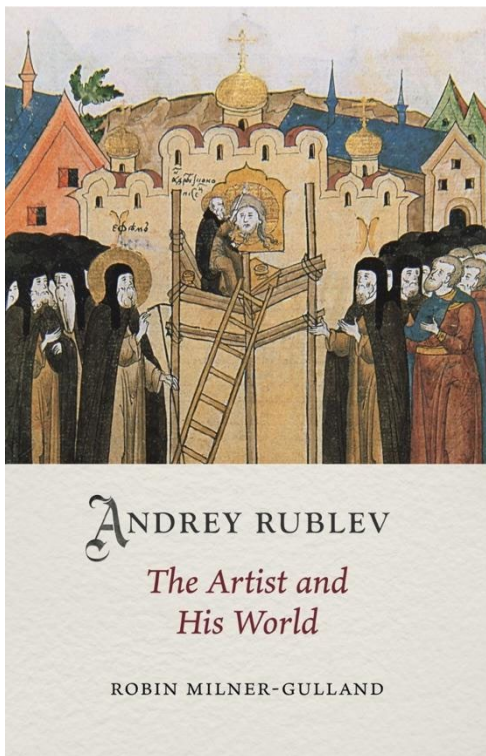


Review: Andrey Rublev: The Artist and His World

by Robin Milner-Gulland. Reaktion Books, distributed by the University of Chicago Press, May 2023. 152 p. ill. ISBN 978-1-78914-680-6 (h/c), \$22.50.

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As Robin Milner-Gulland observes in his new biography *Andrey Rublev: the Artist and His World*, "...in Russia, the time of Rublev, around 1400, was rather a good one, despite the Tartars and the Black Death." Part of a series of interdisciplinary medieval studies for general readers by Reaktion Books entitled *Medieval Lives*, Milner-Gulland's volume is the first English language monograph on the artist who created what is arguably Russia's most famous medieval icon, *The Old Testament Trinity*.

Since its creation six centuries ago, Rublev's *Trinity* icon has been of central artistic, religious, and political significance to Russian religious and national identity. Coincidentally, in May of 2023, shortly after Milner-Gulland's book was published, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, where the *Trinity* icon had long been housed, to return it to the Russian Orthodox Church in an effort to bolster religious support and nationalist fervor for his war on Ukraine - making Milner-Gulland's volume

surprisingly relevant to contemporary geopolitics.

Rublev remains little known outside Russia and there is little historical information about his life. Only two records of Rublev's commissions for frescoes and icons in churches near Moscow from 1405 and 1408 survive, together with several posthumous accounts describing his work on the design and decoration of two additional monastic churches in the 1420s. Milner-Gulland explores and expands upon these documentary sources, providing a rich historical context for Rublev's life. He evokes a time of relative peace in Moscow around 1400 when the refurbishment and new construction of churches coincided with monastic reforms led by the Russian Orthodox monk St. Sergius, to whom Rublev is believed to have dedicated the *Trinity* icon. The author devotes a full chapter to the *Trinity* icon, exploring Rublev's innovative

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approach to the subject within the broader context of Christian art. Elsewhere, he discusses Rublev's working methods, describes all the works that can be unequivocally attributed to him (even proposing a new attribution of his own) as well works whose attributions are more questionable, and reviews the nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian scholarly literature on Rublev. A professor emeritus of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Suffolk in England, Milner-Gulland deftly synthesizes scholarship from several fields including Russian political and Orthodox Church history and medieval Russian art, presenting a wealth of historic information in a style readily accessible to general readers.

Produced as a sleek octavo (9 x 5.75 inches and 150 pages), the physical volume is well-designed and extensively illustrated with color photographs. The scholarly apparatus includes a note on transliteration, chronology, index, and select bibliography. Lacking, however, is a list of the documentary sources—the Old Russian chronicles and saints' lives—which are discussed extensively in the text but do not appear in the bibliography. Providing a list of these primary historical sources, perhaps annotated to indicate which are available in English translation, would be helpful for readers who want to explore further.