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Publishing about 1812 in the long nineteenth century

A weekly journal began on the 8th January 1814 in which accounts of eyewitnesses from the campaigns of the French and the allied troops of 1812/13 were published under the title *War Stories from the Years 1812/1813, or Representations and Narratives from the Campaigns of the French and the Allied Troops, Morals and Character Traits of Battles and Sieges, detailed Description of Individual Rallying manoeuvres Drawn from the Reports of Eyewitnesses* (*Darstellung und Schilderungen aus den Feldzügen der Franzosen und der verbündeten Truppen, Sitten- und Characterzüge aus Schlachten und Belagerungen, ausführliche Beschreibung einzelner anziehender Begebenheiten, aus den Berichten der Augenzeugen geschöpft*, 1814). Printed in Breslau by the city and university publishing house, this publication consisted of four volumes, the first of which numbered over 400 pages. The editor, Friedrich August Nösselt, a history teacher in Breslau, was concerned to save the deeds of the previous years from disappearing into certain 'oblivion' (Vergessenheit). 'Sparing neither trouble nor expense', he had sought contributions from all over Silesia. The accounts were not arranged chronologically and began with Leipzig in September and October 1813 with little overt editorial intrusion. Each issue could be purchased separately and copperplate etchings were available to accompany the series at a cost that depended on their size and whether they were black and white or with colour. Each edition contained three or four pieces, unsigned, that typically covered two to three pages before promising to continue in either the next or an unidentified future issue. The journal ran to 108 issues, with the final one dated 27th January 1816.

Nösselt was not the only figure to identify a desire for eyewitness accounts of the 1812-13 conflict. One of the early single-author accounts published was that of Johann Gottlieb Haars from Braunschweig. Haars was conscripted into the service of Jerôme Bonaparte, King of Westphalia and he left Kassel for Russia on 1 April 1812 as a quartermaster two days after his twenty-second birthday. During the campaign he became ill and was taken prisoner at the start of December 1812. He did not make it back to the Fatherland until July 1817. Upon returning home, seemingly one of his first acts was to record all that had happened to him and send it to the printers 'at the behest of [his] friends'. The foreword to his memoir is dated Braunschweig December 1817, only five months after he had returned. The act of writing was clearly

important to this man who, despite being ‘tired from much work’, would sit ‘late into the night and write’ before he had to leave his *Stammbuch* behind early in the campaign.

Memoirs, letters, accounts, reports–both anonymous and attributed–continued to be published throughout the long nineteenth century and formed part of an increase in the volume of printed materials being produced and made available to the reading public. The educational reforms of the late eighteenth century had fundamentally broadened this category and meant that German speakers were likely to be readers and writers of German too. By 1800, books were fairly widely available with a lending library of some description in almost all major towns. Literacy rates are notoriously tricky to calculate, however, estimates for Germany tend to be high. Around 1800, roughly a quarter of the population of the German states were literate, and by 1870 this had risen to three quarters. In 1871 86% of ten year-olds in Prussia could sign their name. This common marker of literacy suggests that mass literacy came to Germany earlier than to the rest of western Europe. Exact figures are disputed, as is the definition of literacy, however the growing quantities of books, pamphlets and journals being printed had to be consumed (read) by someone. That someone was still more likely to be an urban male with both education and leisure time to read and enough money to buy access to written materials, but measures of literacy rates across the German-speaking areas demonstrate that this was no longer exclusively the case.

Commercial lending libraries were but one part of a diverse infrastructure providing access to books and other written materials. Various reading societies and coffee houses provided access to books, journals, and pamphlets etc. and a place in which to read them, for a modest fee. Novels continued to gain in popularity throughout the century and frequently formed a substantial portion of both library holdings and reading society acquisitions, with the historical novels of Walter Scott and later Karl May as enduring favourites. Indeed, the popularity of novels among young women became a cause of concern for some as part of early debates about the influence of mass media on vulnerable or impressionable social groups. Travel literature and biographies offered a different way to transport the reader to distant times and places and were another popular choice. The movement away from intensive repeated reading of a small selection of books to extensive reading of a broader range of books during the Enlightenment era nurtured a booming trade in books as individuals sought both information and distraction in printed pages.

The returning soldiers writing their accounts of their campaigns did so within generic conventions. This is sometimes signalled in titles and subtitles with terms such as ‘war trip’ (Kriegsfahrt) and ‘war journey’ (Kriegsreise) as well as biographical terms ‘life at war’

(Kriegsleben) and ‘life as a soldier’ (Soldatenleben). The modification of the terms ‘journey’ (Reise) and ‘life’ (Leben) with military words ‘war’ (Krieg) and ‘soldier’ (Soldat) also marks what is distinctive about these volumes, namely that they are personal stories of world/military events. Meanwhile, the professionalization of writing from exclusively the pastime of the independently wealthy to a marketable commodity went hand in hand with the expanding book market. Most of the authors of the early texts state that they do not think of themselves as writers, but as soldiers. They also report that they had been asked by friends to write down their experiences, or that the importance of the events required that they be recorded for future generations, specifically the immediate next generation who were too young to have experienced the conflicts directly.

Johann Gottlieb Haars was no exception. The *Apologia* (Vorerinnerung) with which his volume opens contains many of the caveats and requests common to other soldiers’ memoirs. Among them, a hope that despite only relating the events he experienced directly, his account might offer something greater, carrying value for those whose husbands, sons and brothers had not returned. The titular mention of his identity as ‘a Braunschweiger’ also hints at this greater function: by describing the tale as one of a man of Braunschweig, Haars leaves open the possibility that it could be that of *any* man of Braunschweig. In the same passage he also acknowledges his lack of professional literary training and apologises for the unadorned nature of his prose, referring to his book as ‘the following unsophisticated narrative’ (die nachfolgende ungekünstelte Erzählung). It has been argued that it is precisely this ‘ungekünstelte’ (unsophisticated), direct language which appealed to readers eager both to understand the disastrous campaign and to learn more about their eastern neighbours in Russia and elsewhere. Before sending his ‘poor effort’ (geringes Machwerk) out into the world, he offers a final apology. Returning to the theme of truth he describes his style as ‘entirely without ornament’ (ganz ohne Schmuck) and shared in ‘in raw, naked truth’ (roher, nackter Wahrheit). He remarks that ‘the soldier does not easily learn the beauty of style’ (Der Soldat lernt nicht leicht die Schönheit des Styls) thus reminding readers that this is a story defined not by the ‘style’ with which it is written, but rather by its author’s identity as a soldier, again positioning the author first and foremost as a soldier rather than a writer.

Accounts such as that of Haars continue to appear throughout the nineteenth century, with their publication dates clustering around anniversaries. Like Haars, Christoph C. Zimmermann was in his early twenties when he joined the army to fight with the French. Zimmermann was one of nine children and as such his father could not afford the 3000 Thaler required by the authorities to keep all his sons away from military service and as Zimmermann spoke some

French he thought he might make a career in military service. Writing half a century later, Christoph Zimmermann's preamble is punctuated by thoughts of the passing of time and the decreasing number of people who remember Germany's humiliation. In *To Siberia: Memories from the Campaign to Russia and from Captivity, 1812-1814* (*Bis nach Sibirien. Erinnerungen aus dem Feldzuge nach Rußland und aus der Gefangenschaft, 1812-1814*), he seeks to supplement 'the shadow of memory' with 'short sketches'. He identifies his main audience as his family, and notes that it was God's care that brought him back, from among the thousands who left for the campaign, of whom only returned. He then writes of the need for the 'manly power' (die mannhafte Kraft) which alone can resist the humiliations of earlier times, and finally closes with a reference to a 'united' Fatherland. In this manner Zimmermann positions his personal memories as a call for present political unity. The closing sentence of the whole book returns to this theme referencing a future 'father's house' with no more separation and where 'peace is no more disturbed through the war lust of a conqueror' (Eroberers Kriegslust).
The concern to preserve memories, and the memory of others, demonstrated by both Nösselt and other contemporary soldier-authors was a common trait. Karl von Suckow, again writing in 1862, wanted to 'secure [his] memories on the page'. Von Suckow was twenty five in 1812, and seventy five at the fifty-year anniversary in 1862. This was the last significant anniversary that these men, and many of their comrades would witness. Already in the previous decades volumes of memoirs and accounts had begun to appear in the name of a veteran, but 'edited by his son' (Franz Röder's papers were worked into a book by his son Carl in 1848 and Franz Ludwig August von Meerhimb's account again edited by his son in 1860). Others were reworked from the papers of a veteran, typically by another male relative. Often the deceased would have prepared his diaries and notes, possibly with an intention to publish them himself, or as an earlier act of memorialisation. Thus, with ever increasing frequency, the eyewitness accounts were being mediated by a younger generation. As a result, allusions began to made to modifying writing styles that modern readers might find difficult or unappealing, and to removing apparently less relevant passages. The Russian Campaign was becoming a part of a history which could still be told through eye witness accounts, but these had begun to need some contextualisation and editing. Previously regional stories started to emphasise sacrifice for the fatherland as a constituent part of an emerging national story.
The centenary of 1812 coincided with widespread militarisation of European societies. The ingenuity and will to survive demonstrated by the soldiers in 1812-13, especially those taken prisoner, offered a useful template for a resilient and adventurous youth. Familial links to the past were sometimes preserved such as the short volume from Tony Schumacher *My*

Grandfather's Experiences in the War Against Russia 1812 and his Heroic Death at Dennewitz 1813: A Narrative (*Meines Großvaters Erlebnisse im Krieg gegen Rußland 1812 und sein Heldentod bei Dennewitz 1813 : Erzählung,* Stuttgart, 1910), but increasingly the work was being done by historians, other military men and commercial editors. Paul Holzhausen both edited the memoirs of soldier-authors and wrote a history of 1812 drawing heavily upon them. He was involved with the preparation of the memoirs of Heinrich Ulrich Ludwig von Roos, Jean Roch Coignet, and Joseph Maillinger, working with the publisher Robert Lutz as part of their 'Library of Memoirs (*Memoirenbibliothek*) series, focussing on the period of the Napoleonic and revolutionary wars. Lutz's 'Library of Memoirs' alongside *From Yellowed Parchments and Papers* (*Aus vergilbten Pergamenten und Papieren*) produced affordable abridged editions of what were typically multi-volume memoirs for the modern German book-buying public.

For the centenary, accounts which had already become established as part of regional or national history were re-released as children's books. Marketed as part of a *Youth Library* (*Jugendbibliothek*) these editions again reduced multi-volume accounts from earlier in the century to much shorter works seemingly modelled on adventure stories for the younger reader. By the centenary much of the nuance of the earlier accounts–which had often been a hybrid of travel literature and biography–was replaced by volumes which conformed more directly to historical narratives or adventure stories. The somber reflective and memorial tone was superseded by the excitement of adventure and sacrifice.

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