A Russia Born of War

Gregory Carleton

As Romantic nationalism swept across Europe during the early nineteenth century, in Russia that sentiment exploded after Napoleon's invasion of 1812. While war can galvanize the national spirit of any people, to many Russians this was a conflict of a different order, as if Destiny itself had singled them out for a special test. One of history's greatest generals, an army numbering nearly 600,000, and a victory that would ensure French supremacy on the continent – all combined to create a scenario never seen before. Whereas Napoleon could marshal the resources of all his satellites and conquered territories, the Russians stood alone against this titan.

They passed that test with flying colours and in so doing changed the world. No other country had, by itself, repelled an attack by Napoleon and no one else had utterly crushed his army, once seen as invincible. The next year Russia crossed its border, uniting with Austria and Prussia in a crusade to liberate the continent that ended in Paris in 1814. Though Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo would come a year later, for Russians that was but the final act of his denouement. They had inflicted the mortal wound on their soil. If this was the age when other Europeans searched for national greatness, Russians need look no further. Theirs lay in a singular feat of arms, as given in the poignant summary by Denis Davydov, a flamboyant partisan leader: 'now my head rises with pride, knowing that I am Russian'.

The enduring engine of that spirit comes from Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. Whether as a novel, as a philosophical tract or as a historical study – he intertwined all three – ever since its publication in the 1860s, it has become Russians' primary source to remember, to relive and to understand the significance of 1812. Nothing the poet writes can rival it as epic; nothing the scholar produces can displace its scenes and characters as icons of that feat. In fact, its grip on the Russian collective imagination has been so strong that the novel transcends itself as fiction. Tolstoy's contemporary and fellow novelist, Ivan Turgenev, wrote that out of more than 'hundreds of essays on ethnography or history', this work was the 'faithful representation of the character and temperament of the Russian people'. It served, in his words, as a living document of what constituted 'true Russia'. And so the novel lives on, leaving it difficult not to agree with the conclusion of Konstantin Simonov, a writer from the Second World War: 'it is unthinkable, indeed impossible to imagine Russia without Tolstoy.'
Tolstoy’s impact – which has not diminished to this day – stems both from his creative genius and also from the story he crafts of the invasion. If, as a novel, *War and Peace* has many protagonists, then as a history of Russian resistance and ultimate triumph, it has only one hero: the Russian people. Never before had 1812 come alive as the saga of peasants and townspeople – individualised and sometimes identified by name – rising up against the French, sacrificing themselves, their villages and their land to stop and then drive the enemy out. Earlier accounts, be it in history, fiction, verse or song, had celebrated Tsar Alexander I, first and foremost, as the architect of victory. Tolstoy daringly flipped this hierarchy. For him it is the collective power of the people, an elemental force fuelled equally by hatred of the French and passion for their country that, in the narrator’s words, surges forth with one goal: ‘to free their own land from invasion’.

Tolstoy enshrines the 1812 campaign as ‘the people’s war’. He did not coin the term, but his novel is its unparalleled testament. Much of this is due to the fact that he avoids the monochromatic panegyrics that dominated Russian letters produced in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. To press this point even further, from his pen not all of ‘the people’ follow the heroic script. There are cowards, shirkers and sell-outs to the French. Moreover, Tolstoy underscores the suffering at their level – the human costs of leaders’ follies, the execution of civilians, the burning of Moscow, and the harsh toll taken by deprivation – that serve to de-romanticise the war. Taken together, these realistic inclusions do not dethrone the sense of triumph; rather, they turn ‘the people’s war’ into a majestic ordeal – made all the more compelling by the novel’s ground-breaking unconventionality.

If Tolstoy turned the invasion into a national epic, what made 1812 even more special for nineteenth-century nationalist sentiments was the recognition that precisely two hundred years before something similar, indeed even worse, had befallen their country: beset by foreign invaders, the Kremlin occupied, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church a prisoner, the tsar dethroned. Russia, nevertheless, survived, and the story of how it did provided nineteenth-century writers, artists and intellectuals yet even more historical material with which to wax poetic about their country. As a result, scholarly attention logically tends to highlight these later commemorations of and claims on the seventeenth-century past. In what follows, however, I would like to turn that search inside out, focusing on the narrative strategies employed by contemporaries then – particularly one writer, Avraamy Palitsyn, who helped give that story shape – in order to probe a key question: might their approach, as applied to a similar military situation, contain seeds of what would blossom after 1812?
National Survival

The dire condition in which Russia found itself at the beginning of the seventeenth century is commonly known as the Time of Troubles. Devastating famines ripped through the population, claiming, by modern estimates, nearly a third of them. Social upheaval followed as desperate survivors abandoned their homes and villages, while marauders and bandits descended, turning the countryside into anarchy. Politically, the situation was no better. At the very same time, and partly because of this social implosion, central authority collapsed into a chaotic melee among dynastic rivals, false claimants and usurpers – all seeking to gain the throne.

Foreign neighbours feasted on this vacuum of power. From the south came the Crimean Tatars who burnt the suburbs of Moscow; from the north, the Swedes entered, initially as allies, but quickly began to seize Russian territories around the Baltic; and from the west the Poles, united with Lithuanians, invaded. It was this last group which almost dealt Russia a mortal blow, thanks in part to the machinations of some of its most prestigious nobles. In 1610, after having deposed Tsar Vasily Shuisky (whose royal blood ran somewhat thin and was himself a usurper), they did the unthinkable: agreeing that rule should pass to the Polish royal line, they opened the Kremlin gates to its troops.

The looming crisis was not just political but profoundly religious as well stemming from the unique position in which Russian Orthodoxy saw itself. More than a century before, two events combined to create a watershed moment for Russian identity by putting its faith in an exclusive light. The first was the fall of Constantinople, capital of the Orthodox Christian world, to Ottoman Turks in 1453, and the second, coming a few decades after, was Russia’s own deliverance from its Mongol overlords, who had exercised control over the land for over two hundred years. In one stroke, or so it would seem to the ruling elite, God had made the momentous choice to elevate Russia as the supreme protector of the true faith. All other Orthodox Christians – Serbians, Greeks, Bulgarians and so forth – were now ruled by infidels or Catholic heretics save for this one with Moscow as its capital.

The ideology that resulted is most famously known as the ‘Third Rome’, following the logic that if the first, the Vatican, was controlled by Catholics and now the second, Constantinople, by Muslims, then Moscow was the new capital of Christendom itself. Other iterations of exceptionalism were that of the city as the ‘New Jerusalem’ or Russia as the ‘New Israel’ but under any name it bestowed on the Russian state a special mission: it was the last bastion of the true faith since only its lands were free from spiritual
contamination. As a result, the political imperative of defending the land fused with a religious one, meaning that any contest with its neighbours – Muslim Tatars to the south, Catholic Poles to the west, and Protestant Swedes to the north – could be taken as a truly cosmic one.

At the beginning of the Time of Troubles, therefore, each usurper or claimant to the Russian throne marched under the pretension of God’s unique blessing and routinely castigated his opponents as apostates of the Orthodox faith. Later, however, when none such rivals remained and the Poles occupied the Kremlin, the context and stakes of the conflict changed dramatically. The plans of the Polish king, Sigismund III, called for nothing less than the forcible conversion of his (future) Orthodox subjects to Catholicism. What was before a dynastic contest for the Russian throne was now, if the Poles succeeded, an existential one – in other words, a war for the very survival of the Orthodox faith.

That, at least, was the alarm raised by the head of the Russian church, Patriarch Hermogen, a prisoner of the Poles in the Kremlin. Sending out secret letters from his cell, he urged Russians to stop killing themselves, unite around their faith and drive out the foreign heretics. Others followed suit, raising the same cry through broadsides and pamphlets that coursed from city to city, especially in the northeast of Russia which remained unoccupied. One such example, author unknown, gives us a striking portrait of the conceptual categories in play at this level and in real time.

As would be expected for the early modern period, peoples and actions are rendered in biblical terms. The author highlights the patriarch’s role as a ‘pillar amidst our great land’, armed only with ‘God’s word’ against the ‘forces of Hagar’ and excoriates any who support the Poles as ‘Satan’s relatives’ and the ‘brethren of Judas’. The stakes are nothing less than apocalyptic since the enemy has come not just to kill and enslave but to ‘eradicate’ the Orthodox faith and replace it with their ‘fallen one’. Moreover, if Orthodoxy serves as the ideological foundation to unite, in the author’s words, ‘all of us’, so too does that very same land, identified here as ‘Great Russia’. The two, in fact, are inseparable since the loss of one, as is made clear, means the loss of the other. In short, the appeal is to a people whose collective identity shares a terrestrial and spiritual dimension to the exclusion of all others. Thus the ‘time has come’ to rise and fight, and the author ends with the exhortation to tell others and spread the word. What is more remarkable is that rhetoric such as this, echoing the patriarch and circulating in wide fashion, proved to have real power.

In 1612 a militia formed in the unoccupied territories with a single mission: to liberate Moscow from foreign heretics and elect one of their own as
that goal reaffirmed how religious and political imperatives merged while operating under a putative sense of self-awareness that was as much ‘Russian’ as it was ‘Orthodox’. This does not mean that all who joined the militia did so for such purposes, but the fact that the militia fulfilled its mission in precisely this way suggests that the idea behind it had concrete legitimacy: the Poles were defeated, Moscow was freed, and instead of looting and rampaging – as was customary on such occasions – in just a few months an assembly elected a young noble, Michael Romanov, tsar in 1613. While fighting would continue, the Time of Troubles, as is conventionally seen, was over. The state, the Russian people, and their faith were saved.

Because virtually none of the primary documents from this period have been translated, this crucial episode of Russia’s past remains relatively unknown in the West. Nevertheless, historians and literary scholars, who might disagree on other matters, concur for the most part that something akin to a national awakening occurred at this time. In the conclusion of Chester Dunning, for example, ‘Russia’s salvation came at the hands of the people themselves, adding to patriotic Russians’ growing sense of personal responsibility to defend their homeland as the last refuge of true, untainted Christianity’. On a similar note, Michael Cherniavsky has argued that only after the Time of Troubles did the epithet ‘Holy Russia’ appear as an expression found among the people, whereas before manifestations of exceptionalism, like the concept of Third Rome, were the provenance of the elite.

A Writer for the Time

A key voice from this conflict belongs to Avraamy Palitsyn, a high-ranking church official, participant in the 1612 militia, and author of an illuminating work that appeared around 1620, commonly titled The Narrative of Avraamy Palitsyn. Comprised of seventy-seven chapters, the work divides itself into three parts. The first six chapters explain why disaster befell Russia from the very beginning (a combination of sins committed personally by Tsar Boris Godunov who died in 1605 and collectively by the people). The final twenty-two chapters focus on the conflict’s victorious outcome and aftermath. In this third section, he describes Patriarch Hermogen’s role in initiating the campaign of letters and, with obvious pride, delivers a roll call of the cities which in 1612 sent soldiers to Moscow so as to ‘avenge Christian blood’. Here, writing in the third person, Palitsyn assigns himself a central role in the militia’s success, particularly in his ability to rally
Cossacks to their cause. Without Palitsyn's personal intervention there and elsewhere, the final outcome, at least according to him, would have been quite different.

It is, however, the forty-five chapters in between these two sections that concern us here because they have been relatively neglected in discussions about the roots of Russian nationalism. If the first and the third sections operate as wide-ranging macro history, the centrepiece of Palitsyn’s work is the opposite, focusing instead on just one part of the conflict: the siege of the St. Sergius-Holy Trinity Monastery. In fact, his account of the siege has its own separate introduction and conclusion from the main body, suggesting it was written as a self-standing narrative. Thus scholars believe it was likely produced at a different time from the other two sections, which later were all merged or edited into a single text. This begs the question: why would Palitsyn give the siege such narrative weight, far exceeding anything else he wrote, and what might be the importance of his departure from the norm?

While the Time of Troubles was witness to many sieges, there was none more consequential in a symbolic and, literally speaking, spiritual sense for the Orthodox faithful. In terms of religious prestige and authority, the Holy Trinity Monastery was unrivalled since its founding in the fourteenth century by Sergius of Radonezh who was destined to become one of Russia’s most legendary saints. As a model of asceticism, his lifelong devotion and piety inspired nothing less than the reformation of Russia’s monastic system, and his monastery became one of the richest, most powerful and largest in terms of land ownership. Such was its influence, which carried on this legacy in Sergius’s name, that the Holy Trinity Monastery has served ever since as the spiritual home of Russian Orthodoxy.

In 1608, therefore, when a large Polish-Lithuanian force that included Tatars, some Russians and others surrounded it, a better setting could not have been scripted for what many truly believed was a cosmic showdown. For eighteen months, the monastery’s garrison endured repeated assaults, hunger, deprivation and disease. Yet despite numerous offers to surrender, it never did, and the enemy eventually withdrew. This victory helped secure the final one, the liberation of Moscow, since the monastery was strategically located seventy kilometres northeast of the capital city and would later serve as an important conduit for and contributor to the patriotic letter-writing campaign.

The Holy Trinity Monastery was also the one to which Palitsyn belonged, though he was not there during the siege. His assignment was in Moscow. Afterwards, however, he spoke with surviving defenders, some of whom he knew personally, and read relevant records. It would be premature to suggest
that this approach gives his account something of a proto-journalistic basis, but the narrative flavour it adds does make his account almost unique for his time.

At first such a distinction might not be apparent. As with virtually all chronicles from this period, no matter where allegiances might lie, his script operates in conventional binary categories. Inside the monastery’s thick walls stand ‘Christ’s flock of Orthodox Christians’, ‘Christ-loving warriors,’ and the ‘lambs.’ Arrayed outside are ‘Satan’s hordes’, the ‘children of heresy’ or simply the ‘wolves’. Russians who joined the attacking side (and some did for purely mercenary reasons) are described as having ‘forgotten God’, as ‘vile apostates’ or, more poignantly, as ‘Russian traitors’. The narrative’s religiously-based superstructure also motivates actions that occur on a cosmic/supernatural plane. St. Sergius himself, for instance, descends from heaven to help in his monastery’s defence by warning of night attacks or causing enemy arrows to boomerang back and kill them. Another refrain describes the defenders as part of the new Israel, and actions are sometimes overlayed with biblical prefigurations of the same. At this level, little departs from our expectations for early modern literature – so much so that a doyen of the field, Dmitri Chizhevski, waved off Palitsyn’s siege narrative with the retort: ‘He [Palitsyn] is unable to illustrate his description in an effective way for he substitutes for concrete representation the petrified formulas of the old military literature’.12

Yet if we accept that premise then we prematurely close our eyes to what, in fact, makes Palitsyn’s account stand out, and, pace Chizhevski, why it decisively breaks from the past precisely in its representational strategy. In between ‘petrified formulas’ the narrative drives home a well-crafted sense of suspense, buttressed by an unprecedented emphasis on detail. Its short chapters, each typically featuring a dramatic episode, transport the reader (and, given literacy rates then, more often the listener) into an almost you-are-there event. We follow the action as enemy trenches snake their way towards the monastery walls while, below ground, unseen tunnels crawl closer and closer. The defenders race to find them before they undermine the walls and often send out night-time sorties to seize a ‘tongue’ – an enemy soldier – who is then tortured to disclose their location. Besieged Russians also scale down on ropes to surprise a foraging party that gets too close, or, with St. Sergius’s forewarning, ambush a night-time assault party, dropping incendiary devices on it and setting many alight – all narrated with a deep sense of satisfaction.

An intense attention to the physical setting and other minutiae heightens this impression. The precise names of the fields, groves, streams, hills and
gullies where the fighting took place proliferate (e.g., ‘from the Moscow road and the dam on Red Pond up to Volkusha Hill’). So too are the exact dates and even time of the day given. All of this is irrelevant to the actual fighting – all the more so for a reader who never had or would set foot on the monastery grounds – but not to the ‘reality effect’ Palitsyn seeks (he even identifies, at times, who provided him with what information). Underscoring this effect are both the inclusion of defeats and the candid admission that not all the defenders are worthy of the Christian honorific of being ‘lambs’. Some steal bread from the monastery stores to trade for drink with the predictable debauchery and mayhem to follow. Others shirk from duty or behave treacherously, either by deserting or signalling the enemy from the walls.

Quite often in these passages, the religious colouring fades, leaving an almost matter-of-fact account no matter the subject at hand, as in the following example:

On the nineteenth day of the same month [October] Lithuanians came to steal cabbage from the garden plot [located alongside the monastery]. From the fortress, seeing that there weren’t many of them, several [of ours], not because of any leader’s orders but by their own volition, descended down the fortress walls on ropes. They killed some of the Lithuanians and wounded others. At the same time a youth, the servant Oska Selevin, ran off to the Lithuanian forces.

This approach is particularly telling when applied to the defenders’ sufferings. As enemy cannonballs rain down on them, the monk Kornely loses his ‘right leg up to the knee’, while ‘that same day’ a cannonball tears off an elderly woman’s ‘right arm and shoulder’, killing her. As the toll mounts, a daily ritual forms of carrying the gravely wounded into a church dedicated to Mary, where they are given last rites and the men, at least, tonsured. The rising number of dead leads to inflation for the cost of burials, until corpses are just buried in groups. Hideous sanitary conditions combined with malnutrition bring on scurvy with people’s teeth falling out, whereas others are afflicted with horrible swellings and putrid scabs. Most devastating is the ‘non-stop diarrhea’ that immobilises sufferers and causes an ‘effusion of feces’, in which worms grow, spreading pestilence further.

In both a quantitative and qualitative sense, Palitsyn presents such a rich vein of information that his work overshadows any previous Russian narrative of war, in particular its closest rival of a half century before, *The History of Kazan*. That lengthy text describes Tsar Ivan IV’s successful
siege in 1552 of Kazan, the capital of a Mongol successor state to the east of Moscow, which ultimately opened up the Volga region and Siberia to Russian conquest. The author, whose name is not known, revels in the same ideological and religious formulas as Palitsyn: Moscow is referenced as the Third Rome; the conflict against (the primarily) Muslim Kazan is rendered as a crusade of Christian good versus infidel evil; and the triumphant outcome is a clear sign of God’s blessing over His chosen people. However, with the exception of certain details regarding the battle, such as Ivan’s practice of surrounding the city with impaled prisoners – it is he who earned the sobriquet ‘the Terrible’ – the narrative lens is primarily formulaic or in the abstract. Never are we given the level of detail that lends Palitsyn’s history such a measured degree of authenticity and nowhere does it match him in crafting an action-laden saga. Most importantly, for all its emphasis on Orthodox-defined Russian exceptionalism, nowhere in The History of Kazan do we get a sense of Russians as individuals, that is, as transcending the category of collective anonymity. Only those at the level of noble or commander are identified by name and action.

This last point is where Palitsyn’s history of the siege of the Holy Trinity Monastery truly distinguishes itself. No one leader or hero dominates, as would be our expectation from earlier accounts of war. Instead, a multitude of individuals come to us on each page who often hail from the lower castes of Russian society like the peasantry and monastery workers and yet are identified by name – even if, as in the case of the youth described above, they are deserters. Thus we are introduced to Vlas Korsakov, who was given responsibility to listen for the sounds of tunnel digging ‘since he was skilled at that’, and just like the aforementioned Kornely, we learn of the monk Kopos Lodygin only because he was also killed by cannon shot. Another episode features a peasant nicknamed Sueta (‘Restless’) from the village of Molokovo rallying fellow Russians with his pole axe aloft. And yet in another, the peasants Shilov and Slota from the village of Klementevo set charges in an enemy tunnel and, before it reaches the monastery walls, blow it up with themselves inside.17

Palitsyn presents these individuals as if they are worthy of identification because they belong to a common cause, facing a common enemy, and sharing the same challenges. The result is a collective portrait of the monastery’s defenders and their fate – the constant bombardment, hunger, illness and deprivation crowned by ultimate victory – yet at their level and on their terms across generations and gender.

Given the breadth and sheer length of Palitsyn’s account, it is difficult not to see in the siege something of a microcosm of Russia itself or at least that
part of it which would later rise to drive out the foreign invaders. Indeed, he encourages that impression, consciously or not, by beginning with praise for the monastery as part of that Russia which did not sell out either to the Poles or to imposters vying for the throne. Later he enumerates the many cities from which defenders hailed as if God had brought all of them together for this epic battle. From his pen, in other words, the siege reads as a parallel of the greater existential war in which he and his contemporaries could see themselves.

The conditions of the siege itself – a monastery, that is to say, sacred Orthodox land surrounded by foreign enemies and traitors – speak to the predicament of Russia as a whole. It literally is an assault on their faith, and Palitsyn plays with the monastery’s name in painting the attackers as ‘enemies of the Holy Trinity’. He avidly mixes the terrestrial and divine consequences of attacking so sacred a place, once again enforcing the idea of Russians as a chosen people. When a cannonball flies through the monastery’s window, it plows into a triptych, ‘nearly clipping Archangel Michael’s wing’, then ricochets into candles illuminating an icon of the Trinity, and injures a priest before expending itself. The offense, we learn, was taken personally in Heaven above. A wrathful Michael materialises, prophesising: ‘So, you faithless ones, now your [impertinence] has reached my image. The all-powerful Lord will have His vengeance’.18

The Lord does, saving the monastery from destruction in 1610, just as He would save ‘Great Russia’ itself two years later. For Palitsyn, a putative sense of Russian-ness blends with the Orthodox faith to the extent that after one successful encounter, he can write with confidence that the enemy has ‘suffered defeat from the Russian people, that is, rather from God’.19 What Palitsyn crafts is, for its time, an unrivalled saga of Russians defending their land and faith and through whom the Holy Spirit works Its wonders. In other words, it is a portrait of Russian Orthodox exceptionalism in action, but at the level of the general populace.

Palitsyn’s account represents a key window onto how a collective identity could be imagined in such a critical period of Russia’s history, and it leaves the impression that the monastery defenders with whom he spoke afterwards retained the belief of having been part of a miracle, of God’s direct intervention on their side, because they upheld their faith which, in turn, defined a proto-national affiliation. To be sure, this is what Palitsyn wants us to believe, but his unprecedented attention to detail and individuals suggests a certain legitimacy in what the ordeal might have meant to defenders of the monastery and to those later in the national militia which liberated Moscow. This does not mean that all on their side embraced the rhetoric propagated by him or the likes of Patriarch Hermogen. Moreover,
the binary categories of Orthodox versus Other that they employed were not always upheld by the reality on the ground since forces were typically multi-confessional. Nevertheless, we do know that at a certain level the fusion of being Orthodox and being Russian, as exemplified here and elsewhere, hardened decisively in what was taken by many to be an apocalyptic time.

Archetypes and Continuity

With the benefit of hindsight, Palitsyn’s contribution to this sentiment stands out – arguably more than any of his contemporaries. Two centuries before Russian nationalism exploded in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, he was already exercising and experimenting in what would become key symbols and motifs for its articulation. In other words, if his work is a manifesto of unbreakable defiance, of necessary resistance against foreign assault, and of the Russian people’s astounding ability to withstand any hardship, then already in Palitsyn’s hands we see the archetypes that would come to define 1812 in the collective imagination.

Equally striking in this regard is that his approach anticipates how Tolstoy would come to portray 1812 as ‘the people’s war’ *avant la lettre*. A narrative lens that captures the totality of the war’s impact on the population; an authorial eye that distinguishes individuals and does not hesitate to delve in details, even unwholesome ones; and a story arc that takes readers from near-disaster to absolute victory – both share this approach. In no way whatsoever, of course, is this to make a claim that *War and Peace* and Palitsyn’s account of the siege are of similar quality, but they were, in a sense, cut from the same cloth: chronicling the people’s ordeal during a cataclysmic war. This suggests a certain continuity in the idea of how ‘Russian-ness’ could be articulated across centuries because it is clear that Palitsyn touched a chord. Not for nothing did his history circulate widely and enjoy immense popularity. The large number of surviving copies – sometimes of just the siege itself which was often excerpted and thus distributed – led Sergei Kedrov, a literary scholar and contemporary of Tolstoy, to claim that it was ‘a favourite book of our ancestors’.20 Certainly no other work about the Time of Troubles from an eyewitness has been reprinted and anthologised for subsequent Russian readers to the same degree.

Another contemporary of Tolstoy, Apollon Maikov, essentialised that continuity by appropriating the idea of a besieged monastery as the symbol *par excellence* of a distinctive Russian identity inseparable from war. In his poem ‘The Annulled Monastery’, the narrator visits its ruins which metaphorically come to life as he travels back in time to the Middle Ages when the lands of
Russia (and much of future Ukraine and Belarus) were known collectively as ‘Rus’. Maikov’s poetic vision of its history is that of almost continuous foreign incursion, starting with the Mongols in the thirteenth century and running up through the early modern period with its reference to arquebuses and ‘the scars of sieges’ on its remaining walls. If the narrator asks – ‘What speaks from these stones to my soul’? – the answer, in a rousing crescendo, mirrors the heart of Palitsyn’s message using the same conceptual framework:

Stand firm! ... and you withstood,
Holy Rus, all the Lord sent you –
All the blood and burden,
Slaughter and pain.

A heavy hammer has forged you
Into one people – the pounding lasted for centuries.
But you know that God, out of love,
Punished you, and by that you are unbreakable.21

Notably, the archetypes of the Russian people that we meet on the pages of Palitsyn's history and which helped give shape to nineteenth-century Russian nationalism have not lost their vitality. The monumental sieges of Leningrad and Stalingrad in the Second World War only reaffirmed their iconic status, and in the twenty-first century, amid a newly awakened and resurgent Russia, they continue to serve as a common reference point for national pride by reprising an organic fusion of land, faith and collective identity. As championed today by filmmakers, political leaders, religious authorities and popular historians, the Time of Troubles, so construed, tells a uniquely Russian story – one made more powerful whenever the feeling of isolation and confrontation with the West arise.22 A significant share of the credit for this endurance arguably belongs to Avraamy Palitsyn and the narrative achievement through which he captured and passed on a truly formative period of Russian history.

Notes
5. On this tendency, which began even before 1812, see Andrei Zorin, Kormia dvuglavogo orla [Feeding the Two-Headed Eagle] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 157-186.
11. The most recent and extensively annotated reprint of Palitsyn’s account of the siege as a self-standing narrative is in D.S. Likhachev et al. (eds.), Biblioteka literatury drevnei Rusi, vol. 14, 238-355, where it is given the title Skazanie Avraamiia Palitsyna ob osade Troitsko-Sergievskago monastyria [The Narrative of Avraamy Palitsyn on the Siege of the Trinity-Sergius Monastery]. Subsequent references here are to this version.
14. Ibid., 263.
15. Ibid., 277.
16. Ibid., 307.
17. Ibid., 267, 269, 292, 283, respectively.
18. Ibid., 279.
19. Ibid., 341.
