

“It Was the Lord’s Will that I Should Not Leave Moscow”: J. A. Rosenstrauch’s Memoir of the 1812 War

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RESÜMEE

Dieser Beitrag untersucht das Geschehen in Moskau 1812 anhand einer bislang fast unbekannten Quelle: den Kriegserinnerungen des deutschen Einwanderers Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch (1768–1835). Rosenstrauch war erst Schauspieler in St. Petersburg, später Kaufmann in Moskau und zuletzt Pastor im ukrainischen Charkow. Der Artikel bespricht seine Biographie und die Rolle, die europäische Einwanderer wie er in den Prozessen der Modernisierung Moskaus gespielt haben. Danach werden drei Aspekte seines Kriegserlebnisses untersucht: sein kompliziertes Verhältnis zur russischen Bevölkerung; seine Stellung in den Netzwerken, die Russland mit Europa verbanden; und der Einfluss des Kriegs auf das weitere persönliche Schicksal Rosenstrauchs. Auf diese Weise ergibt sich die Chance, den individuellen Lebensweg eines Einzelnen mit den großen Linien der russisch-europäischen Begegnungen in den Napoleonischen Kriegen in Verbindung zu bringen.

Sometime in 1835, in Khar’kov in present-day Ukraine, the Lutheran pastor Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch wrote a memoir about how Napoleon’s occupation of Moscow had changed his life.¹ Rosenstrauch was a man who talked little about the past. He had come to Khar’kov when he was already in his fifties to serve the local congregation of

1 I thank the American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS), the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, and the Nanovic Institute for European Studies and the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts – both at the University of Notre Dame – for the funding that made this project possible. I am also grateful for the critical reading and helpful suggestions I received from Tobias Boes, Julia Douthwaite, Lauren Faulkner, Thomas Kselman, Pierpaolo Polzonetti, Yasmin Solomonescu, Lesley Walker, and Martina Winkler.

German settlers. In his pastoral capacity he was a tireless speaker – preaching the Gospel, offering spiritual counsel, inveighing against drink and gambling – but otherwise he was a reticent man. He lived alone with his unmarried daughter and rarely spoke of the complicated odyssey that had brought him from his native Prussia to the edge of the Ukrainian steppe. Even when they had guests, he preferred to dine by himself in his study.² Only there, alone with pen and paper, did he sometimes feel free to reminisce.

The memoir that Rosenstrauch wrote about the events in Moscow in 1812 is contained in a small copybook held by the State Historical Museum in Moscow.³ It is a fair copy in Rosenstrauch's own hand. For what purpose he intended it is unknown. The text is a little under 22,000 words long (about three times the length of this article) and bears no indication of authorship. It covers the period of the war but also makes passing references to earlier and later events in the author's life. Memoirs about Napoleon's Russian campaign have drawn immense scholarly interest over the past two hundred years, yet aside from a single article from 1896,⁴ this narrative has escaped notice. I discovered the real author through pure serendipity. Muscovites filed more than 18,000 petitions for government financial assistance after their city was burned during the occupation by Napoleon. When I was studying a random selection of these to learn about material culture in the early 19th century, I chanced upon the proverbial needle in the haystack: a petition that matched the memoir in handwriting and key narrative details and that bore the name Rosenstrauch.⁵

Rosenstrauch's memoir is one individual's reflection on his encounter with the great historical forces of the age. It illumines the social and national solidarities that emerged in wartime Russia, because as a non-Orthodox, bourgeois foreigner, Rosenstrauch was excluded from them. At the same time, it helps us understand how a modern urban culture developed in Moscow, because Rosenstrauch was a participant in that process. The interest of Rosenstrauch's vantage point lies in his position as both outsider and insider in Russian society.

On one level, the memoir describes the collective experience of the middle strata of Moscow society: shock at the destruction of the urban environment, antagonism toward other classes of Russian society, and outrage at the enemy in general mixed with sympathy for individual soldiers.

2 J. P. Simon, *Russisches Leben in geschichtlicher, kirchlicher, gesellschaftlicher und staatlicher Beziehung*, Düsseldorf 1854, p.310.

3 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse in Moskau im Jahre 1812 zur Zeit, der Anwesenheit des Feindes in dieser Stadt", Otdel Pis'mennykh Istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo Muzeia (Division of Manuscript Sources of the State Historical Museum), f. (*fond*, collection) 402, d. (*delo*, file) 239. A copy of this manuscript, with numerous transcription errors, was produced in the late 19th century by an unknown Russian scribe: "Zapiski Rozenstraukha o prebyvanii vruga v Moskve v 1812 g." Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow), f. 1337, op. (opis', inventory) 2, d. 49.

4 M. Korelin, *Novyia dannyia o sostoianii Moskv v 1812 godu*, in: *Russkaia mysl'* (1896) 10, pp. 57-73.

5 Tsentral'nyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Moskv (Central Historical Archive of Moscow), f. 20, op. 2, d. 2219, ll. (list, folios) 171-171ob (oborot, verso).

On a second level, its interest lies in its engagement with the relationship between history, the city, and the individual. "I can confidently assert," Rosenstrauch writes, "that it was the *Lord's* will that I should not leave Moscow." Later in the text, he adds that "For me, this difficult time of trial had inestimable and blessed consequences"⁶. He thus spells out what is only implicit in most memoirs about Moscow in 1812: that his war narrative is a story of personal transformation. The Russian patriotic mythology of 1812, most prominently articulated in Leo Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, anthropomorphized Moscow as a collective entity with a unified consciousness and destiny. Rosenstrauch's memoir is a corrective to such myths, for it shows that Moscow was in fact a finely balanced social system vulnerable to catastrophic disruption. Like all cities, it was a place where History with a capital H bent the trajectory of otherwise unique personal biographies.

The third level on which Rosenstrauch adds to our understanding is by helping us situate Moscow in the cultural and commercial networks of Russia and Europe. Moscow was the principal site from which influences from Europe, which entered Russia primarily through St. Petersburg, were diffused into the interior of the country. Rosenstrauch had emigrated from Germany via St. Petersburg to Moscow, and he sought his fortune there by selling Western consumer goods to a Russian clientele that circulated seasonally between Moscow and the provinces of the Russian heartland. This made him an active participant in the networks connecting Russia with the West, and he sheds light on the way in which these networks operated in Moscow during the Napoleonic occupation.

This article will begin with Rosenstrauch's biography and his position in Moscow at the time of the war. Then, after reviewing the war narrative presented in his memoir, we will examine three elements of his experience on which the memoir sheds light. First, his difficult relationship with the Russian common people. Second, his role in the networks connecting Russia with Europe. Third, the journey to the interior – both of the Russian Empire and of his own soul – that he undertook as a consequence of his war experience.

1. Rosenstrauch and Moscow

Understanding Rosenstrauch's memoir of Moscow in 1812 requires a familiarity with his larger biography. Our knowledge of his early years is sketchy. Rosenstrauch rarely wrote or spoke of them, so what we know comes largely from scattered archival records. He was born in 1768 in Breslau, the capital of the Prussian province of Silesia, to parents whom he later characterized as burghers (*bürgerlich*).⁷ He was raised as a Catholic. As a young man he took up the profoundly disreputable profession of acting. ("Rosenstrauch" seems

6 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), ll. 30b, 53. Here and elsewhere, all emphases are in the original.

7 Aside from those identified in the footnotes to this article, the sources on Rosenstrauch's career before he came to Moscow are cited in my chapter: Middle-Class Masculinity in an Immigrant Diaspora: War, Revolution, and Russia's Ethnic Germans, in: K. Hagemann et al. (Eds.), *Gender, War, and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775–1830*, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 147–166, p. 149.

to be a pseudonym, perhaps adopted to avoid besmirching the family name; his birth name is unknown.) At the unusually young age of twenty, he married an actress. From 1792 on, archives and periodicals provide a continuous record of his employment with theater troupes that toured western and northern Germany and, for a brief period in the early 1790s, the Netherlands.⁸ It was a hard, humiliating way to make a living. Traveling actors were poorly paid, enjoyed little esteem, and could not build a stable life in one place. According to the traveler Johann Georg Kohl, who came to Khar'kov a year and a half after Rosenstrauch died, people remembered Rosenstrauch saying that in his years in the theater, "He had been so poor that he and his family shared a wretched bed of straw, and later in life he often told his son, who by now was a rich man in Moscow, how often [his son's] air of deprivation had caused him great chagrin, because he sometimes did not know how to feed and clothe him"⁹.

Sometime around 1800, Rosenstrauch's life changed directions. He separated from his wife, although he retained custody of their four children.¹⁰ Perhaps searching for social acceptance and spiritual renewal, he joined several masonic lodges while he was an actor with the court theater of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1801-04. This was not his first contact with freemasonry: in 1792, while touring with a theater troupe, he had joined a masonic lodge in the Dutch town of Kampen.¹¹ In 1804, he moved to Russia (for good, as it turned out) to join the German theater of St. Petersburg.

Moving to Russia opened new doors for Rosenstrauch. St. Petersburg could support a German theater thanks to the large German expatriate community and the many ethnic Germans and German-speaking Russians at the imperial court and in the bureaucracy. Germans and other Europeans who could serve as purveyors of Western skills and lifestyles – such as merchants, physicians, engineers, or artists – were in great demand, and far from one's homeland, it may have been easier to conceal aspects of one's past. Rosenstrauch also joined several masonic lodges, thereby gaining a further entrée into St. Petersburg's cosmopolitan society. At the same time, he was becoming increasingly religious and disillusioned with the acting profession. He thus had both the motive and the opportunity to make extensive changes in his life.

He was nominally a Catholic as late as 1801,¹² but his spiritual yearnings, and perhaps a desire to adapt to the mostly Protestant German diaspora, led him toward Protestantism. By 1807, people said that he wished to become a pastor. In 1809, he left the theater and started a business in St. Petersburg that traded in imported goods. In November 1811, he expanded his business by opening a shop in Moscow. Ten months later, Napoleon's

8 The earliest reference seems to be in *Allgemeines Theaterjournal* 1 (1792) 3, p. 213.

9 J. G. Kohl, *Reisen im Inneren von Rußland und Polen*, 3 vols., Dresden and Leipzig 1841, Vol. 2, pp. 168-169.

10 [Christian Nettelblatt], „Johann Ambrosius Rosenstauch," *Die Bauhütte: Organ des Verein's deutscher Freimaurer* (21 June 1862), p. 198 (reprint of an article from 1837). The last reference to his wife that I have found is a contract with a theater troupe from 1798: Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg (Hessian State Archives, Marburg), Bestand 5, Nr. 12,280, fol. 142. Later documents do not describe Rosenstrauch as either widowed or divorced.

11 Rosenstrauch joined the Masonic Lodge "Le Profond Silence" in Kampen on 10 June 1792. I thank Conservator Jac. Piepenbrock of the Cultureel Maçonniek Centrum "Prins Frederik" in The Hague for this information.

12 *Ibid.*

army arrived. After the French withdrew, Rosenstrauch recovered and built a flourishing business that propelled him to the leading ranks of Moscow's German community. A near-fatal illness in 1820 deepened his religious faith,¹³ prompting him to leave his business to his son and go to Odessa to study theology. In the last phase of his life, from 1822 until his death in December 1835, he served as Lutheran minister in Khar'kov (today the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv).

As he built his new life, Rosenstrauch systematically expunged his earlier identities from his personal narrative. Nowhere, it seems, did he speak or write about his parents, his youth, his erstwhile Catholicism, or his marriage; these were apparently painful topics that he preferred to leave behind. He was secretive even toward his superiors in the ecclesiastical bureaucracy. In 1827, in an official questionnaire that asked for details about his biography, he said nothing at all about his life before he became a merchant in Moscow.¹⁴ In the reminiscences of those who knew him, references to his theater career are rare and sometimes utterly misleading. Kohl heard in Khar'kov after Rosenstrauch's death that he was from Prague and had been a set painter – in other words, a man of the theater, but at least not an actor.¹⁵ Of course, Rosenstrauch was an actor from Breslau, but his friend Leopold Czermack was in fact a set painter from Prague. Evidently, Rosenstrauch appropriated his friend's biography to improve his own image. According to another story, he was a merchant who became associated with the theater only when he was offered the directorship of a theater in Moscow. He allegedly accepted because he wanted to impose Christian values on the actors and censor the plays they performed, and had to resign when the public insisted on the immoral entertainments to which it was accustomed.¹⁶ Rosenstrauch's ability to remake himself during his years in Moscow owed much to the ongoing transformation of the city itself. Moscow in the early 19th century was becoming an urbane European metropolis. As recently as the mid-18th century, a Westernized way of life was restricted to the aristocratic elite. Since then, a more democratic public culture had emerged, with masonic lodges, a few coffee houses, a public theater, and a tree-lined boulevard for genteel promenading. Old-fashioned haggling and hard-sell tactics remained the norm in most of Moscow's retail trade, but elegant, foreign-owned stores like Rosenstrauch's were beginning to offer courteous service and fixed prices. Moscow on the eve of the Napoleonic occupation was beginning to acquire a bourgeois urban culture.

Foreigners played an important role in building this culture. According to the police count of the population in the winter of 1811-12, Moscow had 275,477 inhabitants. Sixty-one percent of these were legally serfs or state (that is, non-serf) peasants, generally migrant laborers who put down no deep roots in the city. The core constituency for

13 Letter from Rosenstrauch to M. P. Barataev, 2 March 1820. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow), f. 48, op. 1, d. 494, ll. 10-11.

14 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg), f. 828, op. 1 dop., d. 37, ll. 30ob-31.

15 J. G. Kohl, *Reisen im Inneren von Rußland und Polen* (note 9), Vol. 2, pp.168-169.

16 J. C. F. Burk, *Evangelische Pastoral-Theologie in Beispielen*, 2 vols., Stuttgart 1838-1839, Vol. 1, p.20.

the new urban culture consisted of people who were financially prosperous, were settled in the city, and had access to education. They were drawn mainly from the 15 percent – 41,660 men, women, and children – who belonged to the social estates of clergy, merchants, or nobles. (Most of the nobles were minor civil servants and their families.) Another 3,214 Muscovites were foreigners; the vast majority were Europeans, and 1,349 of these, by far the largest contingent, were Germans.¹⁷ Foreigners were important in shaping the urban culture both because they personally modeled European ways of living and because they specialized in culturally influential occupations such as the arts, medicine, education, and the trade in luxury goods.

Rosenstrauch was at the forefront of these developments. Each week, his son in St. Petersburg sent him imported goods (he mentions raw silk, tarragon vinegar, and ink¹⁸) that he sold in a store on Kuznetskii Most, Moscow's most elegant shopping street. He was also a prominent freemason who belonged to lodges that had both foreign and Russian members, and after 1812 he became a leading layman at the German Lutheran church and married his children to successful expatriate merchants. All of his social roles required him to be forceful, charming, and persuasive. These were skills he had honed in two decades in the theater, where he had acquired, as one of his friends observed, "admirable clarity of expression and eloquence," "knowledge of the human heart," and the ability to interact "with people of all conditions, great and small, rich and poor, educated and uneducated"¹⁹. Rosenstrauch was no lonely emigrant marooned in a foreign land. Rather, he was a figure of some importance in the Euro-Russian milieu in which Moscow's incipient bourgeois culture was being formed. As he looked back over his life, it seemed to him that a decisive moment in his social and spiritual ascent had been the 1812 war.

2. Rosenstrauch's Memoir

Rosenstrauch opens his narrative of the war by stating his intent to describe how he had witnessed an extraordinary moment in history and how his understanding of the power and wisdom of the Almighty had been transformed. It was apparently no one dramatic moment that inspired his deepened religious faith, but the cumulative effect of his entire war experience.

As the French drew near the city, chance events prevented him from leaving the city. In retrospect, this appeared to him as a Providential occurrence:

As far as human insight permits, I can assert with confidence that in Petersburg, absent a remarkable miracle, I would have not have achieved the same degree of prosperity with

17 P.I. Shchukin (Ed.), *Bumagi, otnosiaschchiasia do Otechestvennoi voyny 1812 goda*, 10 vols., Moscow 1897-1908, Vol. 4, pp. 225-28.

18 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), II. 22, p. 28.

19 A.W. Fechner, *Chronik der Evangelischen Gemeinden in Moskau*, 2 vols., Moscow 1876, Vol. 2, p.117.

*our trading business, which was restricted to that location; nor attained a completely changed way of thinking, which arose in me through the sufferings and dangers in Moscow; nor accomplished such preparatory work in church and school affairs through active participation in the proceedings of the church board; all of which had to have occurred before I could even take, much less carry out with any likelihood of success, the decision to become a preacher.*²⁰

By staying in Moscow, he writes later in the memoir, he was able to save his shop from destruction and therefore reopen for business as soon as the French withdrew, whereas his competitors first had to rebuild their ruined shops. In addition to a deeper faith, divine intervention thus blessed him with something that had always eluded him: prosperity, and the self-respect that it made possible.

*It thereby became possible, after eight years, to enter into the office of preacher, and until the present day, with God's help, to proclaim the Gospel free of charge, that is, without needing to accept a salary or compensation for the performance of [my] official duties in order to live.*²¹

The first days described in the memoir, those immediately before and after the French arrived, were terrifying. Together with his friend Leopold Czermack and other Germans, he spent the last days before the French came in hiding. Lower-class Muscovites were aroused against the foreign community by panic over the impending fall of the city, the chauvinistic propaganda of Governor-General Fedor Rostopchin, and their own class hatreds. Only the timely arrival of the French army, according to Rosenstrauch, prevented the drunken rabble from massacring both the foreigners and each other. The fall of the city came as a complete surprise to Rosenstrauch, and it had not crossed his mind that the city might be sacked. Then, standing in front of Czermack's house, he saw a rocket in the sky and had a sudden flash of insight: Moscow would burn, and Russia would triumph. As he wrote his memoir twenty-three years later, the cause of this premonition remained an inexplicable mystery to him.²²

He initially stayed at Czermack's house, but this became intolerable as marauding parties of Napoleonic soldiers grew increasingly aggressive. When he heard a French officer inquire about quarters near the Kremlin, Rosenstrauch offered his own apartment on Kuznetskii Most, presumably in the hope that the presence of officers would keep looters away. As a result, for the rest of the occupation, he hosted four colonels who were aides-de-camp to Marshal Berthier, as well as several newly homeless Germans and Russians. Rosenstrauch developed a cordial relationship with the French colonels, who in return protected him and his shop from looters. He saw the city burn, but his own street was spared. Forays into the city brought him into contact with various facets of the occupation: the streets littered with corpses; the widespread looting by enemy soldiers as well

20 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), I. 4.

21 Ibid., I. 32ob.

22 Ibid., II. 9-9 ob.

as Russian peasants; attempts by high-ranking French officers to confiscate wares from his shop for use at their headquarters; the recruitment of local inhabitants to staff the *municipalité* that the French had set up to govern the city; the French attempt to blow up the Kremlin; the riotous conduct of Russian peasants in the interval after the French withdrew from the city; and the restoration of order by the returning Russian authorities.

The themes of Rosenstrauch's narrative reflect the wider memoir literature about Moscow in 1812.²³ The authors mainly came from the middling social groups that formed the base of the new urban culture. Almost no one from this milieu left an account of the Moscow plague of 1771; the fact that fifty or so wrote about 1812 suggests that middling Muscovites had developed a more modern conception of themselves as individuals whose personal experience of history deserved to be recorded.²⁴ The topics highlighted in the memoirs reflect concerns specific to these strata. Middling status was established in part by leveraging one's tenuous resources to achieve an appearance of respectability. This made the middle strata into targets of lower-class resentment, yet they lacked the wealth that allowed the elite to provide for their own security or recover easily from material losses. Hence the memoirs focus primarily on the collapse of order and the degradation of the urban environment.

With Napoleon at the gates, most of the population fled the city. The elites went to their country estates and the migrant laborers returned to their villages, but for the middle strata, leaving the city often meant becoming homeless refugees. An estimated 6,238 people, disproportionately from the middle strata, were stranded in the city.²⁵ What they witnessed there was the collapse of civilized urban life. A firestorm consumed most of the city, the charred ruins reeked from the stench of thousands of rotting bodies, and an eerie quiet, insecurity, and nighttime darkness settled over the ruins. Stripped of the protection afforded by a stable social order, the remaining inhabitants suffered looting and violence from Russian peasants and enemy soldiers. They recalled with gratitude that individual enemy officers tried to maintain order, but mostly they remembered Napoleon's men as a ragged, uncouth horde that looted what they could and vandalized everything else.

All of these issues are prominent in Rosenstrauch's memoir as well. His portrayal of the war was not influenced by reading the memoirs of others; in fact, he wrote that he had read nothing at all about the war.²⁶ Instead, his interpretation of his war experience resulted from his position as someone who was an outsider in Russian society yet also shared the urban middle-class sensibility of many of the Russian memoirists.

23 I discuss this corpus of writings in my book *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762–1855* (Oxford, forthcoming).

24 On the history of this memoir literature (including an exhaustive bibliography), see: A. G. Tartakovskii, *1812 god i russkaia memuaristika: Opyt istochnikovedcheskogo izucheniia*, Moscow 1980.

25 The figure is extrapolated from post-war surveys conducted by the police; A.G. Tartakovskii, *Naselenie Moskvy v period frantsuzskoi okkupatsii*, in: *Istoricheskie Zapiski* 93 (1973), pp.356–379.

26 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3) I. 3.

Rosenstrauch's memoir expresses the outlook of an entire social milieu, but it is also a carefully constructed literary work that reflects its author's personal history as a man of the cloth and of the stage. Religion provides the general interpretive framework. The narrative technique, on the other hand, could be described as theatrical. Rosenstrauch shows a keen sense for visual and aural detail, reproduces conversations and monologues, and displays a flair for storytelling that moves adeptly between suspense, humor, and brooding meditation. For example, in one episode he describes going to inspect a cellar where some of his merchandise was stored and where, he was warned, he would find the rotting corpse of a soldier. As he approached, he saw his lost diary lying under the soldier's head: "My joy over this important find was great, and I bent down to remove it from under the dead man's head, which I succeeded easily in doing, but at that moment the supposed dead man began to growl in an irritated tone, like someone being disturbed in his sleep"²⁷. Later, in the anarchy at the end of the occupation, he was keeping watch one night on the roof of his house when he was suddenly plunged into abject existential despair: "The shooting, the screaming, the barking of the dogs, the clattering of carriages, the galloping of horses, in brief, the utterly dreadful surroundings of my lonely vigil had left me feeling truly forsaken by God. [...] I struggled and continued wrestling with truly mortal fear until daybreak." At that point, "two riders, wrapped in cloaks, came slowly up Kuznetskii Most." Afraid that they might be Frenchmen who had come back to set explosives to blow up the city, he watched in terror as "they stopped just in front of our house, on the opposite side of the street, and one of them dismounted and gave his horse to the other to hold. Already I thought that they had noticed me [...] and my fear returned tenfold [...] when I saw that the dismounted horseman" – who turned out to be a Russian police dragoon – "merely wanted to answer the call of nature"²⁸.

Another aspect of the memoir that reflects Rosenstrauch's individual circumstances is its reticence about his biography. The authorial voice is that of a charming raconteur who is nonetheless guarded about his personal story. He says nothing of his childhood or youth. He mentions encountering the French army in Holland in 1793 and in the Rhineland in 1795, but not that he was in those places as a traveling actor. He mentions friends in Moscow who worked for the theater, but without revealing that he had once shared their profession. He speaks of his son and daughter, but says nothing of their mother. Most of what might allow a reader to reconstruct his life is shrouded in silence.

3. Class Struggle

One theme that is prominent both in Rosenstrauch and in the Russian memoirs is class conflict. The Russian memoirs express resentments in two directions: against the elites, and against the peasants. The elites were accused of dishonesty and cowardice. Many Muscovites recalled that they stayed in the city because Governor-General Rostopchin's

27 Ibid., II. 22-22ob.

28 Ibid., II. 50-51.

chauvinistic propaganda persuaded them that the enemy would never reach Moscow. When the French arrived anyway, rich nobles bought up the remaining horses and fled to safety, thereby (in the words of a Moscow priest's son) "saving their own skins while surrendering [the people] and the metropolis itself to Napoleon"²⁹. Feelings toward the peasants from the surrounding countryside were similarly bitter, both because hordes of them came to loot the abandoned city – as late as 1898, a priest's son wrote that he had heard that they fell upon Moscow "like locusts," that is, like a Biblical plague³⁰ – and because of the hostility that refugees from Moscow sometimes encountered in rural villages.

Rosenstrauch writes in a similar vein, but his position as a foreigner affected his perspective. The memoirs by middling Russians suggest that conflicts with peasants were often the result of chance or misunderstanding (e. g., in cases when Russians in European dress were taken for Frenchmen). According to the memoirs, such conflicts could be defused if one identified oneself as a fellow Russian and did not try to assert social authority, for example by trying to stop the looting. Moreover, middling Russians felt alienated not only from the peasants but also from the aristocracy. Rosenstrauch by contrast, as a European and purveyor of foreign luxuries to the wealthy, was a magnet for popular hostility and had much to lose from a breakdown of the social order. Hence his loyalties were firmly on the side of the Russian elites. In the final days before the French arrived, he recalled, he was chased by a mob that shouted, "You cursed foreigners, we will kill you." His own coachman, "an insolent young fellow with a Satanic physiognomy," assembled men in the courtyard of Rosenstrauch's house for military drills. Ostensibly they were answering Rostopchin's appeal to fight the French, but the coachman "harangued" them, saying that "now the tables have been turned: the serfs must become *lords*, and the current lords must either be killed or become peasants." Adding a sexual threat to his class hostility, the coachman pinched the cheeks of Rosenstrauch's daughter and mockingly promised her his protection. The lower classes, Rosenstrauch wrote, also turned their violence and greed against each other: when they looted the Kremlin, "they killed each other like flies" while fighting over booty.³¹

Another prominent note in Rosenstrauch's account of common Russians is that he acted in a bravely paternal manner in response to their childlike irrationality. Various episodes illustrate this pattern. During the chaotic mass exodus from the city, Czermack's landlord, a Russian priest, promised to hide Rosenstrauch in his church. Then the priest sent his own wife to safety, and fifteen minutes later he "began to behave like a madman. He threw himself onto the ground, tore the hair from his head and his beard, smashed his face, [and] screamed and cried about having let his wife leave by herself etc." Rosenstrauch advised him to make haste after his wife, even though this meant forfeiting the

29 "Razskazy ochevidtsev o dvenadtsatom gode: Na Mokhovoi", *Moskovskii Vedomosti*, 1 March 1872.

30 A. Lebedev, *Iz razskazov rodnikh o 1812 gode* (*Iz vlechenie iz semeinykh zapisok*), in: P.I. Shchukin (Ed.), *Bumagi* (note 17), Vol. 3, p. 259.

31 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), II.5-6, 42.

promised hiding place.³² When Rosenstrauch returned to his own house, he saw "seven peasants who lay kneeling on the ground with faces like poor sinners" and whom the French were about to shoot. These were servants whom Rosenstrauch's landlord Demidov had entrusted with guarding the house. They had broken into the supply rooms and spent three days drinking, then foolishly fired shots at the French soldiers. Rosenstrauch pleaded for their lives, and the French relented and spared them.³³ Later during the occupation, serf domestics arrived at his house with wares from looted shops:

*Now I chided them as thieves and robbers for having so sinfully violated the property of their Russian brothers, and I declared to them that I would never permit such things to be brought into the house; I could not [forbid this to] French soldiers, but I very well could forbid it to them as Russians and serfs of Demidov's.*³⁴

Immediately after the French pulled out of Moscow, and after the first explosion by which the French tried to destroy the Kremlin, the servants broke into the storage rooms holding Demidov's possessions. Rosenstrauch stood up to them, and they tied him up and prepared to kill him. Then a second thunderous explosion rocked the city center and disoriented them, and he challenged them to kill him quickly, before a further blast annihilated the city and brought them a painful death: "Then you will go eternally to hell as robbers and murderers, and I will go to heaven, because like a righteous man I resisted the looting of your lord's possessions"³⁵. This admonition cowed the peasants. Some fell on their knees and pleaded abjectly for his guidance. He suggested that they flee the city center at once, and they followed his advice.

Whether the Russian peasants truly found Rosenstrauch so persuasive is open to question: J. P. Simon, who knew him in the early 1830s, wrote that "despite having lived in Russia for more than thirty years, he remained a bumbler in the Russian language, and whoever did not understand German had to do without the pleasure of his heartfelt and instructive conversation"³⁶. However, a belief in his own powers of persuasion was part of Rosenstrauch's self-image. In 1833, two years before he wrote the memoir about 1812, he published a moving account of his pastoral efforts to reconcile dying (German-speaking) sinners with Christ.³⁷ His narrative of the confrontations with Demidov's serfs also resembles scenes from a play; when the serfs back down before the force of his admonitions, he is at once actor and preacher.

Rosenstrauch resembles middling Muscovites of Russian nationality when he depicts the peasants as unreasoning, greedy, and hostile. However, his thinking about Moscow's

32 Ibid., II. 7-7ob.

33 Ibid., II. 13ob-14ob.

34 Ibid., I. 25ob.

35 Ibid., I. 46ob.

36 J. P. Simon, *Russisches Leben* (note 2), p. 312.

37 "Erfahrungen eines evangelischen Seelsorgers an Sterbebetten", first published in Dorpat in the journal *Evangelische Blätter* (1833) and reprinted in *Mittheilungen aus dem Nachlasse von Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch, früherem Consistorialrath und Prediger in Charkow* (Leipzig 1845, repr. Dresden 1871).

social order was also informed by his position as an immigrant in a society where European culture was connected with the state and the nobility. He echoes clichés widespread among both Russian nobles and Westerners: that common Russians were naïve and superstitiously religious, and were bullies when they felt strong but were easily subdued by a show of authority. Westernization and closeness to the imperial regime, not socio-economic status or one's position on the ladder of social estates, appeared to him as key determinants of social identity. He writes with respect and sympathy about nobles and officials, the two groups most strongly identified with cultural Europeanization. On the other hand, even though he was himself a merchant-turned-clergyman, he felt no bond with the Russian merchantry and clergy. In his memoir, the clergy exhibit the same irrationality as the common people, and Russian merchants, a class famous for its cultural conservatism, are never mentioned at all.

4. Meeting the Enemy

A further topic on which Rosenstrauch has much in common with the Russian memoirists is his perception of the Napoleonic army. Educated people in prewar Moscow equated the presence of uniformed men with order, and tended to see the French as a nation of shallow but also refined and graceful character. The army that occupied Moscow was a caricature of those expectations. The men were dirty, foul-smelling, and famished, and their uniforms were in tatters, inspiring revulsion and occasionally pity. They exhibited a certain panache as they marched into the city, but then their discipline collapsed. They sacked the city with shocking callousness. It was grotesque to see the ragged soldiers of a doomed army straining under the weight of carpets, women's dresses, and other incongruous loot.

The one ray of light was that the officers sometimes displayed the gallantry and bonhomie for which France was renowned, and attempted to protect civilians against the depredations of the soldiery. Obtaining protection was easier if one could communicate with them. Rosenstrauch's French was poor, but many of the troops were ethnic Germans, and three of the four French colonels who lodged in Rosenstrauch's house spoke good German. When German was not enough, Rosenstrauch could call on Czermack's wife, who knew French well.³⁸ Russians, too, reported having such contacts: many nobles spoke French, as did some serfs in noble households and Russians who worked for foreign businesses,³⁹ and Orthodox clergymen found that the languages taught at seminaries (especially Latin) sometimes allowed them to speak with enemy officers.⁴⁰

38 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), II.9ob, 16, 18ob.

39 "Razskaz nabilkinskoi bogadelenki, Anny Andreevny Sozonovoi, byvshei krepostnoi Vasil'ia Titovicha Lepekhina", in: "Razskazy ochevidtsev o dvenadtsatom gode" in: *Russkii Vestnik* 102 (November 1872), pp. 266-304, here: p. 288.

40 See for example: I.S. Bozhanov, *Tetrad' sviashchennika moskovskago Uspenskago sobora* I. S. Bozhanova, in: P. I. Shchukin (Ed.), *Bumagi* (note 17), Vol. 4, p. 57; "Moskovskie monastyri vo vremia nashestviia frantsuzov" in: *Russkii*

Rosenstrauch found himself close to enemy officers to a degree that is rare in the Moscow memoir literature. With officers from Napoleon's German contingents, he could appeal to ethnic solidarity,⁴¹ but his close rapport with the four French colonels who lodged in his house reflects more fundamental aspects of his position in Moscow society. An important function of Westerners in Russia was to model and disseminate European manners and lifestyles. Rosenstrauch did this first as a stage actor and later as a shopkeeper. In 1812, he reversed the operation, charming the French by creating an island of Western living amidst the ruins of Moscow. He cheerfully listened to their war stories, and told them about his own encounters with the French armies in the early 1790s, when three of them were still children.⁴² He also attended to their material comfort. They turned up their noses at the rye flour, groats, and coleslaw that he had in plentiful supply, so he spiced his dishes with tarragon vinegar, which they liked so much that they took some to Napoleon. Soon General Duroc, who managed Napoleon's household, came to buy up the entire supply; Rosenstrauch declined, because he needed it himself to keep his colonels happy.⁴³

A theme that is absent from his narrative but recurs with great regularity in the Russian memoirs is the vandalizing of churches. Napoleonic troops had a tradition of anticlericalism that manifested itself in systematic violence against clergymen and the desecration of churches: the soldiers vandalized icons, paraded in clerical robes, and turned churches into filthy, stinking stables and slaughterhouses. Rosenstrauch refers to this only once, when he writes that while still at Czermack's house, he came to the rescue of an archpriest "on whom the soldiers staying with us were trying to inflict every kind of insult"⁴⁴. Why he does not discuss this topic further is a mystery. As a seller of luxury goods and former theater professional, he cared about sights and smells, as he shows when he evokes Moscow's looted shops and the stench of putrefaction. His own church in Moscow had escaped desecration only because the pastor persuaded Marshal Ney to grant it special protection,⁴⁵ and at the time he wrote the memoir, Rosenstrauch was himself a pastor and had invested large sums of his own money to build a church for his congregation.⁴⁶ Perhaps he found Orthodoxy particularly alien, but his writings give no indication of antagonism toward the Orthodox Church. Another possibility is that the foreign community was too insular to pay close attention to the fate of Orthodox shrines. In any case, his silence is puzzling.

Rosenstrauch's conception of the war, as we have seen, emphasized two interlocking dynamics: a social conflict between classes, and a national conflict in which he was caught

Arkiv (1869), cols. 1387-1399, here: col. 1393.

41 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), I. 12ob.

42 Ibid., I. 43ob.

43 Ibid., II. 27-27ob.

44 Ibid., I. 11.

45 A.W. Fechner, *Chronik der Evangelischen Gemeinden* (note 19), Vol. 2, pp. 70-71.

46 A. Döllen, *Kurze Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche und Gemeinde zu Charkow*, Charkow 1880, p.20 and p. 26.

between the Russians and the French. More important to him than either of these, however, was how, in 1812, Providence had reached into his life and given his personal journey a decisive new direction. His narrative thus illustrates the war's transformative impact on the unique life experience of the individual.

5. Journey to the Interior

Coming to Moscow did not mean to a foreigner like Rosenstrauch what it meant to Russians. For Russians, Moscow and St. Petersburg were the empire's twin capitals, and both were equally associated with the opportunities and cosmopolitan flair of the big city, as well as its social and moral perils. Westerners, on the other hand, mostly arrived and stayed in St. Petersburg, Russia's principal port and most international city. Few ventured to Moscow, and fewer still into the provinces; *grattez le Russe et vous trouverez le Tartare* (scratch a Russian and find a Tatar) – the apocryphal quotation captures what many thought awaited them.

Rosenstrauch's migrations followed a path that was more typical of Westerners than of Russians. He first started his business in St. Petersburg, and only then moved into the interior by establishing a commercial bridgehead in Moscow. One of his masonic brothers in Moscow was the German theologian Karl August Böttiger.⁴⁷ At that time (in 1815–17), the German settler communities scattered across Russia's ten southern provinces were served by only nine pastors, leading to concerns in St. Petersburg about the possible spread of sectarianism and irreligion. In 1818, to reinforce confessional orthodoxy and central control, the government appointed Böttiger as Lutheran superintendent of southern Russia and charged him with building a stronger network of churches.⁴⁸ When Rosenstrauch wanted to be trained as a pastor, he followed Böttiger and went to Odessa. In 1822, he became pastor in Khar'kov, a congregation that heretofore had neither a resident pastor nor its own church building.⁴⁹ As he migrated across Russia, Rosenstrauch thus became a cultural ambassador of the Western-oriented imperial culture of St. Petersburg to areas ever more remote both spatially and culturally, and he settled in foreign communities that were ever smaller and more provincial.

Even as he carried European culture across the Russian Empire, Rosenstrauch was leaving his own European past behind him. For Russians, the war opened new perspectives onto the wider world. They encountered new political ideas, met foreign soldiers and Russians of other backgrounds, and saw new parts of Russia or even (if they were in the army) foreign countries. Rosenstrauch's trajectory was the reverse. As an actor on the German Enlightenment stage and a witness to the Wars of the French Revolution, he had seen the world and been an active participant in the making of European culture, and as a seller of

47 A. I. Serkov, *Russkoe masonstvo 1731–2000: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, Moscow 2001, p. 113 and p. 708.

48 Friedrich Bienemann, *Werden und Wachsen einer deutschen Kolonie in Süd-Rußland: Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinde zu Odessa*, Odessa 1893, pp. 81–86.

49 A. Döllen, *Kurze Geschichte* (note 46), pp. 7–12.

luxury goods, he brought refined European lifestyles to Russia. However, when he wrote his memoir in 1835, none of that meant much to him anymore.

For Rosenstrauch, what had been an intense engagement with the outside world gave way to a deepening interiority. He no longer, it seems, read very much. His recall of his war experiences was detailed and precise, but he had forgotten the name of the great battle near Moscow (Borodino)⁵⁰ – something he surely would have known if he had had frequent conversations about 1812. When important outsiders visited Khar'kov, his friend Simon wrote, local notables went to pay their respects, but Rosenstrauch "stayed in his study, where he would sit in a reclining chair and spin his snuffbox like a top on the delicate oilskin that covered the table. That was how he passed the time. Outside of church, I never saw him with a book in his hand"⁵¹.

6. Conclusion

Rosenstrauch illustrates the ambiguous place of immigrants in the spread of European culture in Russia. As an actor, merchant, and freemason, he promoted the secular culture and sociability of the European elites. His shop, which he left to his son, became such a fixture in Moscow that Ivan Turgenev mentions it in one of his novels (*On the Eve* [Nakanune], 1860). Later, as a pastor, he personified a warm Protestant spirituality that was and is likewise attractive to Russians up until this day. His account of ministering to the dying appeared in Russian editions (under the title *U odra umiraiushchikh*) in 1847, 1863, and 1998, and excerpts in Russian can even be downloaded as an audio file from the Internet.⁵² However, even as he helped bring Europe to Russia, he grew isolated from both. It was a paradox characteristic of emigrants. He had left his homeland to escape the burden of his past, but because he assimilated into a diaspora made up of his countrymen, the past continually caught up with him. Hence the desire for a fresh start pushed him ever deeper into Russia – farther from his native culture, but never any closer to the Russian mainstream.

Many Russians later remembered the Napoleonic invasion as an eye-opening event that led them, often for the first time, to see their country as a vast national community whose fate was intertwined with Europe. For reasons connected with his experience as an immigrant, the same war that broadened the worldly horizons of Russians narrowed them for Rosenstrauch.

50 "Geschichtliche Ereignisse" (note 3), l. 60b.

51 J. P. Simon, *Russisches Leben* (note 2), p. 312.

52 <http://video.yandex.ru/users/scyoa-com/view/48/>, accessed 4 March 2012.