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Odessa, a Black Sea port founded by Catherine the Great in 1794, shortly after the territory was wrested from the Ottoman Empire, became a boomtown on the southern fringe of the Russian Empire. Catherine and the early administrators of the city, such as the Duke de Richelieu, promoted settlement by Europeans in addition to the Greek, Italians, and Jews who came on their own initiative to take advantage of economic opportunities in the robust grain trade with Europe. More ethnically diverse by far than St. Petersburg, Odessa became a remarkable independent-minded, large cosmopolitan city, attracting and producing noted writers, artists, musicians and scholars. Imperial Russian tsars and Soviet leaders maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the maverick city, appreciating the fame and fortune it generated, but also leery of the activities of secret foreign national societies, pogromists, revolutionaries and simply the perceived lack of patriotism in the singular city so far away from the heart of Russia. With the withering of the lucrative grain trade by the time of the Soviet Union, Odessa became a neglected city, drained of its foreign flavor. With the independence of Ukraine in 1991, there were hopes raised that the architectural beauty and economic prospects of the city would be revived. Given the current hostilities in Eastern Ukraine with the potential of the Odessa area becoming a possible land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, the fate of the former Pearl of the Black Sea hangs in suspension. The present book brings together--indeed, re-collects--some of the most valuable and thought-provoking research on Odessa and its culture, community, and economy published by Patricia Herlihy over several decades of her work. Scholars of Ukraine, Russia, and the former Soviet Union will find in this book a helpful resource for their research and teaching.
