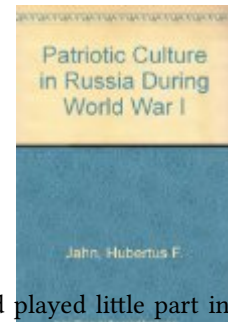


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Hubertus F. Jahn. *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1995. xiv + 229 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3131-9.

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For Russia, the “Great War” appears almost as the antithesis of a “Great Patriotic War,” but like most obvious truths, this one is probably inadequate. Although the “initial outburst of flag waving enthusiasm” with which Russia, like other nations, entered the war “barely survived the catastrophic defeats” in East Prussia during the first six weeks, according to Hubertus Jahn in *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I*, “Russian patriotism quickly became more differentiated, simultaneously reflecting separate and even disparate loyalties within society” (p. 171). Jahn thoroughly examines these changing patriotic attitudes as reflected in non-print media from August 1914 to the end of 1916.

A member of the faculty of the Friedrich-Alexander Universitaet in Erlangen, Germany, Jahn conducted extensive research in the St. Petersburg archives and also in Moscow and Helsinki and in Washington, D.C., where he was a Fulbright fellow at Georgetown University. Although he specifically excludes “literature and the fine arts,” he covers virtually all pictorial and performing arts existing at the time, from *lubki*, the oldest form of Russian popular prints, originating in the seventeenth century, to cinema, then in its very vigorous infancy in Russia, and from circus to grand opera. He organizes his subject in three major categories according to type of material: pictorial art, performance, and cinema. The first two categories are divided into many subgroups, each of which is treated chronologically.

Jahn defines “patriotic culture” as “the patriotic activities of artists, entertainers and cultural entrepreneurs, as well as...the reaction of audiences and of society in general” (p. 4). He frequently admits the difficulty of assessing public reactions and seldom attempts to do so, but he finds occasional information in press accounts. The

Russian government of this period played little part in the creation of patriotic material. Negative censorship was ubiquitous, but “official propaganda was little developed” (p. 3). The Skobelev Committee, “a semiofficial propaganda organization” that “enjoyed the august patronage of the tsar” (p. 40), issued photographic postcards and had a monopoly on the production of documentary films at the Front. According to Jahn, its cards were “conservative and unimaginative” and its (usually staged) newsreels were so few and inadequate that, despite the scarcity of imports, Russian movie audiences had a better picture of action on the Western Front than did the soldiers (p. 156). Even the Skobelev Committee operated on a commercial basis, and the rest of Jahn’s “patriotic culture” came from profit-seeking businesses. The reader may therefore assume that, as far as censorship permitted, this material reflected, or sought to reflect, public demand.

Apart from the *lubki*, which “could be found in almost every peasant hut” (p. 12), Jahn, perhaps unavoidably, limits his study to urban culture. Even the *lubok*, he points out, was obsolescent as folk art and was partially sustained by the intelligentsia and avant-garde artists. Thus the “patriotic culture” described here is not necessarily that of the *narod* who did most of the fighting.

At the beginning of the war, all forms of patriotic material emphasized hostile caricatures of the enemy and heroic interpretations of Russian exploits. As in the United States later, Wilhelm II with his distinctive moustache and inevitable spike helmet was the overwhelming favorite for abuse in all media. Caricaturists knew no limits in their efforts to make him simultaneously foolish and brutal. Bourgeois propriety was apparently not essential. One cartoon reproduced in the book shows three

figures: Wilhelm, Franz Josef, and a fist with one finger extended (p. 62). Jahn's only description of this drawing is "the Moscow artist P.R. gave the finger to the two enemy leaders" (p. 59). However, since the original caption reads "Triple Alliance," it appears that Jahn, while emphasizing the tastelessness of the cartoon, misses its point.

All Germans, led by their Kaiser, were gross beer-drinkers and sausage-eaters as well as rapacious aggressors. The other two enemies, Austria and even Russia's historic foe Turkey, usually appeared as contemptible puppets of the Germans. None could match the simple courage of the Russian soldier, especially the Cossack. New technologies of war, particularly air power, also figured prominently in *lubki*, postcards, and film. Perhaps none of the book's many illustrations epitomizes these themes better than the *lubok* designed, Jahn says, by Vladimir Maiakovskii, showing a mounted Cossack puncturing and destroying a Zeppelin with his lance (p. 17).

As the war turned into universal disaster in 1915, jingoism and ridicule of the enemy virtually disappeared from the popular media. The *lubok* depended heavily on these themes and, as far as Jahn could determine, ceased to exist as a living art form after this period. The decline in "kaiser-bashing" may not have been entirely spontaneous, for in mid-1915 the nervous government banned ridicule of all crowned heads, a change that Jahn does not mention specifically until late in the book (p. 158). In any case, patriotism did not disappear, but changed in several directions. The message often became "sober and compassionate rather than aggressively patriotic" (p. 47). Wounded soldiers and angelic nurses became favorite themes. Patriotism now frequently expressed itself in exhortations for aid to the suffering. Many performing artists collected money for such purposes, and some went to the Front voluntarily as performers or nurses or involuntarily as draftees.

Patriotism could also include forms of social criticism. Clowns, traditionally critics of authority in Russia, and *estrada* (variety theater) performers soon diverted their attacks from the Germans to war profiteers, some of whom might be sitting in the front rows. After the first months of the war, many or most performers turned to what the author calls "social patriotism" (p. 91), meaning "loyalty to the people, not to abstract national symbols and an imperial ideology" (p. 97). This attitude also led to "a boom in Russian folklore" (p. 98) in the form of "countless" genuine and ersatz folk singers and musi-

cians.

Some forms of entertainment, especially the theater after the early months, turned away from patriotism and "either ignored it with escapist fare or transcended it with plays about death and decay" (p. 133). The Moscow Art Theater "did not offer a single patriotic piece during the war" (p. 126). Opera houses, after an initial obsession with Mikhail Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, generally considered it sufficient to play the national anthem and to avoid German works. Operettas "boomed" as "escapist fare," but after 1914 "operettas with patriotic content had completely disappeared" (p. 144).

Jahn surprises the uninitiated with the statistic that the Russian commercial film industry produced over 1,200 films during the war or an average of about one film per day (p. 152). "Everyone went to the movies," which must have been far more democratic than other places of entertainment throughout the world if "aristocrats rubbed shoulders with workers" (p. 153). Theaters provided newsreels, usually staged and without news value, patriotic feature films, and "escape into a world of celluloid dreams." The last function predominated, as "the vast majority" of films offered only "the usual fare that had been popular before the war" (p. 154). The patriotic movies provided a mixture of cruel and bungling Germans, tragic Belgians, and romantic Russian adventurers. Considered in relation to the film technology of 1914-15, some of the plots described captivate the reader's curiosity, but Jahn found that relatively few of the films survived, and he appears to have derived his extensive knowledge largely from contemporary reviews and film journals.

Jahn's impressive collection of evidence from so many forms of expression gives authority to his argument that Russia lacked a unified positive focus for patriotism during the First World War. A high degree of national unity existed for the first few months, but only in denunciation of the enemy, not in any positive purpose. How many Russians would be willing to die because the Germans were beer-drinkers and sausage-eaters? Of course the Germans were also portrayed as brutal aggressors, but most of the atrocities depicted in Jahn's sources allegedly occurred in faraway Belgium.

Even when victory could be thought probable, these Russian media put forward little notion of anything to be gained by it. When it ceased to be probable, patriotism did not cease to exist, but it took on a variety of meanings that helped to divide society and to weaken the state.

Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I may not cover everything promised by its title, but its limitations are eminently reasonable. Inclusion of the print media would provide a more complete picture, but would enormously increase the scope of the project for the sake of bringing in material that is more familiar and accessible. The author very wisely ends his study before the February revolution, although the war continued. To go further would be to enter a different world, and one that is also probably more familiar to scholars. The great mass of material that Jahn did examine well supports his

conclusion that the war revealed and accentuated “a national identity crisis within Russian society” (p. 175), and thus in one more way contributed to the Revolution. He thereby adds a piece to our understanding of why a war that, in comparison to its successor, caused so much less human and physical destruction nevertheless had so much greater social and political impact on Russia.

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