

Summary

Most of the 166th *NZ* issue is devoted to problems that are increasingly troubling historians and other humanities scholars. It concerns the so-called “history from below”, which creates an opportunity to “hear the voices of the oppressed” – the lower social classes of the past, those who in recent decades have been named “subalterns” (as defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). This issue is not purely academic; it arose in the context of the development of post-colonial studies and the general leftward shift of Western academia, which has become an arena for ideological battles.

In this issue of *NZ*, the discussion of “history from below” has been prompted by a forthcoming book by Kirill Ospovat titled *“Pugachevshchina: The Political Semiotics of a Rebellion in the Age of Enlightenment (A Study in Democratic Historiography)”*, in which the author radically reinterprets the approach to looking at the 18th century popular uprising led by Yemelyan Pugachev in the Russian Empire. This event is conventionally viewed from the top down, from the perspective of the ruling classes and authorities of the time; this view was canonised in the novel *“The Captain’s Daughter”* by the classic of Russian literature Alexander Pushkin. The general attitude toward the uprising as a cruel “Russian revolt, meaningless and merciless”, was not shaken even by a hundred years of Marxist historiography, which held a dominant position in the USSR. Within that tradition, the peasantry

was regarded as an ignorant class, captive to prejudices, whose revolutionary activity was by definition secondary to that of the proletariat. Kirill Ospovat overturns this logic and interprets Pugachev’s Rebellion (even reappropriating the old term “pugachevshchina”, which negatively defined the rebels’ way of thinking and acting) as an event of radical Enlightenment, placing it in the context of the 18th-century Western revolutions – the American and the French.

The block of materials centering around this topic opens with a chapter from Kirill Ospovat’s book itself (*“The Pretender and Democracy”*), followed by a round table discussion on a range of questions raised by Ospovat – and on problems arising from them, both historiographical and ideological in nature. The round table, moderated by *NZ*’s editor-in-chief Kirill Kobrin, includes the author of the book under discussion, Kirill Ospovat; the philosopher Igor Kobylin; the historian Konstantin Jerusalimsky; and the political scientist Anna Nizhnik. The topic continues with a republication of an excerpt from the forgotten work by the historian and ethnographer Afanasy Shchapov (1831–1876) titled *“The Zemstvo and the Schism”*, which was one of the first attempts to create a “people’s history” of the tragic events in 17th-century Russia. Another piece in this thematic block is the now-classic article by the British historian Edward Palmer Thompson, *“The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”* (1971), which largely laid the foundations for present-



day approaches to “history from below”. The selection concludes with an article by Andrey Kostin, *“From Everywhere and to Wherever: How to Write the History of Literacy and Writing in Early Modern Russia”*, which significantly broadens the lens of the discussion of “history from below”. The article offers an unconventional view of the history of literacy, which calls into question the very boundary between literacy and illiteracy (based on Russian material from the 17th–18th centuries) – and, consequently, between the means by which “the subaltern can speak” to a historian.

A prominent place in issue 166 of the journal is occupied by vodka. The focus is not on the alcoholic beverage per se, but on its consumption as a core component of Soviet (and to some extent post-Soviet) daily life, around which a number of crucial social rituals arose. One such ritual – sharing a bottle of vodka “among three” – is discussed in a substantial study by Mikhail Nikolaev, titled *“«A Mark Was Made on the Glass»: On the History of Drinking «Among Three» in the Post-War USSR”*. The author establishes a connection between how the changing legislation of the USSR transformed the consumption of hard alcohol by Soviet people, how the Communist Party fought against this new form of heavy drinking, and how this campaign was reflected in the official Soviet press. The topic is first introduced in the latest instalment of *SOCIOLOGICAL LYRICISM*, where Alexey Levinson analyses data on Soviet people’s attitude toward vodka consumption, drawing on rich sociological material from the early 1990s.

Another regular section, the *CULTURE OF MODERNITY REVISITED*, features two pieces. Igor Smirnov analyses the “modernist” and “modern” layers in several American and British films released in recent years, and finds evidence of profound changes in public opinion regarding the basic values of Western society. Anatoly Ryasov offers the readers a short philosophical essay, *“The Taboo on Transcendence and Its Political Consequences”*, whose central figures are Gilles Deleuze, Antonin Artaud, and Martin Heidegger. Similarly, the possibility/impossibility of philosophising in the postmodern era is the focus of Andrey Gelianov’s extended response to Boris Groys’s book about the Russo-French Hegelian philosopher and bureaucrat Alexandre Kojève, found in the *NEW BOOKS* section.

The new instalments of two more regular sections of *NZ* are devoted to two very dissimilar topics. In *THE REVERSE OF THE METHOD*, Tatyana Vorozheykina provides an analytical overview of the last few months in Venezuela’s history – following the US abduction of the nation’s dictator, Nicolás Maduro. The *CASE STUDY* section offers an exhaustive account of the history of a little-known paramilitary organization of first-wave Russian émigrés – the Russian Rifle Druzhina named after General Wrangel, which existed in Belgium in the 1930s (the authors are Oleg Beyda, lecturer at the University of Melbourne, and Ekaterina Nikolaeva-Tandil, French art historian and scholar of first-wave Russian emigration).

As usual, the 166th issue of *NZ* concludes with Alexander Pisarev’s *RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL JOURNALS REVIEW*.

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