CHAPTER 4

Commitment, Reserve and Self-Assertion

The Celebration of Patriotic Anniversaries in Russian and German Universities 1912/13

Trude Maurer

Russian universities were modelled on the German reform universities of the eighteenth century and developed in a way similar to the German research university that evolved during the nineteenth century. Many future professors were (partly) trained in Germany and shared the German concepts of Wissenschaft, academic ethics and a constitutional monarchy. Despite this common ground, the position of academics in their respective societies and their attitude towards the political system of their home countries differed considerably. To what extent they committed themselves to the patriotic cause or rather remained aloof is demonstrated by a comparative analysis of the commemoration of the anti-Napoleonic wars and the celebration of dynastic jubilees in 1913. The differences can partly be explained by their respective state’s support or interdiction of university jubilees shortly before. At the same time, the findings help to explain the differences of participation of German and Russian academics in the war efforts of 1914–1918.

In Russia, the early twentieth century was a period of cancelled, postponed and even officially banned university jubilees. Only the Russified university in the Baltics, Jur’ev (formerly Dorpat) was able to celebrate its centenary.2 In Moscow, they had started to plan the 150th anniversary celebrations to be held in 1905 as early as 1898, but had been declined permission. The Ministry of

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1 This comparative essay is based on two comprehensive articles on the Russian and German celebrations, respectively Trude Maurer, “Engagement, Distanz und Selbstbehauptung. Die Feier der patriotischen Jubiläen 1913 an den deutschen Universitäten”, *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte* 14 (2011): 149–164; Trude Maurer, “Distanz und Selbstbehauptung: Die patriotischen Jubiläen des Studienjahres 1912/13 als Brennpiegel der Gesellschaftsgeschichte russischer Universitäten”, in: Matthias Stadelmann and Lilia Antipow (eds.), Schlüsseljahre. Zentrale Konstellationen der mittel- und osteuropäischen Geschichte. Festschrift für Helmut Altrichter zum 65. Geburtstag (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 2011): 233–254. For detailed references see these articles. Only the introductory paragraphs concerning university jubilees are completely new and have therefore been documented more fully. For other sections only quotations from or summaries of particular speeches will be cited.

Education claimed that there was no legal foundation for celebrating non-centenaries.\(^3\) In 1905, amidst of the so-called Banquet Campaign of the Liberal Union of Liberation,\(^4\) even the annual student banquets celebrated on 12 January were forbidden.\(^5\) At the same time, the council of the University of Char’kov wanted to transfer the celebration of its centenary from January to October 1905 because of the Russo-Japanese war. Moreover, the authorities closed down the premises of the noble assembly where there had at least been a banquet planned for the day of inauguration. By doing so, however, they provoked a public meeting which called for a constituent assembly. In autumn the universities reopened only for a short time, and in October barricades of the 1905 revolution blocked University Street in Char’kov.\(^6\) In Kazan in 1904 the 100th anniversary of the university’s inauguration had also been postponed because of the war in the Far East. They intended to celebrate it ten years later on the centenary of the university’s so-called “real opening”, but in 1914 had to defer it again, as another war had just begun.\(^7\) Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly all Russian university jubilees were, for political reasons, put off \textit{ad calendas graecas}.

In contrast, all Russian universities contributed to the celebrations of the patriotic anniversaries of 1912–1913. At the end of August 1912, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Borodino either opened or just predated the academic year. At the end of February 1913, the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty followed.

\(^3\) In Russian: ‘nekruglye daty’, literally meaning: ‘not round dates’. In fact, during the second half of the nineteenth century ‘jubilees’ (\textit{jubilei}) were celebrated after 50 or 100 years, but at the end of the century events or particular periods of service were celebrated after 25 years (Konstantin Nikolaevič Cimbaev, “Fenomen jubileemania v rossijskoj ob\'obchušennoj žizni konca XIX – načala XX veKA [The phenomenon of jubileemania in Russian public life at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries]”, \textit{Voprosy istorii} (2005), no. 11: 100). However, the 50th anniversary of the University of Char’kov in 1855 was not celebrated because the tsar found the “lifespan” too short (Sergej Ivanovič Posochov, “Jubilei Char’kovskogo universiteta [The anniversaries of Char’kov University]”, \textit{Oтеčestvennaja istoriJA} (2004), no. 6: 142).

\(^4\) In order to circumvent the ban on public meetings the liberal intelligentsia organized banquets in the autumn of 1904 where plans for a thorough reform of the political system were discussed. In some places even demands for a constituent assembly were made.

