

***Book review: Contemporaries' Memoirs of the Epoch of 1812
in the Magazine "Russkaya Starina" (Old Times in Russia) ***
***Compiled, edited, foreword by V. M. Bezotosniy; State Historical Public
Library of Russia. Moscow, 2011. 464 p.***

Year 2012 proved to be full of commemorative events of remarkable value in the Russian history. These include: 1150th anniversary of the chronicles mentioning invitation of Rurik by the elders of the tribal state of Northern Russia; 1130th anniversary of the unification of Northern and Southern Russia into one state with the center in Kiev; 550th anniversary of the reign of Moscow Grand Prince Ivan III, the first all-Russian ruler, creator of the United Russian State; 400th anniversary of Moscow liberation from foreign interventionists, done by people's army in the times of Smuta. This is a scarcely exhaustible list, that would take more than one page. However, without doubt, in the list of the outstanding historical commemorative anniversary facts there is one that still has a special significance. It is the 200th anniversary of the Patriotic War of 1812, when the Russian people together with other nations of the state rose up in one rush to defend the Homeland against the invasion of 'twelve tongues' and saved their independence and autonomy.

The Historical Society of Russia had a proper reaction to this significant event. Many interesting books and articles appeared in the press. These include, for example, new monographs of E.V. Anisimov*, S. Nechaeva** and reprints of time-proven works***.

These and many other studies deserve attention of experts and people interested in the Russian history. However, in quite a wide range of literature on the war of 1812 it is important to single out a collection of "Contemporaries' Memoirs of the Epoch of 1812 in the Magazine "Russkaya Starina" (*Old Times in Russia*)", prepared by the staff of the State Public Historical Library and published in Moscow, 2011.

Memoirs of the era of 1812 is the greatest legacy of the 19th century, that reflects the high level of spiritual development of the Russian society and its national identity. According to some experts, memoirs of 1812 include over 700 publications. Their scope ranges from very brief to very extensive ones with lots of pages of detailed events. It should be noted that public, interested in this genre, usually knows a limited number of memoirs. These books are written by well-known people and have the quality of a narrative. For example, the memoir of D.V. Davydov, "The experience

* Anisimov, E.V. General Bagration. Zhizn' i vojna (General Bagration. Life and war). Moscow, 2011.

** Nechaev, S. Barklaj-de-Tolli (Barklay de Tolly). Moscow, 2011.

*** Tarle, E. V. 1812. God russkoj slavy (1812. The year of Russian glory). Moscow, 2012; Shil'der, N. K. Imperator Aleksandr I. Ego zhizn' i carstvovanie (Alexander I the Emperor. His life and ruling). Moscow, 2008.

in theory of guerrilla actions” («Opyt teorii partizanskogo dejstvija»), F.N. Glinka’s “Letters of a Russian military officer about war events in 1812” («Pis’ma russkogo oficera o voennyh proisshestvijah 1812 goda»), “A brief review of military life and deeds of Count Miloradovich” («Kratkoe obozrenie voennoj zhizni i podvigov grafa Miloradovicha»), F.P. Segur’s “The Battle of Borodino and the French occupation of Moscow” («Borodinskoe srazhenie i zanjatie Moskvy francuzami»), F.W. Rostopchin “The truth about the fire in Moscow” («Pravda o pozhare Moskvy»), “Fire in Moscow. According to the memoirs and correspondence of contemporaries” («Pozhar Moskvy. Po vospominanijam i perepiske sovremennikov») and some other works. Nowadays these very works are printed in large publishing houses, because of commercial considerations. They form the reader’s preferences in the sphere of national history and bring up ever given resource, that seems to be quite complete in description.

However, these views are actually incomplete. In fact, a significant number of interesting memoirs were not published as books until 1917. They were published in some well-known and popular magazines, such as “Old Times in Russia” («Russkaja starina»), “Russian Archives” («Russkij arhiv»), “War Journal” («Voennyj zhurnal»), “The Historical Bulletin” («Istoricheskij vestnik»). These publications are stored in specialized or central libraries. The modern reader, for a number of reasons, also of technical type, cannot find them.

That is why the collection of works “Contemporaries’ Memoirs of the Epoch of 1812 in the Magazine “Russkaya Starina” (*Old Times in Russia*)” helps to some extent to overcome the problem and widens the insight into memoiristics of 1812.

The magazine “Russkaya Starina” was chosen as a holder of this information that is valuable from historical and literary point of view, and it was one of the most widely read and interesting titles of Russia before the revolution. But that was not the only reason for collectors to choose it. Age, social status and rank of memoirists that published their works on the pages of this magazine impresses and amazes. The notes of witnesses, whether they were a 8 year old boy or a hoar-headed old man, or officers, civilians, men or women, are very important and substantial, and this is not a hyperbole. An opinion of people of different age, life experience, and social status concerning same events or descriptions of some non-matching facts gives us the opportunity to recreate a fuller and objective portrait of the history, swiftly developing in 1812.

The memoirists of “Russkaya Starina” wrote differently and about different things, from the beginning of military operations in 1812 till capturing Paris in March of 1814. The density of events creates a patchwork of reminiscences. Some vividly describe facts, so to say, in the aftermath, evaluating them on the basis of their immediate opinion, others write about “deeds of good old days”, being of rather old age and not only from the point of view of life experience, but also with formulating historical opinions and judgments. In the latter works, of course, there is not so much emotionality that prevails in memoirs, written “live”, but instead they present an analytic approach, as well as solidity and justification of conclusions.

For the purpose of systematization, all the memoirs in this collection may be divided into several groups. The first group includes works written by government

officials. Among them we may find B.R. Marchenko, Y.I. Sanglen, D.P. Runich, S.I. Mayevskiy. Their works give an interesting interpretation of reasons for some decisions taken by Russian authorities during the war of 1812.

The second group of memoirs consists of works written by military men (P.M. Sukhanin, F.F. Berg, P.A. Kolzakov, E.M. Konkov, I.M. Kazakov). The people above were under-officers and their attention was mainly focused on campaigns, battles and a simple military way of living. Geography of events described is very broad — from Smolensk, Borodino, Tarutino to Leipzig and Paris.

The third part of memoirs presents the works of civilians. Mainly they focused on abandoning Moscow by Russians in September-October of 1812, one of the most tragic and important events of the Patriotic war of 1812. The memoirs of a provincial government official G.I. Dobrynin are written very vividly and with a great sense of humor. In this work he speaks about life in Vitebsk when French have captured the city.

Although the memoirs above were written by men, the works of a landlady A.I. Zolotukhina deserves a special description. Her work is valuable for being a mirror of world perception of Russian women that bid their beloved husbands farewell and were in great worries for their lives and future of Motherland.

All the texts are presented in the collection according to modern orthographical norms, so readers will not face any difficulties. Still the stylistics of the language of the XIXth century is left untouched. It gives readers a great opportunity to tune into the beat of style of the epoch and not only feel the specifics, but understand its beauty as well. For better understanding of memoirs the introductory articles of “*Russkaya Starina*” magazine staff are present in this collection. In addition to that, every memoir has some comments by magazine staff. The index of names in the end of the collection has 30 pages and eases the work with the book greatly.

From the point of view of critics some facts can be noted. There are no contradictions about choosing “*Russkaya Starina*” as one of the most important holders and distributors of memories about the Patriotic war of 1812. But, in fact, there is no information about the history of this collection, its authors, publishers, main branches of publications in the introductory part of the book. Of course, in our times of ever-present Internet this problem seems to be addressable, but it would be rather natural and reasonable to give such characteristics in the introduction of the book, the content of which reflexes the style of publishing of the magazine “*Russkaya Starina*”.

In general the collection “*Contemporaries' Memoirs of the Epoch of 1812 in the Magazine “Russkaya Starina” (Old Times in Russia)*” deserves a positive mark. It is valuable for professional historians and for “amateurs” as well, for whom the history of Motherland in general and the war of 1812 in particular proves to be a vivid and living expression of people’s spirit, their greatness, firmness, and rigidity even in the most difficult circumstances.

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