cast a bright light on the corruption at the Sysk and its protection of a dangerous criminal. This led to a purge of the Sysk and the arrest, imprisonment, and death sentence of Kain, a penalty later commuted to hard labor at Rogervik port on the Baltic.
- 8 Akel'ev's book is not merely a good read. It is also good history, as it provides a remarkably detailed and revealing view of the internal dynamics of a key social institution and of a rarely penetrated urban subculture. This work is a wonderful example of how a talented researcher can bring to life the social world of the Russian eighteenth century.