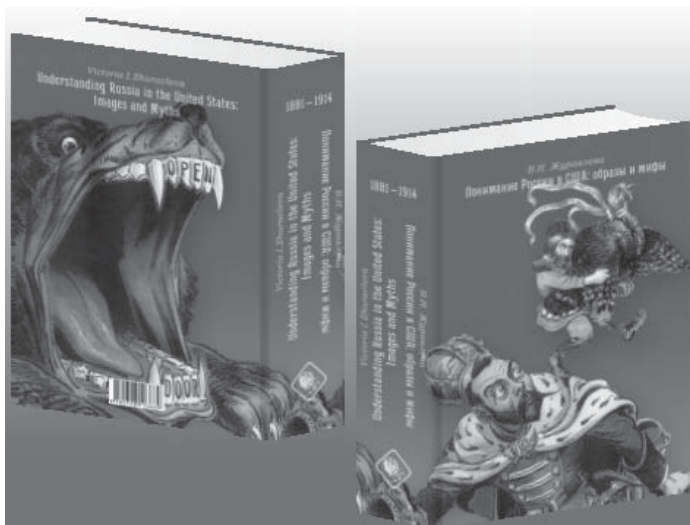


НА КНИЖНОЙ ПОЛКЕ



Журавлева В.И. Понимание России в США: образы и мифы. 1881–1914. М. : РГГУ, 2012.

Victoria I. Zhuravleva. Understanding Russia in the United States: Images and Myths. 1881–1914. Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2012

What did Americans consider to be true about Russia at the end of the 19th — beginning of the 20th century? Why would some images come to the fore and others — remain in the background? Had the growth of information about the Russian Empire and the new “discovery” of this country by Americans during this period been truly contributing to the formation of more adequate ideas about the processes that were under way there? Why had the American myths about Russia and the stereotypes in its perception proved to be so enduring? When and why had the images of Russia created within the American society begun to make rapid inroads into the American foreign policy, shaping the contents and the ideological justification of its

Russian vector? The main purpose of “Understanding Russia in the United States” is to address these and many other related questions.

Each culture has its own image of the “Other” that plays an important role in the interplay of meanings and significations that determine its “I”-concept. Ever since the beginning of the US history, Americans kept looking for “national communities” that could be presented as significant “Others” and formed their

collective identity by superimposing and projecting outwards the images of these “Others.” The present study retraces the process that began at the turn of the 20th century, through which the Russian “Other” was constructed and redefined as the key element of the American identity discourse, so that “demonizing” and “romanticizing” of Russia’s image served to revitalize the American nationalism.

The author strives to describe in a comprehensive manner and at multiple levels the process of how ideas and knowledge about Russia were formed in the United States between 1881 and 1914. This analysis takes into account the American socio-cultural context of that time, the agenda of the observer society as well as the overall patterns of Russian-American relations. The research objectives of this study are: to detect the main sources of American representations of Russia; to determine the factors that influenced the construction of its images at the societal and official levels; and to analyze the repertoires of meanings in different American discourses set by the text about Russia, including their characteristic articulation practices

that shaped and maintained the long-term American myths about Russia and Russians.

The conceptual framework of this study relies heavily on three kinds of context that engendered the American text about Russia and can be better understood through this text. The first one is the socio-cultural context that helps to identify dominant identity markers that were characteristic for the observer society in the long run. The second, short-term context closely related to the first one, is the agenda or the political context — the specific configuration of domestic and foreign policy issues that are important at a given stage of development of the observer society — that explains the mechanisms through which the Russian “Other” is being used. The third and final one is the auxiliary context of Russian-American bilateral relations. In analyzing these interdependent contexts, the author relies not only on the findings of the “linguistic turn” research tradition that places the emphasis on the study of the “Other’s” image in terms of discursive practices (the subjective context), but also on the attention that the advocates of the “cultural turn” drew to the objective contexts that are important for the construction of texts about the “Other.”

It must be noted that, during the period under consideration (with the exception of the 1903-1905 crisis and the abrogation of the 1832 treaty on commerce and navigation in 1911), the interstate interactions remained relatively unaffected by the changes that occurred in the American positioning of Russian image and that the diplomats also attempted to neutralize this influence. Nevertheless, this objective context allows to highlight several important issues. First, there is a correlation between the agenda of Russian-American relations and the perception of Russia, that is, between the “internal” process of identity formation in the United States and the “external” construction of the Russian vector in its foreign policy. Second, the American society elaborated mechanisms for putting pressure on the decision-making process in the realm of foreign

policy, and these pressure mechanisms directly affected the overall character of bilateral relations. Third, it was precisely during this period that the ideological factor became a negative constant in Russian-American relations. However, if ideology is defined as an aggregate of ideas, values, and myths that shape a worldview, then the ideological factor has been present in these bilateral relations ever since their beginning.

Methodologically, “Understanding Russia in the United States” is based both on traditional methods of historical research, used to create the historical narrative, and on the interdisciplinary methodological framework that came to be known as the imagology of international relations. This framework is grounded in the findings of social constructivism, cultural anthropology, and ethnopsychology and is focused on comparative study of background ideas, images, cognitive stereotypes, and myths that operate at the normative level in a given national environment, as well as on the study of communication traditions that are imprinted in the cultural and historical memory of a nation and use the conceptual pair “Self/Other.”

In creating a methodological base for her book, the author relied especially heavily on the work of those scholars who based their studies of identity problems in international relations on the concept of dialogism introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin. This framework posits the existence of the “Other” as a necessary condition for defining the “Self” and includes research on mental geography with an emphasis on the study of mythologization of time and space as well as studies that present the US foreign policy as a field of identity construction and analyze the ideological and cultural dimensions of this policy. The author list for the former current includes such researchers as Tzvetan Todorov, Edward Said, Larry Wolff, and Iver Neumann; the latter current is represented, among other authors, by Emily Rosenberg, Michael Hunt, David Campbell, and Walter Hixson.

Given such a methodological framework, the author does not limit her task to studying