



*Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22*. Book 1. *Popular Culture, the Arts, and Institutions*; Book 2. *Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory* (Russia's Great War and Revolution, vol. 1). Ed. by Murray FRAME, Boris KOLONITSKII, Steven G. MARKS and Melissa K. STOCKDALE. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2014. – xxiv+426 [+42] and xviii+370 [+56] pp. ISBN 978-0-89357-423-9; 978-0-89357-424-6

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Emotions, meanings and reminiscences generated by the First World War on the Russian side of the Eastern Front, and in the Russian Empire in general, as well as the profound changes caused by the Great War in institutions (the Church and educational institutions) in the Romanov Empire, are so far a little-known area. A situation of unequal awareness has formed in the comparison not only of Eastern and Western Europe, but also of the Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Romanov monarchies that fell in crisis situations triggered by the Great War. Historians have made substantial progress in studies of these phenomena in Western Europe, the Western Front, the Habsburg monarchy, and especially in Germany; however, knowledge of them in Russia is still vague. The collection of articles *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22* aspires to fill the gap.

It should be noted at once that not all the topics covered in the collection are equally unknown, even if we look at English-language historiography. Attempts have already been made both to provide a panoramic view of Russian 'cultural life' in the years of the Great War,<sup>1</sup> and to analyse one issue or another in greater detail, such as, for example, the patriotic culture in Romanov Russia generated by the war,<sup>2</sup> or remembrance of the Great War in Russia after the end of the war.<sup>3</sup> However, we have to admit that the two-part volume in question differs significantly from all previous initiatives of this character, first of all by the fact that it has emerged as a result of more ambitious research, which started in 2006 and was called 'Russia's Great War and Revolution'. The initiative was born by bringing together several dozen Russian and 'Western', mainly USA, historians for one purpose: on the occasion of the approaching 'centenaries', to reconsider the role of the Great War and the Revolution of 1917 in Russia, and simultaneously the contribution made by Russia,

<sup>1</sup> STITES, Richard. Days and Nights in Wartime Russia. In *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914–1918* (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, 6). Ed. by Aviel ROSHWALD and Richard STITES. Cambridge, 1999, pp. 8–31.

<sup>2</sup> JAHN, Hubertus F. *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I*. Ithaca, NY and London, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> PETRONE, Karen. *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Indiana-Michigan series in Russian and East European studies). Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 2011.

after undergoing a series of deep crises, to contemporary history. Employing Peter Holquist's concept (*continuum of crisis*<sup>4</sup>), the participants in the project 'extended' it by another year, covering the period from the beginning of the Great War to the formal declaration of the establishment of the Soviet Union. Interestingly enough, trends in the politics of history in Russia in recent years also witness attempts to attach a new meaning both to the Great War and especially to the year 1917: the October Revolution has long stopped claiming the central role in the assessment of the continuum of the crisis; however, the trend has been increasing to actualise the fall of the empire as an essential and, of course, 'tragic' consequence of the Great War. Given all this, the reviewed volume becomes all the more important, as it challenges reductionism, manifesting itself at the level of politics of history, and contraposes the analysis, the context, and the resulting deep insights. In short, the international team of researchers brought together by the above-mentioned project sought to open up completely new opportunities to get to know the cultural changes that occurred in Russia. The reviewed books prove the meaningfulness of opening up such opportunities, both in terms of a large-scale initiative and its sufficiently multifaceted and successful implementation.

In the preface, we find no clear definition of the key concept of culture. However, judging from the content of the books, the concept is understood in the broad sense of symbolic-interpretive anthropology. This approach, first of all, allows the reader to get acquainted with the language (the vocabulary) used in the years of the war, the meanings, and the discourse that manifested themselves at different levels, from political rhetoric to theatre, music, fashion, photography, film and architecture. The articles also touch on the issue of changes in institutions: schools, museums and the Orthodox Church. Moreover, they present an analysis of the change in mentalities, and the research area usually referred to as 'memory studies'. Altogether, the collection consists of 31 articles, each assigned to a specific chapter (whose titles in part mirror the subtitles of both books), one introductory article (by Christopher Read), and two summarising ones (by William G. Rosenberg and Aviel Roshwald). It has to be noted that the articles were written by qualified experts, working mainly in universities in the USA and Russia, as well as some other countries (Canada, Finland, France, Germany and the UK). In fact, they reveal that, as noted in the preface, 'cultural life was not only tightly intertwined with its social and political contexts, but that the wider history of Russia's Great War and Revolution cannot be fully comprehended without due attention to culture in its broadest sense' (p. xxi).

However, when looking through the book, the perception of Russia itself in the collection remains confusing. Why did the authors deviate from the approach propo-

<sup>4</sup> HOLQUIST, Peter. *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*. Cambridge, MA, London, 2002.

sed by Andreas Kappeller<sup>5</sup> and others to see the Empire as a multi-national and multi-layered structure? The reader is briefly informed about it in the preface: '[The] emphasis in these two books is largely Russo-centric' (p. xxii of Book 1), write the editors; however, they still included in the collection one synoptic text devoted to Russian Jewish culture. Could it be that, as promised by the editors, the gap was to be filled by other volumes, published in the framework of the project 'Russia's Great War and Revolution'? However, so far, besides the reviewed two-part volume, only one more additional volume<sup>6</sup> has been published, certainly offering significant insights, but by no means filling the gap that formed due to the editors' Russo-centric orientation, and even partly extending that orientation. Therefore, the reviewed collection actually reveals the view of certain (frequently prevailing) trends in Russia; however, there remains a lack of an equally deep perception of how the situation developed on the outskirts of the Empire, or, more generally, what the period 1914 to 1922, of war and revolutions, meant to other cultures in the Romanov Empire. After all, for most of them, the Great War became the catalyst that raised the primacy of national unity, and thus intensified the 'production' of national cultures, whatever the impact of the prevailing Russian culture on those cultures was.

The potential effect of such a view of Russia, more consistent with the situation of the period in question, and placing a greater emphasis on the divergence of its legacy, can be considered on the basis of one example. Recent research by me and my colleagues<sup>7</sup> has proven that in a country such as Lithuania in the interwar period, we faced a surprising similarity in the dynamics of prominence given to the Great War to the one revealed by Karen Petrone<sup>8</sup> in her book on post-Imperial Russia. Lithuanian wartime experience was conveyed in numerous memoirs and in the fiction of the interwar period. Several monuments or works of art were devoted to these experiences. Like everywhere else, Great War veterans and those disabled by the war fought for their social welfare. Ultimately, the idea matured in Lithuania to collect all the available information about the contribution by Lithuanians to the First World War, and to convey the contribution not only in writing, but also by means of a national monument. The initiative was halted by the Second World War, which eventually pushed experiences of the Great War into oblivion.

We can explain why all this has been missed by previous researchers by a reference to a quotation by Petrone from her paper in the reviewed collection of articles. As

<sup>5</sup> KAPPELER, Andreas. *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung—Geschichte—Zerfall*. München, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> *The Empire and Nationalism at War*. Ed. by Eric LOHR, Vera TOLZ, Alexander SEMYONOV and Mark von HAGEN. Bloomington, IN, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> I mean the findings of the research project 'Remembrance of the First World War: A Comparative Analysis of Lithuania and East Prussia (before 1939)' conducted by the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology at Klaipėda University.

<sup>8</sup> PETRONE, K. *The Great War in Russian Memory...*

is stated by her, 'previous scholars have conflated an absence of official state commemoration with an absence of memory' (pp. 262–263 of Book 2). This statement also applies to Lithuania. Tomas Balkelis, who in Volume 2 of the series 'Russia's Great War and Revolution' provided his insights as to why the Great War was marginalised in interwar Lithuania,<sup>9</sup> was essentially following the path laid by previous researchers. When discussing Lithuania in the interwar period, researchers saw it as a monolithic entity. This approach may allow us to identify the general trends; however, it does not contribute to seeing Lithuania as a normal society, in which at that time, like now, different meanings assigned to major events of the past were circulating, and in which the relationship between those meanings was not, after all, as clear as people sometimes attempt to prove. This comment also applies to the approach to the Romanov Empire and to what occurred in its place emerging in the reviewed book.

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Thus, non-Russo-centric research on the same topic and of the same volume, devoted to Russian culture, remains as guidelines for prospective research, and as an important perspective on a new discussion of Russia in the years of the Great War and the revolution.

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<sup>9</sup> Plg. BALKELIS, Tomas. Memories of the Great War and the Polish-Lithuanian Conflict in Lithuania. In *The Empire and Nationalism at War...*, pp. 241–256.