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JOURNALISM IN MODERN HISTORICAL POPULAR SCIENCE JOURNALS: TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Research article

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Abstract

Trends of “actualization” and “politicization” of historical journalism have become mandatory for modern popular science historical journals in order to continue functioning. Even at the end of XIX century historical-literary journals (today’s popular science journals) used to consider publication of sources, popularization of history and spreading historic knowledge to their readers to be their main responsibility. But starting from the events of Russian Perestroika and to this day practice shows that the more “historic agenda” of a title connects with modern reality, social and political climate, and shows parallels between history and current events, the more interesting and relevant it is to the readers.

Keywords: historical popular science journalism, historical journalism, development trends, actualization of historical topics, politicization of historical topics, social functions.

ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА В СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ НАУЧНО-ПОПУЛЯРНЫХ ЖУРНАЛАХ: ТЕНДЕНЦИИ РАЗВИТИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ ФУНКЦИЙ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Тенденции "актуализации" и "политизации" исторической журналистики стали обязательными для современных научно-популярных исторических журналов для продолжения их функционирования. Еще в конце XIX века историко-литературные журналы (сегодняшние научно-популярные) считали своей служебной обязанностью публиковать источники, популяризировать историю и распространять исторические знания среди своих читателей. Но начиная с событий перестройки и по сей день практика показывает, что чем больше "историческая повестка" заголовка связана с современной действительностью, общественно-политическим климатом, и чем больше он показывает параллели между историческими и текущими событиями, тем интереснее и актуальнее он для читателей.

Ключевые слова: историческая научно-популярная журналистика, историческая журналистика, тенденции развития, актуализация исторических тем, политизация исторических тем, социальные функции.

Introduction

In Russian periodic publishing, historic journalism begins with the famous argument between G. Miller and M. Lomonosov on the topic of ‘Norman theory’ of the origin of Rus in the first Russian popular science ‘proto-journals’ (“Monthly historic, genealogical and geographical additions to “Vedomosti”, “Monthly editorials for education and entertainment” etc.). With development, rising complexity and differentiation of the Russian press system, new factors, affecting the growth of historic journalism, start emerging. On one side, specialized historic titles started appearing, on the other - the demand for discussing both Russian and worldwide historic events in the context of national identity development was rising. As a result - the development of the “state historiography” by N. Karamzin and alternative “national-patriotic” literature of the Decembrists.

With the introduction of a new type of “historical-literary” journalism and a number of new popular science magazines in the last third of XIX century (more than 20 titles), historic press gained a new media platform where it could function and be perfected.

Main results

Before 1917 its percentage in historic magazines was constantly increasing. Moreover, with the complication of social-cultural context and increasing social-political tension of the XX century empire two trends of its development have been formed - “actualization” and “politicization” of historic agenda in magazines’ publications. And if the luminaries of classic Russian history magazines, like P. Bartenev (“Russkiy Arkhiv” - “Russian Archive”), M. Semevskiy (“Russkaya Starina” - “Russian Antiquity”) and S. Shubinskiy (“Istoricheskiy Vestnik” – “Historic Herald”), used it discreetly, then latest journals were filled with historic journalism almost fully (up to 2/3 of content). In that way publications with historically-revolutionary interpretation of Russian history became an “ideological platform” for a number of SRs’ magazines [28, P. 68-75].

After a cardinal shift in our social-political state structuring in 1917, historic journalism underwent a noticeable transformation. History was pronounced a “partial science”, and ‘class-partial’ approach became the main criteria in evaluating historic events. Thereby, being a part of the partial ideology, historical journalism became an irreplaceable part of the propaganda complex (for example, dozens of publications of “Commision of history of October revolution and Communist party (Istpart)” [1, P. 48-96]. However, the civil historical journalism have undergone a renaissance of sorts after patriotic rise in the aftermath of the Great Patriotic war (1941-1945) and later, after the relative “pluralism of opinions” of Russian authors in the 60-s. Despite partially regaining its stance in literature, historic journalism didn’t gain that constant “media platform” in press as it was with the specialized “historically-literary” magazines pre-revolution.

Reemergence of “historically-literary” (Historical popular science) journal in “Our heritage” (1988) and “Motherland” (1989) happens amidst the rapid liberalist social progress of the Perestroika and wide social discourse on recovering our historical, national and cultural traditions. That was a fruitful soil for historic journalism to flourish, even in the years following the fall of soviets. Trends that started at the beginning of XX century (actualization and politicization of historical agenda) suddenly reemerged and are main trends even today, when the segment of popular science historical titles counts dozens of publications.

Relevance of the theme of the message and political position of the author addressing the audience are native to journalism as a literary genre in general. But with historical journalist text it wasn’t always the case. Historical itinerary and portrait articles or analytics weren’t always heavily tied to the current social-political climate, but instead were presented in accordance with the basic concept and program of the publication. For example - editor of the respected pre-revolutionary magazine “Russkiy Arkhiv” - P. Bartenev was convinced that a specialized historical magazine should give specifically historical information to the experts and history dabblers and should avoid giving biased political angle on the events [28, P. 40-41]. Editor of another classic historically-literary journal “Istoricheskiy Vestnik” - S. Shubinskiy considered historical journalism addressing current social and political events unwanted and populist and was heavily against increasing its amount in the journal by his successor - B. Glinskiy [28, P. 135-146].

However, trends of actualization and politicization of historical themes have confidently taken over when the historically-literary branch of journalism reemerged in the Perestroika period of the 80s. At this time first magazines of that type “Rodina” (“Motherland”) and “Nashe Naslediye” (“Our heritage”) were already targeting the widest number of soviet readers that could only be attracted not by stating curious historic facts but with historical publications heavily tied to the current moment in history. Considering this, in the context of relative pluralism of opinion every magazine was trying to attract the most readers based on their political views.

The publications of every given issue were based around central theme, that usually was described in a catchy title and commentary being displayed as early as the issue’s cover. Topic of the issue, usually taking up half of its content, included articles, commentary, numbers, facts, analysis and a number of illustrations that were supposed to speak for themselves. It was the matter of focused and concentrated historic theme and its actualization, where the content is built around journalistic message and political position of the staff. This model has remained unchallenged for 30 years and heavily represented in modern historical journalism.

This trend for actualization and politicization of the publications in modern historical magazines is heavily illustrated by the articles written on global events in Russian history, such as the 100 year anniversary of 1917 revolution or the 75 year anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic war etc. Their chief editors and leading authors use their magazines to establish their ideological and political views. Just as often the theme of an issue can be current events in the Russian Federation.

As was mentioned prior, the oldest current Russian historically public magazine “Rodina” that started publication in 1989 has started the trend for journalistic analysis of historical events under the lens of current social and political goals the Russian public is faced with. The circumstances of the publication’s origins dictate its state patriotic position. What is interesting, though, is that those positions are in favour of both Russian empire and USSR. Under the initiative from chief editor V. Dolmatov themes of an issue starting since the 90s could be: “380 year anniversary of the Romanov House” (№1 1993) or “Russians - who are we?” was the theme of issue №1 of 1994, with newly reestablished old state sigil - the two-headed eagle on the cover of the magazine [22].

The most visual illustration of the process of actualization of historical journalism in the magazine today is an active contribution from “Rodina” towards the preparation for the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic war. This topic has been central to both our recent history in general and in Rodina’s articles in particular since the beginning of the XXI century. Between 2000 and 2020 this topic spawned more than 600 articles [23].

Actualization of these events is greatly present in a particular category of publications we are going to label as “war and today’s issues”. Ever since the magazine was made into a project by “Russkaya Gazeta” in 2015 themes of war were even more present. At the start Of 2000-s about 10% of all war related topics were taken up by the Great Patriotic war. “Rodina” was writing about “The Immortal Regiment”, preservation of historic memory, issues with talking about the war at schools, selling of soldier diaries etc.

Starting with issue №1 2020, on the year of the 75th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic war, the magazine took it upon themselves to create a new sort of memoriam. Every issue since January through May had a 25 page attachment - “Documents of Victory. Five notebooks on the unknown truth of war”, where the documents from recently declassified archives were published for the first time since the war. Every issue that had this attachment started with a journalistic article on the papers (ex. “Life and death by order” by Lepskiy in the January issue of 2020) and the documents themselves contained journalistic commentary on their contents [2].

One of the most widely distributed magazines today (about 65,000 copies), the “Diletant” (“Dilettante”) magazine, began publication in 2012 as a new print project by “Ekho Moskvyy” (“Echo Moskvyy”) radio station. In the words of chief editor V. Dymarsky it presents itself as a traditional liberal historiographic publication [11]. The magazine takes every chance it gets to present its ideological alignments in the current social political climate.

Probably the most important topic to the magazine in the context of “relevant history” is the 100-year anniversary of the Russian revolution of 1917. It was the subject of more than half publication from not just one, but an entire line of issues in 2017. March issue (№15) of 2017 was dedicated to the February revolution and the abdication of the throne by the last Russian emperor. Even the title on the cover is opinionated - “A man out of his place” [7]. The central publication of the issue was an article by V. Uskov “Eternally addicted” [29]. It introduced an entire block of 10 articles (half of the issue’s content) under the common title “Nikolay the Last”. As we can see, the condescending attitude towards emperor’s persona is everywhere in this issue - from the articles and titles to caricatures, which is to be expected in a revolutionary-liberal tradition.

May (№17) 2017 issue is dedicated to one of the key players of the Revolution - L. Trotsky (the central topic titled “Trotsky - the demon of revolution” has 12 articles and the famous caricature “Trotsky in the guise of the Devil” sits on the cover) [8]. An article by A. Muhin “Where our train ran” was setting up the accent points [19]. On one hand, it was establishing just how big a role Trotsky played in Revolution and Civil war, on the other, pronounced a very harsh to the victors, “the Reds” - “The main advantage of the bolsheviks which allowed them to come out victorious in 1917 were their malice and ignobility. They didn’t change after coming to power, either” [20, P.16].

Obviously, the final nail was the November (№23) issue, talking about Lenin with the title “Lenin - savior or betrayer of Russia: 100 years of Russian revolution”. The title of the main article - “Brain Leninism” - wasn’t so charitable though [18].

The Great Patriotic war wasn’t so interesting for “Diletant”, but in preparation for the 75th anniversary of the event, authors for “Diletant” regularly stated their uncertain opinion which is very uncommon for this traditionally patriotic topic. The staff was interested in lesser known stories, key moments left up for interpretation and controversial people of war. But even then some historic constants are attacked by “oppositional historiography”, for which opposition is the goal [5].

№6 2012 may serve as a testament to that, titled “Price of Victory”, articles from which later served as a foundation to a collective publication with the same name published in 2019. It and the Issue itself followed the idea of answering the question: “What did the USSR sacrifice to win the Great Patriotic war? How did the front and back lines hold up? Debunking myths on the most bloody war in history!” [27]. It is easy to see that the magazine is pushing its readers to an uncomfortable conclusion - sacrifices made by the USSR to achieve victory were excessive and unnecessary?

Popularity of the beginning of the war as the subject for articles among the writers for “Diletant” could be explained by the oppositional viewpoint of the publication. They clearly try to point out the mistakes made by high command. Issue № 7 2016 started with a lead: “1941. Tragedy”. A year later the magazine emphasizes the same thing: “Tragedy of 1941. Why?” (2017 issue 19). Indisputably, the beginning of the Great Patriotic war was the hardest stage for us, and it is those hardships and failures that the idea of ineptitude of the soviet high command is built on [6].

However, “Diletant” often dabbles into the actualizations and dedicates sometimes even entire issues to the articles on current agenda. Issue 26 2018 may serve as an example: topic of the issue sits on the cover - “Alexander III - Russia’s fate in XXI century?”. The issue is based on deconstruction of the consensus that this tsar ruled over every branch of the state and who recently got carelessly mentioned in a positive light by current president V. Putin [21]. The magazine was quick to start a delayed discussion with the government. Central thesis of the issue was: “The most public tsar against the people: counter-reforms of Alexander III took away the chance for people of the Russian empire to build a financially powerful country with strong and free citizens” [10]. It is unfortunate that these brave debatable comparisons are drawn to the current “Putin’s regime”. The bias behind historical interpretations is obvious here and the emotionally charged baseless evaluation of current events are hasty as the events are ongoing and results - unclear.

But the award for the most questionable actualization of historic events goes to the January issue of 2018 under the title “The true Matilda”, that was released during an ongoing controversy on the film “Matilda” by the director A. Uchitel. The issue contains articles about Matilda Kshesinskaya, other famous Matildas, a tank with the same name etc. The actualization and social pandering are overly excessive here. Though it is easy to explain as the magazine views itself not as just journalism but also infotainment [9].

One of the newest Russian historical magazines - “Istorik” (“The historian”) - is drastically different. This journal, which began publication in January 2015 could probably be called more of a classic popular science publication about history. This serious tone is explained by the fact that it was launched as a “popular science project” by actual academia historians, the ISEPR fund to be exact.

However despite the academia background, “Istorik” is interested in being not just a historical archive but a historically-relevant publication. It’s purpose is stated right on the cover: it’s a “journal about relevant past” [24]. Because of that, the events that are covered in every issue aren’t just chosen spontaneously. The most relevant to the current events historic facts are chosen specifically to be featured in an issue.

Social and political viewpoints of the magazine are stated in several first issues: this publication is targeted at those who “have a demand for conservative knowledge about past and present”. Chief editor of “Istorik” - historian, journalist, teacher, PhD candidate in philology - Vladimir Rudakov states that the concept for “istorik” is ripe enough for the modern Russian public: “I see how big the demand for a smart historical journal with a patriotic stance is. Of course that doesn’t mean we’re going to follow in Alexander Benkendorf’s steps and write that “Russia’s past is wonderful, present is beautiful, and future is unimaginable”. Instead we’re going to analyze the past of our country while doing adequate evaluations and avoiding tropes and stereotypes perpetuated abroad. Do not delude yourself: the struggle in the world is not just for the present, but for the past as well, not just for the resources, but the minds. We must not sit and wait for the arrival of the victor” [17].

The “Istorik” magazine tries to present itself with professionalism and restraint. In the years of particularly important anniversaries for the country the new evergreen sections appear in the journal. For example, in 2017, for the 100 year anniversary of the Russian revolution of 1917 the publication started new “Russian empire” and “Russian revolution” sections.

Every issue is held together with the “problem of the issue” (it usually takes up 50% of an issue’s content), that unfolds over a number of articles. The May issue of 2016 was dedicated to the 100 year anniversary of the famous “Brusilov breakthrough” that occurred during World War I (the central article - “Last breakthrough of the Empire” by S. Bazanov and V.

Tsvetkov, a series of articles about general A. A. Brusilov etc.) [14]. In november 2018 issue, dedicated to the 100 year anniversary of the conclusion of World War I the magazine published a whole series of articles under the lead - "World War I: the war that turned Russia and the world around". Here the main message and weight of the issue rested on the interview between the chief editor and a history professor V. Voronin under the title "On the way to catastrophe", where both of them were trying to answer the question "Could Russia avoid participation in World War I or win it?" [20]

To the 100 year anniversary of the Russian revolution of 1917 on one hand, and 110 years of the Stolypin reforms on the other, the magazines staff, self admittedly having conservative and traditionalist viewpoints, dedicated the June 2017 issue to the question of a possible alternative of revolution in Russia" (50% of the issue's contents) and the key figure of this probable alternative - P. Stolypin. Topic of the issue - "Stolypin alternative - did Russia have a chance at avoiding revolution?" Central articles (like the editorial "the Prime Phenomena" and an interview with history professors - "The Stolypin alternative") were trying to give an affirmative answer with a caveat that it would happen if Stolypin actually managed to achieve what he set out to do [17].

Another topic given priority by "istorik" was the approaching 75 year anniversary of our victory in The Great Patriotic war.

"Great Patriotic war and modern day" was the leading block in depicting the theme of war. Relevant articles in this category took up about 10%. In particular the magazine was talking about the "Immortal Regiment", streets named after the heroes of Great patriotic war, destruction of memorials, depiction of military events in Latvian and Polish history textbooks. It was also touching on the problematic points during the war (like the collaborational army of A. Vlasov or the "cauldrons" of the first war years) [13].

Topics of every given issue were the reminders to the readers about important anniversaries in the history of Great Patriotic war. February 2018 issue was dedicated to the victorious conclusion to fateful Battle for Stalingrad (Topic of the issue - "Stalingrad: the battle that changed World War II"). The main article here was an interview with a historian A. Isaev - "The Battle on Volga" [26]. Journal number №1 2019 - under the lead "Leningrad Blockade: why Hitler couldn't break the city on Neva?" was almost entirely about the ending of the blockade [16]. All the interpretations and evaluations of historic events and personas by "Istorik" are classically patriotic.

The 30 year anniversary of one of the most catastrophic and shocking events in our history - collapse of the USSR - was met by the magazine with a new topic for the issue - "The Collapse of USSR: was the failure unavoidable?" (№1 2019). An entire series of journalistic articles was released. Everything - from the chief editor's article "Lessons of collapse" to the main editorial "Could we keep the USSR?" by V. Ivanov - tries to convince the audience that if given more willingness and effort from the government we could, of course, keep it. Lead of the central article is characteristic: "Soviet Union, unlike most other empires, was broken not "from below", but "from above" - by scattering and fragility of the ruling class" [12]. This clear journalistic message brightly illustrates modern political views of the publication and its readers.

Magazine "Zhivaya istoriya" ("Living history") published by State Central museum of modern Russian history in 2015-2018 was a curious but, unfortunately, short-lived project, where historic journalism was essential part of its content. Central museum's executive director I. Velikanova and journals chief editor N. Anikin mentioned that main interest of the publication lied in the transformations that happened to Russia over the last 150 years.

As we can see, it consciously takes the newest age in our history that resonates more obviously with the current social and political climate, as in, is relevant today, though less clearly, being the "living history" of Russia. This concept is present even in the subtitle of the publication - "History is made by YOU". Magazine's content was 90% made up of relevant historically-journalistic articles, the rest was additional entertainment content: tour guides, historical crossword puzzles and partnered material (like an article on history of Russian railroad system made in partnership with Russian Railways). Actualization of history was laid as the most basic foundation of its philosophy since the first issue with the statement: "There's nothing more modern than history" [32].

On the verge of the 100 year anniversary of the 1917 Russian revolution this point for the "Museum of modern Russian history" obviously became central. The revolution has most articles published about it in the entirety of the magazine's existence (about 37 publications). Since the issue №1 2017 journal was quick to state their centrist, "objectivist" viewpoint on this "era defining event": "Dear friends! 2017 has arrived and with it one of the most important anniversaries in Russian history - 100 years of the Great Russian revolution... To this day discussions are held on where the line is drawn between the achievements and sacrifices of the soviet government. Even after one hundred years since October of 1917 the divide between reds and whites, revolutionists and emigrants, remains, and the consequences of those events are felt all over the world. May it be that this anniversary will become the point where we build a new consolidated Russian society - in the name of great future for our Homeland?" [33]

Article by historian V. Buldakov in issue №1 2017 about Nikolai II and the drama surrounding his renunciation of the throne - "Abdication by the tsar - renunciation of the tsar" opened the topic for not just the issue, but the entire year [4]. On the cover of April issue for 2017 along with the title - "April frontier" the bust of V.I. Lenin from the museum's collection was shown. Editorial by historian K. Tarasov was dedicated to the persona of "the proletariat leader" and his famous "April theses", which became the first push for bolsheviks on their way to overthrowing the temporary government [25].

The theme of May issue was dictated by two articles at once (with both titles on the cover) - "Genius of Russian freedom" by K. Zalesskiy and "the crisis of temporary government" by historian F. Gayda [35]. The key figure for this period in the revolution in general and articles themselves was A. Kerenskiy (his rare portrait from the museum's collection on the cover). The publication states: "He truly was one of the brightest characters of 1917: he embodies all the pathos, meaninglessness, powerlessness and tragedy behind the Russian revolution" [30].

The subjects for September and October issues were two people who embody two alternatives (left and right) of exiting the "democratic stage: of Russian revolution and the stalemate it brought, becoming the key figures of the upcoming civil war - L. Kornilov ("To save the homeland or die..." fate of general Kornilov" by K. Zalessky) [31] and L. Trotsky ("Lev Trotsky:

revolution and fate” by V. Buldakov) [3]. Both characters (and alternatives) the magazine attempted to show and judge “sine ira et studio” - without bias nor anger.

These were just the key articles on the topic that pierced the “theme of revolution”, that was further developed in the magazine with other publications: “Valkyries of the revolution . What lead the noble women into politics?”, “Tragedy in Mogilev: how soldiers of revolution dealt with general Duhonin”, “Bloody Moscow week” etc. [34]

Conclusion

Throughout its evolution, Russian historic science-popular (earlier historically-literary) journal went through severe development in its organization, form, and content. Its social functions and, as a result, the functions of historical journalism in general also changed drastically.

For the pre-revolutionary magazines, starting with N. Novikov, those functions were mostly education and popularization of historic knowledge. In the soviet era (when history was presented as a “partisan scientific sphere”) those main functions were propaganda and pushing an ideology. Today, the main purpose of social historical journals in general and their public messages in particular are actualization and politicization of historical content as dictated by current social and political climate. Modern magazines focus on similarities between events of days past and today’s agenda, trying to have their input in the discussion on these topics.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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