

*N. E. Adamova, V. N. Baryshnikov, T. N. Goncharova, V. N. Borisenko, M. Kerautret*

## STUDIES IN MODERN FRENCH HISTORY AT SAINT PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY\*

This paper honours Associate Professor Oleg V. Sokolov, one of the leading experts in the military history of the Napoleonic era on the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday by tracing back the traditions established and innovations introduced in Modern French Studies at the Modern and Contemporary History Department of St. Petersburg State University. Special attention is paid to the valuable contribution to research into the history of the Great French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire made by such renowned historians as Nikolay I. Kareyev, Yevgeniy V. Tarle and Vladimir G. Revunenko. Having adopted the best of their methods and with a basis in their groundbreaking works, Oleg Sokolov managed to improve and to expand the existing range of historical research by adjusting it to the information age, thus adding a new chapter to the history of Modern and Contemporary History Department. Refs 15.

*Keywords:* the French history, historiography, The Great French Revolution, Napoleonic era, military history, Sokolov, Kareyev, Tarle, Revunenko.

*Н. Э. Адамова, В. Н. Барышников, Т. Н. Гончарова, В. Н. Борисенко, М. Керотре*

## ТРАДИЦИИ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИСТОРИИ ФРАНЦИИ НОВОГО И НОВЕЙШЕГО ВРЕМЕНИ В САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГСКОМ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

В статье, посвященной 60-летию юбилею кандидата исторических наук, доцента Олега Валерьевича Соколова — одного из крупнейших в нашей стране специалистов по военной истории наполеоновской эпохи, раскрываются традиции преемственности и новаторства в изучении прошлого и настоящего Франции на кафедре истории Нового и новейшего времени

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*Adamova Nina Eduardovna* — PhD, Senior Lecturer; St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; n.adamova@spbu.ru

*Baryshnikov Vladimir Nikolaevich* — Dr., PhD, Professor; St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; v.baryshnikov@spbu.ru

*Goncharova Tatiana Nikolaevna* — PhD, Associate Professor; St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; t.goncharova@spbu.ru

*Borisenko Victor Nikolaevich* — PhD, Associate Professor; St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; v.borisenko@spbu.ru

*Kerautret Michel* — professeur agrégé; École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France, 4–14 rue Ferrus, 75014 Paris; michelkerautret@laposte.net

*Адамова Нина Эдуардовна* — кандидат исторических наук, старший преподаватель; Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; n.adamova@spbu.ru

*Барышников Владимир Николаевич* — доктор исторических наук, профессор; Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; v.baryshnikov@spbu.ru

*Гончарова Татьяна Николаевна* — кандидат исторических наук, доцент; Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; t.goncharova@spbu.ru

*Борисенко Виктор Николаевич* — кандидат исторических наук, доцент; Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; v.borisenko@spbu.ru

*Мишель Керотре* — агрегированный профессор; Практическая школа высших исследований (École Pratique des Hautes Études), Париж, Франция, 4–14 rue Ferrus, 75014 Paris; michelkerautret@laposte.net

\* Работа выполнена при поддержке гранта СПбГУ: От национальных государств к единой Европе: проблемы европейской интеграции в XIX–XXI вв., шифр в ИАС: 5.38.275.2014.

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СПбГУ. Особое внимание уделяется ценному вкладу, внесенному в дело изучения истории Великой французской революции и Наполеоновской империи такими мэтрами исторической науки, как Н. И. Кареев, Е. В. Тарле и В. Г. Ревуненков. Показано, как О. В. Соколов, впитав в себя все лучшее из их исторических методов и научных достижений, смог существенно обновить и дополнить арсенал имеющихся в распоряжении историка научно-исследовательских средств, адаптировав их к эпохе массмедиа и открыв в начале XXI века новую страницу в истории кафедры. Библиогр. 15 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* история Франции, историография, Великая французская революция, наполеоновская эпоха, военная история, Соколов, Кареев, Тарле, Ревуненков.

Associate Professor Oleg V. Sokolov, an outstanding Russian historian, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour (the highest government award in France), celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 9, 2016. A distinguished scholar, Sokolov is rightly seen as one of the leading experts in the field of the military history of the Napoleonic Empire, as well as a natural successor to the traditions of studies in Modern French history, maintained in Saint Petersburg State University.

Indeed, these traditions were established back in the nineteenth century, and since then a genuine research interest in the Modern Western history has been demonstrated by a special unit of the University, namely, the Modern and Contemporary History Department. Even at those times, the scholars employed at the department were noticeably preoccupied with studies in French history, a special attention being paid to the French Revolution and events, which followed it. This passion for the French history was inherited by and remained prominent in Oleg V. Sokolov's body of work. Nonetheless, this tradition was set up by Professor Nikolay I. Kareyev (1850–1931), the father of so-called “Russian school” of French Revolutionary studies and the founder of the Modern and Contemporary History Department. It was he who wrote a classic book, among many others, *The Peasants and the Peasant Question in France in the last Quarter the Eighteenth Century* (Moscow, 1879), published in French translation in 1899. The very issuing of that monograph had indicated the international importance of research efforts launched at the Department back then.

Having satiated his zeal for agricultural and economic history of the late-eighteenth-century France, Kareyev proceeded with a research on the history of Paris sections in 1790–1794, revealing their role in radicalization of political remonstrance, thereby having confirmed the ideas, which the prominent French historian Jules Michelet had pointed out back in his days. The Russian historian focused especially on the actions of the sections starting from the summer 1792, when the sans-culottes had achieved domination over the revolutionary committees and influence of the common people's initiative had increased, strikingly manifesting itself in deposing the monarch. The results of Kareyev's research into this topic, which drew heavily on the archive resources, were published in the magazine *Russkoe Bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*) as a number of books and articles. Moreover, two collections of documents, including the records of Paris sections' meetings held on Thermidor 9, and other papers never been published before, were edited by Kareyev and printed in 1914 by the Academy of Sciences Press, associate member of which he had been.

Kareyev's *The Great French Revolution* (Petrograd, 1918) turned out to be a certain line drawn under his extensive research in this field. In this book, the historian denied the widely accepted beliefs that the revolt of Vendémiaire 13 in Year IV (October 5, 1795) had

been a counter-revolutionary uprising organised in order to restore a monarchy; on the contrary, Kareyev argued that such beliefs were actually based exclusively on the rumours concocted and spread by Barras. It is worth to mention that Kareyev's viewpoint on the Vendémiaire uprising has always generated heated debate within the scientific community, some historians disputing his reasoning, while the others supporting his conclusions [Goncharova 2012].

Furthermore, Nikolay Kareyev was an author of the seminal *Modern History of Western Europe* (in 7 vols, 1892–1917), a book with quite a number of chapters on the French history. Some of his works were published in French translation and were highly rated by such renowned historians of the French Revolution as Henri Lefebvre and Albert Mathiez. Three volumes of Kareyev's *Historians of the French Revolution* were published in 1924, summarising his research into the Revolution's historiography [Dalin 1989].

In the same manner as his elder department fellow, Professor Yevgeniy V. Tarle (1874–1951) had launched an investigation of an understudied chapter in the history of the French Revolution: he was the first Russian historian who undertook research into the conditions, under which workers of manufactories and artisanal workshops were living in the late eighteenth century. By the time his book *The workers of the National Workshops in France during the French Revolution (1789–1799): according to unpublished documents* was printed (1907), of all the French historians only Pierre E. Levasseur, Jacque Martin and Jean Jaurès had addressed this topic at least to some extent. Any issue concerning workers and working class seemed to be so drastically vital in Russia, simmering with the protest sentiments, that viva voce of Tarle's doctoral dissertation *The Working Class in France during the Revolution: Historical Essays* (in 2 vols, St. Petersburg, 1909–1911) held in Saint Petersburg University, had to be secured by the police [Kaganovich 2014].

In his books on the working class Tarle criticised the policy of the price ceiling (maximum), i. e. fixed prices on the basic consumer goods, a criticism which he nonetheless revised later. For the centenary celebration of the Patriotic War of 1812, Tarle presented a study on the Continental System (*Continental System. Studies in the History of French Industry and Foreign Trade under Napoleon*, in 2 vols, St. Petersburg, 1913). In this book, Tarle carried out exhaustive research into Napoleon's struggle against British economic supremacy. Elaborating on this issue, in 1915 he published a book *The Economic situation in Italy under the rule of Napoleon I*, which was translated in French in 1928 upon the recommendation of Albert Mathiez.

After a lull in 1920s, Tarle, already being the Academy of Sciences fellow, resumed his teaching post at Leningrad University in 1930s, and immediately burst into research and publishing activity. In 1934, he edited and issued the abridged *Memoirs* of a prominent diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, whose abilities were highly appreciated by Napoleon in spite of the former's proverbial slyness, cupidity and craftiness. Tarle's works on the Napoleonic era came one after another: *Napoleon* (1936), *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia* (1938), *Talleyrand* (1939) — a brilliant trilogy, a “War and Peace” in its own fashion. Even though his image of Napoleon as a “strangler” of the Revolution was rather grotesque, this biography of the Emperor of the French written in Tarle's distinctive lively and artistic style remains relevant both in Russia and in France, where it is available in translation provided by the Payot publishing house in Paris.

For all his interest to the Napoleonic era, Tarle had not abandoned his studies in the revolutionary period. On the eve of the sesquicentenary of the Great French Revolution,

he issued a book *Germinal and Prairial*, dedicated to the sans-culottes uprisings in Paris in the spring of 1795. The author revised there his previous criticism on the price ceiling, probably, due to his own personal discouraging experience in revolutionary Russia, when he had to face an incredibly high cost-of-living. Eventually, the scholar concluded that although free trade generally is more desirable for economics than dirigisme, in fact, the rigid Jacobin laws introducing the Maximum on May 3 and September 29, 1793 were a least-evil solution from the social point of view. Far too many profiteers hoarded grain and flour amid limited market supply in order to boost its prices and charge exorbitant rates for it later. Because of a price ceiling, grain became affordable for the poor, namely, the sans-culottes themselves who had been directing the Revolution at the time.

The generalising work *The French Bourgeois Revolution 1789–1794* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1941), a result of joint efforts of several authors and edited by Vyacheslav P. Volgin and Yevgeniy V. Tarle, had been acknowledged as canonical at that time, and the data this book represented was widely considered to be the last word in French Revolutionary studies [Gordon 2005]. One of the contributors to the above-mentioned publication, Kareyev's pupil Yevgeniy N. Petrov, published a number of articles on the disputes on the communal ownership of land, thus carrying on a tradition of the Modern History Department to explore the agricultural issues of the revolutionary period. Besides, in the last antebellum year of 1940–1941 Y. N. Petrov conducted a lecture course *French Enlightenment Thinkers of the Eighteenth Century* [Revunenkov 2007, p. 187]. The same year witnessed him issuing a work on a more specific subject: the impact of Jean-Jacque Rousseau's political ideas on the revolutionaries, which was enormous (1940).

A bit earlier, another historian of Leningrad University, a son of the renowned Pushkin scholar, Pavel P. Schegolev, likewise conducted a serious study of the Great French Revolutionary era. Having started in teaching at the Modern History Department in 1926, he produced several essential works, including *The Conspiracy of Babeuf* (1927) and *After Thermidor: An Outline of the History of the Thermidorian Reaction* (1930).

Of all the academicians working at the Department in 1920s–1930s, the most distinguished one was Yakov M. Zakher (1893–1963). In close collaboration with the Moscow scholars Nikolay I. Lukin and Zvi Fridliand he laid the foundation for the Soviet historiography of the French Revolution. Kareyev's disciple, Zakher extended his teacher's study of the French sections in *The Paris Sections in 1790–1795: Political role and Structure*, published in 1921. His research into the biographies of famous revolutionaries followed: *Saint-Just: Life, Acts and Ideology* (Petrograd, 1922), *Robespierre* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1925), *Anaxagoras Chaumette: the Eighteenth Century Antireligious Propagandist* (Moscow, 1930). The most significant topic in Zakher's output, however, was an investigation of the role the Enragés movement played in the revolution, the results of this study having been published in two research works of 1930 and 1961. Repressed in 1939, Zakher was rehabilitated and reinstated as a member of the University staff only in 1956; notwithstanding the misfortunes suffered, he managed to leave over one hundred of research papers behind and make his mark on the historiography of the French Revolution [Zolotarev 2000].

The continuity of research in French history at the University was maintained by Professor Vladimir G. Revunenkov, who later directed Oleg Sokolov's doctoral thesis. The name of this scholar has become a prominent in the French Revolutionary Studies of this era. After his doctorate thesis viva defence in 1937, at which Professor Tarle was his oppo-

ment, Revunenkov worked at the Modern History Department until the early twenty-first century. The area of expertise of this highly erudite scholar comprised the issues of the Polish, Prussian and Latin American Modern History [Evdokimova, Shershneva 2004]. Not until 1960s had the topic of the French Revolution become his chief line of research, although a short article *The Jacobins (An Outline)*, published in the *Propaganda and Agitation Journal* in 1940, heralded this interest even back then [Evdokimova, Petrova 2010].

Professor Revunenkov's very first extensive work on the matter, *Marxism and the Issue of the Jacobin Dictatorship* (Leningrad, 1966), has seriously questioned the leading concept of Soviet historiography which qualified the Jacobin regime as "a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the lower classes", a notion established by an Academy member Nikolay Lukin long before. Evolving the ideas of the Communist historian Albert Soboul and employing a wide range of primary sources, Revunenkov came up with a point of a dual power (diarchy) in France. What he meant by this term was a coexistence of tyranny of bourgeoisie implemented in Convention and its committees on the one hand, and democracy of the sans-culottes realised in the Paris Commune and its Sections on the other. He developed this new approach to the nature of the Jacobin dictatorship in his subsequent monographs *The Sans-Culottes of Paris in the French Revolution* (Leningrad, 1917) and *The Paris Commune. 1792–1794* (Leningrad, 1976). These books caused a considerable controversy with the Moscow historians A. Z. Manfred and V. M. Dalin, and awarded Revunenkov with the widely recognised title of founder of the Leningrad school of French Revolutionary Studies. Meanwhile the controversy expanded to the press. The Moscow historians tended to consider the Jacobin dictatorship as an alliance of the bourgeoisie and sans-culottes (in other words, the alliance of the Jacobin Convention and the Paris Commune), lavishly criticizing their Leningrad antagonist and accusing him of revisionism [Letchford 2002]. In the matter of fact, along with introducing his pioneering approach, Professor Revunenkov had remained loyal to the Marxist-Leninist methodology. His books, comprehensive and brilliant, evidentially evoked a wide response in academia.

Having published a work *An Outline of the Great French Revolution* in 1982–1983 (in two volumes), Vladimir Revunenkov considerably extended the chronological framework of those events in the third edition of his book, issued in 1996. He suggested there that the Revolution came to an end only in 1814, and argued that Napoleon, a "Robespierre on horseback", could not be estimated as a person who had terminated the Revolution; as a matter of fact, he was the one who preserved and developed its social and economic trends. This volume was followed by the books *Napoleon and the Revolution, 1789–1815* (St. Petersburg, 1999), and *Rise and Fall of Napoleon Bonaparte* (St. Petersburg, 2001), which happened to be the last of the scholar's career, unless one counts the fourth edition of his *Outlines*, issued as *History of the French Revolution* in 2003 (St. Petersburg).

It is worthwhile to note that the variety of the issues of the French history covered by the Modern and Contemporary History Department cannot be confined to the history of the Revolution and the Napoleonic era. For instance, Professor Alexandr I. Molok (1898–1977) wrote a number of books on the history of the revolutions of France in the nineteenth century for the average reader. Having started with the study of the Paris Commune of 1871, he later did pioneering research in soviet historiography with his history of the June Days Uprising, which was staged in Paris in June 23–26, 1848 against the closure of the National workshops (*Karl Marx and the June Days Uprising in Paris in 1848* (Moscow, 1934) and *The June Days of 1848 in Paris* (Moscow, 1948)).

The contemporary history of France, which had been obviously understudied at the Modern and Contemporary History Department until 1945, later has been deeply examined there. Associate Professor Mark N. Kuz'min contributed greatly to an examination of the history of the Third French Republic in his work *The Internal political struggle in France, 1926–1932* (Leningrad, 1975). A prominent Third Republic politician, Raymond Poincaré, who served as the Prime Minister of France from 1926–1929 and personified the policy of conservatism, came into the focus of research of Associate Professor Nina P. Evdokimova. In collaboration with Associate Professor Sergey V. Vivatenko she published a volume *Raymond Poincaré, the President of France* (St. Petersburg, 2006).

The continuity of traditions is quite apparent in the research expertise of Associate Professor Tatiana N. Goncharova. Having entered into her academic career with the interest for the history of Restoration and the July Monarchy in France (1814–1848), while working at the Department Goncharova has expanded her research towards the studies in the French colonial history and political history of France in the second half of the twentieth century. The latter interest resulted in the extensive chapter *France at the Crossroads — between the Fifth and the Sixth Republic* in *The Outlines of the Constitutional-Building in Europe in the Modern Times* (St. Petersburg, 2006).

Finally, in recent decades the research of Associate Professor Oleg V. Sokolov has yielded impressive results and contributed immensely to studies in Modern French history at Saint Petersburg State University. Sokolov, directed by Professor Revunenkov as a postgraduate student, explored the issues of the Ancien Régime and the Revolution. This debut of his resembled in some way the academic path of Professor Tarle, who had similarly embarked on his career with an investigation of the Ancien Régime, while turning to the Napoleonic epoch in his ageless biography of Napoleon only as late as the 1930s. The doctoral thesis of Sokolov was titled *The Officer Corps of the French Army in the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, 1789–1799*. This work has obviously opened doors for him, without limiting the scope of his research with chronological framework of the Revolution. A short time after, Sokolov switched his efforts to the scrupulous and painstaking study of the Napoleonic epoch.

Sokolov has published more than eighty research papers and books so far<sup>1</sup>, including such extensive and ground-breaking works as *The Army of Napoleon* [Sokolov 1999], *Austerlitz. Napoleon, Russia and Europe. 1799–1805* [Sokolov 2006], *The Battle of Two Empires. 1805–1812* [Sokolov 2012], as well as the annotated sourcebooks: *Napoleon. Pro et Contra* [Napoleon Bonapart 2012], *The Memoirs of Octave Levavasseeur* [Levavasseeur, 2014]. It is quite telling that some of those works have been translated in French, Spanish, Polish and Czech, a fact that both makes Sokolov's output known to the general audience of the above-mentioned countries and gives a sense of the increasing interest his books attract in Europe.

While having inherited the best methods and traditions kept by scholars working at the Department from the nineteenth century, Sokolov has definitely added new features to the image of a historian dealing with French Studies. In fact, he has ushered in a new era of Napoleonic Studies in Saint Petersburg University. Unlike his predecessors, Sokolov is by no means a sedentary scholar, used to spending much of his time in archives. Being a “founding father” of the Military History Association in Russia and continuously taking

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<sup>1</sup> The full bibliography of Oleg Sokolov can be found at his personal webpage: <http://novist.history.spbu.ru/sokolov.html>

the leading parts in historical reconstructions of the most significant battles all over the Europe, Sokolov tries to live through the dramatic events of the epoch he takes an interest in and to share those perceptions with a wide audience. University staff members and students more than once had the chance to witness Oleg Sokolov, a perfect horseman, galloping off in the battlefield. It is hardly possible to imagine another distinguished historian of Napoleonic Empire riding at the head of an authentically dressed Napoleonic regiment, living in a bivouac, or singing revolutionary songs.

Overall, maintaining the traditions established by the predecessors, the Saint Petersburg University Department of Modern and Contemporary History has been rapidly developing, steadily expanding the research fields and scope of issues examined in the study of French history.

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**For citation:** Adamova N. E., Baryshnikov V. N., Goncharova T. N., Borisenko V. N., Kerautret M. Studies in modern French history at Saint Petersburg State University. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2016, issue 3, pp. 162–169. DOI: 10.21638/11701/spbu02.2016.314

Статья поступила в редакцию 16 марта 2016 г.; рекомендовано в печать 21 июня 2016 г.