

Recenze / Reviews

AVEN, Petr. *Vremja Berezovskogo/Čas Berezovkého*. Moskva: AST: CORPUS, 2018. ISBN 978-5-17-104791-7.

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I wasn't going to read this book²³² and just lose the moment it had been published. Boris Berezovsky himself and his biography have never been in my attention focus. However, a friend of mine being known about my interest in Oral history and contemporary history not only recommended me the book to read but have bought it and gave it me in hand with such recommendation. My friend's reputation is quite enough for me to start reading, and then I wouldn't stop it until come to the end. Firstly, I was rather considering the interview method and criticising it from Oral history methodology perspective. And more I read more I was engaged with the content.

Despite of possible negative comments from professional oral historians, I definitely could classify the book as an oral history one. In fact, we are talking about not historical research but interview collection, which are completely interesting and are a first-class source for historical study and analysis.

The author, Petr Aven, was a member of Yegor Gaidar's economic reform government of Russia in early 1990s during Boris Yeltsin presidency. He was responsible for the Russia transition from closed and ideologized foreign trade to open commercial one. Later he became one of the owners of the Alfa Group, which is one of the biggest business imperia in post-Soviet Russia. The book includes of 27 narrators' interview, among which are politicians and government members (as Anatoly Chubais – vice-premier of the government and “Russian privatisation Father”; Valentin Yumashev – B.Yeltsin's son-in-law, journalist, Chief of the

²³² In Russian original *Пётр Авен. Время Березовского. – Москва: Издательство АСТ: CORPUS, 2018.*

President administration; Alexander Voloshin - Chief of the President administration in last years of B.Yeltsin presidency and early years of V.Putin presidency), the richest Russian businessmen (as Mikhail Fridman, Eugene Shvidler), famous Russian journalists (Vladimir Posner, Sergey Dorenko), two from three Berezovsky's wives, and other both far-famed and little-known friends and colleagues of Berezovsky, who knew him in different periods of his life. Thus, the book consists of chapters collecting interviews' part connected to that periods. The chapter titles also reflect the biography stages: *Mathematician (1970s-1980s)*, *Businessman (1990-1993)*, *Tycoon (1994-1996)*, *Oligarch (1997-1999)*, *Oppositionist (2000-2004)*, *Exile (2004-2013)*. There are the author's foreword, epilogue, entrance comments and brief chronology for every chapter in the book, as well as several dozens of the pictures from private archives of author and narrators.

The title of the book reveals the author's idea that the book isn't about Mr. Berezovsky himself but rather is about 1990s epoch, because by the author's opinion 1990s was the epoch of Berezovsky who represents this contradictory, complicated, and fateful piece in the contemporary Russian history. Some of the narrators disagree in it with P. Aven, e.g. A. Chubais doesn't feel that years were "Berezovsky epoch". I like the narrators choir doesn't sing in unison. Their opinions and assessments considerably differ regarding as the character, as the time. The portrait of B. Berezovsky doesn't seem glanced over and rosy, and thankfully the author didn't wish it.

As for me, I don't really think we could equal Berezovsky and 1990s, but I definitely believe they are essentially connected. This hero's nature and biography illustrate excellently the time and give us good reason to discuss seriously some question in regard with genesis and formation contemporary Russian economic, society and state.

In a sense, we have got some postmodern version of the classic Russian novel about our time hero²³³, in which we have the mix of interviews recorded and commented amateur writer instead of the chain of essays and stories by literature artist, and direct consideration and recollection instead of psychological portrait of the

²³³ I mean the well-known novel *A Hero of Our Time* by Russian famous literature classic Mikhail Lermontov (published first in 1840).

hero in the different circumstances. Indeed, every particular time defines its main hero as well narration style limits. Interesting peoples openly discussing interesting history age is an infallible formula for interesting book creating, isn't it? The book wouldn't become uninteresting even if reader a priori has a negative perception of the time, the character, the narrators, and the author.

Considering fairly narrow topic from outside point of view (Mr. Berezovsky's life story) and not too small size (816 pages) of the book we shouldn't expect it would be translated from Russian in immediate future. Therefore, I need recommend reading it in original for everybody whom Russian language is available for. Besides a reader will know the opinion of the author about some of crucial issues connecting contemporary Russian and its recent history expressing in his question and comments, at the same time he will also get the truly valuable information and original interpretation from participants and witnesses of the events. So, the reading would be worth.