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Stephen M. Norris. *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity 1812-1945.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006. 277 S. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87580-363-0.

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Portraits of a Nation

Stephen M. Norris's *A War of Images* is an intriguing monograph that establishes compelling reason to look beyond the Soviet experience for the formation of Russia's national image. This work speaks to the growing body of scholarship on Russia's print culture and comparative studies on the cultural significance of World War I across Europe. Norris's work joins books by Jeffrey Brooks (*When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* [1985]), Victoria Bonnell (*Iconography of Power: Soviet Posters under Lenin and Stalin* [1997]), and Richard Wortman (*Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* [2006]) as a study in the visual and print history of the late Russian Empire. Norris examines the *lubok*, a kind of poster or broadsheet produced originally for a peasant audience between 1812 and World War II. A lubok was a woodcut print that mixed a stylized illustration (typically in black and white or primary colors) with brief text, often verse, and frequently was satirical in nature. Originally produced for religious worship, lubki became and remained popular with illiterate audiences, since they relied mostly on caricatures and little text to convey messages. In production by Peter the Great's time, lubki grew in importance with the evolution of the mass press in Russia, as printers sought to respond to audience interests. By World War I, therefore, lubki, popular with both the literate and illiterate, were one of the most widely disseminated print materials in imperial Russia.

Norris focuses on the propagandistic quality of lubki in times of war: "Lubki helped define Russian wartime culture, which in turn shaped notions of Russian nationhood" (p. 189). Through the form of this broadsheet, he contends, one can see how perceptions of the nation evolved. In particular, Norris argues that lubki demonstrate significant shifts between 1812 and 1918, shifts that illustrate the existence (as well as the fluidity) of Russian nationalism through World War I. This Russian nationalism was the same force to which Stalin appealed during World War II. Norris rejects the argument that World War II was the defining moment for the idea of the Russian nation, an argument made recently by David Brandenberger in *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (2002). Rather, Norris concludes that scholars have underestimated the contribution of World War I to the construction of the nation. Although Russian propaganda did not differ significantly from that of the other antagonists, he argues, it has been described by commentators as a failure, due to an insufficiently formed sense of nationalism.

Norris makes this argument through a cultural history in nine chapters. His work is organized chronologically, with six chapters speaking to Russia's wars during this period. In each, he draws on lubki to illustrate his points. The Napoleonic War and its aftermath, he shows, inspired the creation of innumerable lubki, all stressing that this was a victory for the whole Russian people. Unlike in all later wars, lubki during this war stressed both the importance of the role of the tsar and the contributions of individual Russians. Later wars saw a distinctive disappearance of tsarist imagery in lubki. In both the Crimean War (1856) and Russo-Turkish wars (1877-78), for example, lubki stressed the role of the Christian peasant soldier rather than the tsar. In these wars, lubki repackaged the nationalism of 1812 to include orthodoxy as one of its main tenets. Although Norris describes these images as evoking "holy war" concepts, interestingly, extreme racism did not appear to be a force in these lubki. This is in direct contrast with the prints from the Russo-Japanese War of 1905-6, which Norris describes as "the racial war," in the eyes of the artists (p. 107). Russian artists so relied on racist shorthand to convey their views that viewers reported liking these lubki best of all, as they were stories of "monkeys and bears" (p. 107). Unfortunately, the very popularity of these images dealt a powerful blow to Russian nationalism before World War I. Faced with the loss of that war and the realization that lubki predictions of easy victory over an inferior enemy had been false, Russian nationalism experienced a "crisis," according to Norris (p. 134). World War I lubki, therefore, had to reassure their audience, emphasizing comforting themes of the victory of the Russian land, even going so far as to fall back to the successful lubki of 1812, comparing the kaiser to Napoleon.

One theme, the tsar, however, was not reiterated in lubki from World War I. The tsar, last seen as a strong image in 1812, made little to no appearance in these lubki, and again, the strength and the spirit of the peasant was used to define the Russian spirit instead. "The Russian monarch ... failed to establish a place within the visual patriotism of the nineteenth century" (p. 188). Norris suggests that this was one of the reasons the tsarist regime was vulnerable to its critics, as the Russian people did not associate their nationalism with the tsar. This was a lesson the Bolsheviks learned. As a result, when they came to power in 1917, not only did their government take charge of the production of all lubki, now better understood as official government propaganda posters, but they also depicted a vision of a nation led by a specific ruler, starting with Lenin. Where the tsarist government had been quite diffident about actively promoting itself through lubki, the Bolsheviks and later Soviets would make no such error. Norris takes *A War of Images* through World War II to prove that the Soviet government had seized the patriotic imagery of lubki and incorporated it into its own mission of propaganda.

Norris's work is not meant to compare the policies of the Soviet and the tsarist regimes, although the comparison comes naturally from the material. His argument is that "artists who created a wartime culture articulated a sense of nationhood" well before the Soviet era, and from his evidence, dating to 1812 onward, it is difficult to disagree (p. 194). He describes this conclusion as in contrast to Hubertus Jahn, who argued that Russian patriotic displays waned during World War I in *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (1995). Norris's conclusions also differ from those of Wortman, whose research on court symbolism stressed the importance of the tsar in court imagery. Norris clearly finds the tsar to be far less significant than the Russian peasant in visual images of patriotism. Although other historians have suggested that Stalin's World War II appeals were significant in forging modern Russian nationalism, Norris aligns his work with British historian Jay Winter's in specifically stating that World War I held great influence on forming popular cultural conceptions of national identity.

Norris's efforts to include comparative history in *A War of Images* is one of the strengths of the monograph. Through each of his chapters on different wars, Norris looks at the propaganda experience in other countries to show how the ideas expressed there resembled or differed from the ideas expressed in lubki. (Great Britain, in particular, is his touchstone of reference.) In addition, he attempts the difficult question of parsing how different Russian social classes approached lubki, utilizing the works of elite Russians (like the great Tolstoy), academics (including ethnographers), and artists/publishers (such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and the publisher Sytin).

These smaller stories are one of the strengths of this work, which suggests a series of important questions for historians. First and foremost, one might wonder just how Russian patriotism was expressed when the Russians were not at war; did visions of the nation change between war and peacetime? The ideas of patriotism expressed in lubki must have resonated with consumers who willingly bought them. If these people located that patriotism in the peasant and not the tsar, should we rethink the easy assumption that Russians were somehow inclined to strong man rule in the twentieth century?-The frequent use of the Russian peasant in these prints also suggests that Russian patriotism held an ethnic component; if they indicate a widely shared vision of Russian identity that excluded the national minorities of the Russian Empire, was the early Soviet vision of equality among Soviet peoples doomed from the start? As a tangent, Norris suggests, but does not establish, that Russian racism in the Russo-Japanese War enabled Russian atrocities and demoralized the troops. (Note his fascinating comparison to Japanese propaganda, which emphasized the worthiness of the Russian foe [p. 123]). Can we build off this idea and these lubki to demonstrate broadly that racist propaganda increases atrocity rates?

Norris, focused on proving his thesis, must leave those conclusions for future research. In *A War of Images*, he succeeds in contributing to our knowledge of visual culture, showing its contributions to the growth of Russian nationalism and locating that nationalism well before the standard assumption that viable Russian nationalism did not emerge before World War II.

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