and poets are restored to their rightful place in the panoply of Byelorussian literature. In the meantime all

steps in that direction, however timid, are to be welcomed.

Arnold McMillin

Rjabcevič, V. N. *O čem rasskazyvajut monety*. 2nd ed. 'Narodnaja aśvieta', Minsk, 1977. 398 pp. Illustrations.

Fortunately numismatics is now firmly established as an indispensable auxiliary historical discipline. This book is an excellent example of how a study of coins, their production and circulation, and their changes in value can have direct bearing on our knowledge of the history of a country. Although written primarily for the layman, it nevertheless succeeds in providing invaluable information for the professional historian.

Rjabcevič's book serves to complement the various editions of I. G. Spasskij's *Russkaja monetnaja sistema*, in that, despite the necessarily common nature of the material in the early chapters of both books, the former concentrates primarily on the coinage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and, to a lesser extent, Poland. The book's most important chapters are precisely those (6-8, pp. 89-171) dealing with the currency in circulation in Byelorussia between the fourteenth and the end of the eighteenth centuries. The author draws his information from documents of the period and uses extensive quotation to illustrate his material. He makes a careful distinction between the coinage systems of the Grand Duchy and Poland; this is absolutely essential at a time when the Polish *grosz* was lighter in weight, and therefore in value, than its Lithuanian equivalent. He is also precise about identifying the occasions on which currency terms are used to signify a unit of account rather than an actual coin. It is for this reason, and for his tabulation of the exchange values of different types of coin within the currency system, that Rjabcevič's book will be of great benefit to the historian who needs answers to the many complex problems that arise in the course of an examination of the decline of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. It

is obviously beyond the scope of this volume to go into detail on the economic reasons for this decline, but it is sufficiently well documented to be used as an introduction to a complex area of economic history.

The final section of the book, pp. 207-398, contains valuable photographs of coins and reproductions of heraldic devices. Unfortunately the quality of the photographs is not as good as that to be found in Spasskij's book or in D. Ja. Fedorov's indispensable catalogue *Monety Pribaltiki XIII-XVIII stoletij*, Tallin, 1966, but this is essentially a very minor drawback. A far more serious shortcoming is one that this book shares with most modern Soviet publications, even those that lay claim to being 'scholarly': complete lack of bibliography and index.

There is one really noteworthy error, undoubtedly caused by the author's excessive enthusiasm for Kiev's international trading connections in the thirteenth century. At the end of his account of a journey to the Mongol Khans (1245-1247), Friar John of Pian de Carpine gives a list of merchants he met in Kiev who can verify the truth of what he has written: 'Sunt et testes mercatores de Constantinopoli qui per Tartaros in Rusciam venerunt... nomina autem mercatorum illorum sunt haec: Michael Genuensis enim et Bartholomeus, Manuel Veneticus, Jacobus Reverius Acre, Nicholaus Pisanus.' Rjabcevič takes 'Acre' to mean that Reverius came from Accra in Ghana but unfortunately omits to identify his source. M. d'Avezac, in his edition of the text *Relation des mongols ou tartares*, Paris, 1838, makes a much more likely deduction: 'peut-être faut-il lire *Acrensis*, pour *Acconensis*'.

J. Dingley