

Gabovich, Mikhail (Mischa Gabowitsch), Editor. *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: etnografija Dnia Pobedy (Monument and Holiday: An Ethnography of Victory Day)*. Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020. Notes. Author Biographies. 98 Color Illustrations. 416 pages. ISBN 978-5-4469-1777-8.

Pamiatnik i prazdnik is a valuable collection of essays about Victory Day, which commemorates the 9 May 1945 victory of the Soviets over Nazi Germany in the “Great Patriotic War,” and is celebrated in Russia and by the Russian diaspora. Despite Victory Day’s prominence in the late Soviet-era and its elevated significance in the post-Soviet period, there is still much to learn about what this holiday meant to various populations within and bordering the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1991 and what it means now.

Under the leadership of Mischa Gabowitsch and Elena Nikiforova, an international team of scholars conducted historical research on local commemorations of Victory Day and then on 9 May 2013, observed the celebration of Victory Day ethnographically in twenty-three cities in eleven countries, from Berlin to Grozny. As the title “Monument and Holiday” suggests, the volume specifically documents commemorative practices that took place at the sites of Soviet war memorials, which are often located in cemeteries or at the sites of mass graves. Another central goal of the study was to counter typically Moscow-centric and state-centric approaches to commemorations, fostering analyses that instead bring out the local and the transnational aspects of celebration rather than only the national aspects. The authors shift their focus away from official narratives emanating from “the center” to the concrete celebration practices of local celebrants as they interacted with the built environments and geographies of war memorials. This more democratic approach focuses on the meanings that participants in numerous cities ascribed to the commemorations, and on the “emotional regimes” that the celebrations generated at the grassroots (9).

A different research team (also co-led by Gabowitsch) conducted similar research in 2015 and produced a volume entitled *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa* (Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017). The publication of *Pamiatnik i Prazdnik* was delayed by the 2014 annexation of Crimea, among other reasons, but the volume is well worth waiting for. By serendipity, this volume captures a key historical moment, the celebration of the last Victory Day before the Russian annexation of Crimea transformed geopolitical relations among Eastern European countries.

The geographic and conceptual range of the volume is impressive; it contains an analysis of celebrations in places with a wide variety of relationships to the canonical Russian/Soviet version of the Great Patriotic War. The case studies include Austria, former Eastern Bloc countries such as Germany and Bulgaria, former Soviet republics such as Belarus and Lithuania, and the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol nine months before its annexation by Russia. Within the Russian Federation, the researchers studied both non-Russian cities such as Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic, and Sortavala, in the Karelian

Republic, as well as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Russian provincial cities such as Rostov-on-Don, and the small settlement of Pervomaiskaia in Tula *oblast'*. The diversity of these studies is one of the book's greatest strengths. Because the editors encouraged each of the researchers to focus on their own areas of interest within a set of common guidelines, there is a panoply of different theoretical constructs and a wide variety of methodologies complementing the broad geographical scope of the volume.

One of the most significant conceptual contributions of the volume is its demonstration of the multi-directionality of cultural customs and influences, and the importance of "the local" in creating Victory Day traditions. While it is too-often assumed that customs travel from "the center" outward, these essays prove otherwise. One of the most interesting and surprising, to me at least, findings in the volume is the investigation of the claim that "on the initiative of a *frontovik*," who was "the director of the local gas factory" (124), the very first eternal flame in the Soviet Union was lit in honor of Victory Day in the small settlement of Pervomaiskaia in Tula *oblast'*. The Pervomaiskaia lighting occurred months, or possibly even two years, before the illumination of the well-known eternal flame on Mars Field in Leningrad, which was dedicated for the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution in fall of 1957. The 2013 ceremony in Pervomaiskaia celebrated this local history with a rebuilding and rededication of the eternal flame, asserting that this phenomenon, which later became ubiquitous at Great Patriotic war memorials, was a local and not a central innovation. Other essays show that the core idea of what became known as "the immortal regiment" was also already being practiced in multiple locales before it was given a name by organizers in Tomsk in 2012, spread widely, and then was adopted with great fanfare by Moscow in 2015. Because of its role in commemorating the sacrifices of millions of specific individuals, Victory Day holds a special place among both Soviet and post-Soviet holidays in the development of grassroots traditions that have the potential to spread nationally and transnationally.

Pamiatnik i prazdnik also shows the complicated ways in which each local celebration both continues and adapts Soviet traditions, while also introducing new local, national, and transnational elements. The celebrations in Minsk, for example, were particularly conservative in continuing many Soviet-era elements. In other places such as Sevastopol, new symbols like the "Saint George ribbon," associated in particular with contemporary Russian nationalism, were distributed enthusiastically by a Russian-funded organization "Moscow House." Another recent phenomenon is the organized tourism of Russian Orthodox travelers to Victory Day celebrations in Berlin, carrying out religious pilgrimages to commemorate the sacrifices of the Soviet fallen. Each participant in Victory Day navigates the intersection of local and personal meanings with celebratory traditions that might be brand new, or decades old, or both. These essays also allow us to think about problems of post-memory now that the war generation is nearly gone, and to see how the varied cultural, social, and political forces influencing the celebration of Victory Day play out on the ground.

The ethnographic approach of this book offers a richness and a complexity in answering the question of what Victory Day means to the individuals who celebrate it – a complexity that is all too often flattened out and homogenized in the analysis of holidays and commemorations. For example, the examination of the celebration of Victory Day among Soviet and Russian emigrants to Berlin documented differences in the ways that the various immigrant clubs from the cities of Odessa, Leningrad, Baku, Moscow, and Kiev commemorated Victory Day. Many of the essays also pinpoint absences and suppressed memories, such as the nature of the Holocaust, the extent of collaboration with the Nazis, the deportation of Finnish residents from Sortavala in 1944 as the Soviets reoccupied the land, the abandonment of the sailors and soldiers in the 35th battery in Sevastopol by the Soviet leadership in July 1942, and the strained relations between Belarusian partisans and the local population because of partisan looting and violence against civilians. The authors reveal a kaleidoscope of variegated participant viewpoints from their particular locales. This is the real strength of the volume.

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