

Mythos Erinnerung Russland und das Jahr 1812

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Abstracts

Myth and Remembrance

Russia and the Year 1812

Anna Ananieva, Klaus Gestwa

1812 in Russia and Europe

Media Presentation, Myths, and Historical Analysis

The Russian Campaign, which the Grande Armée launched in June 1812, marks a break in the political, social, and cultural history of Europe. A few months later, Moscow had been burned. Napoleon's army had disintegrated during the retreat. The Russian Empire had risen to become the "saviour of Europe". These wartime events 200 years ago led to a new order in Europe. It was accompanied by inner-societal changes, accelerated national self-determination, and became the object of reminiscence.

Vadim Parsamov

Myth and Ideology

1812 and the Idea of a "People's War"

In Russia's cultural memory, the idea that Napoleon's forces were crushed in a war with the Russian people is widespread. Leo Tolstoy popularised this concept of a "people's war". Stalinist court historians refined this concept with Marxist notions. To this day, this concept dominates Russian historiography. With regard to 1812, it lacks critical distance to sources and ideology. A reassessment is still pending.

Elisabeth Cheauré

"Eagles in Their Heads, Snakes in Their Hearts..."

Napoleon, Borodino, and National Identity in Russia

Not long after the Battle of Borodino in 1812, the war against Napoleon became a key element of official national identity in Russia. Ever since, the state politics of memory has repeatedly exploited the memory of the victory in the "Patriotic War" for current needs. Especially in times of crisis, the memory of victory in war has served to legitimize rule and to conceal acute problems. At the same time, however, the "Napoleon myth" stimulated subversive criticism of conditions within Russia and discussions about Russia's role in Europe.

Elena Vishlenkova

The Anti-Napoleon Caricature
Peculiarities of Russian Humour

The caricatures of Napoleon that emerged in 1812 are a prototype of the Russian political poster. They show a weak and cowardly enemy, as well as a heroic Russian people. Their folk imagery distinguishes them from British and German caricatures of the same era. Because the common people were depicted as noble and good in contrast to the enemy, the censors banned the caricatures after the war and the restoration of the old social order.

Regine Nohejl

“Glory to You Forever, Borodino!”
The Patriotic War in Present-Day Russia

The Patriotic War of 1812 in Russia has become an all-purpose historical fairy tale. It involves an overpowering aggressor from the West, which Russia, due to its moral superiority, ultimately defeats. Ever since the Crimean War, this story has been told again and again whenever Russia has faced peril from abroad. Today, it is readily deployed to legitimise President Vladimir Putin’s system of “vertical power”. The celebration of the war’s 200th anniversary in Borodino showed how important patriotic mobilisation is for the regime. Official committees watched over the correct representation of the heroes of 1812. “Defeat Napoleon” was a central theme in school curricula.

Denis Sdvizhkov

Uncomfortable Memory
Borodino and Leipzig

An “archaeology” of memory helps to reconstruct how the layers of memory concerning the battles of Borodino in 1812 and Leipzig in 1813 have matured. Originally, this involved imperial and national places where the war against Napoleon’s forces was commemorated. Attempts to make these places of memory European are proving difficult.

Boris Belge

The Roar of Cannon and the Ringing of Bells
Peter Tchaikovsky’s Festival Overture *1812*

Tchaikovsky’s *1812* Overture is one of the most popular Russian compositions. It is worth listening to not only because of the bombastic instrumentation and acoustic effects. The work is also an important historical source. However, it reveals more about the background of the period in which it was created than about the events of 1812. As a “virtual war experience” written for the inauguration of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 1882, it plays a special role in Russia’s politics of memory.

Christine Engel
 War and Peace
 1812 in Tolstoy and Dornhelm

In his novel *War and Peace* (1868/69), Leo Tolstoy showed how the events of the War of 1812 illuminated the social contradictions within Russia and the epochal break throughout Europe, something he vividly depicted on the basis of four families. In his television adaptation of Tolstoy's novel (2007), Robert Dornhelm was less concerned with the tension between personal destinies and great history than with the transformation of the novel into a (globalised) melodrama, in which the private realm takes centre stage and with it completely commonplace feelings such as love, hope, or sadness.

Konstantin Rapp
 The Patriotic War
 The centenary celebrations in 1912

Russia's centenary celebrations for the Patriotic War of 1812 were organized by the government, military, and church at the general exclusion of the public. By concealing the crisis-ridden present in favour of commemorating a glorious past, Russia's tsarist regime sought to unify the nation around the throne. The official events and projects for the 100th anniversary of the war were relatively effective because the regime drew on the traditional narrative that Russia, as a leading spiritual and moral power and bastion of true Christianity, would always be in a position to fend off attacks by seemingly superior Western opponents.

Igor Yermachenko
 In 1812 Everything Was Better
 Using Memory to Displace Crisis in the Late Tsarist Empire

When the 100th anniversary of the Patriotic War of 1812 was marked, the military forces of the Russian Empire were shaken and the political power of the tsar weakened. The tsarist empire therefore turned to the glorious past. The official celebrations were to unite monarchy and society in the commemoration of the Patriotic War. Two years later, the politics of memory served wartime propaganda.

Karlheinz Kasper
 Manuscripts Don't Burn
 First and New Translations of Russian Literature in 2012

With 42 titles, Russian literature was strongly represented on the German book market in 2012. Highlights included new translations of Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, whose use of contemporary German gave their reception a surprising impulse. First and new translations put a fresh shine on the poetry of Konstantin Balmont, Anna Akhmatova, Maria Tsvetaeva, and selected poets who wrote between 1800 and 2000. Prose by Andry Bely, Oleg Prokofiev, Mark Levi,

Gaito Gazdanov, and Vsevolod Petrov was rescued from oblivion. In contemporary literature, traces of the OBERIU avant-garde movement and a growing interest in the traditional theme of the intelligentsia could be detected. Dedicated women spoke out. The rudiments of a socially relevant protest literature were observed.

Klaus Segbers

A Misinterpreted List of Defects

On the Alleged Crisis of Expertise concerning Russia

Recently, it was claimed that, in Germany, there exists a deficit of specialised knowledge about the latest developments in Russia. The situation for research on Russia in Germany was said to be precarious; it was allegedly no longer possible to satisfy the needs of the public and politicians for analysis and qualification. Not only does this diagnosis not apply, the call for training more young experts and establishing a centre for Russian studies is unconvincing.