

### Natalia Pushkareva: Remarks at the AWSS Reception, November 2017

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be the recipient of the *Association for Women in Slavic Studies* Outstanding Achievement Award for 2017, so I thank the Association and all of you, my friends and colleagues. I'm grateful and proud to receive this recognition of my efforts in promoting Russian women's history.

It is flattering that my efforts were noticed and appreciated by colleagues in the United States, the country that *first* (long before the other countries including my own country, Russia) noticed my research in this field in the distant 1980s. So many years ago my topic was not considered scientific in the USSR. Senior colleagues recommended that I stop trying to reconstruct a "separate women's history" and finally return from the world of my fantasies into reality. Even at the end of the 1980s -- as I already worked at the Institute of Ethnology (and where I still work now, and where the Women's and Gender Studies Department was established in 1990s when I became Professor in Russian History) -- the "women's theme" was not recognized as important and actual at my institute.

I published my book *Women in Old Russia* in 1989 (in 100,000 copies!), but no Russian scientific journal published even a short review about it. On the contrary, more than 20 foreign magazines replied to my publication, but first of all, there were American ones. The administration of my Institute of Ethnology tried to preserve -- in this context -- silence and disinterest. My director, Professor Tishkov, Academician, insisted that I develop the history of Russian emigration or write about the foreign historiography of Eastern Slavs. These topics were my *плановые темы* (topics that were interesting for Department of History at our Russian Academy of Sciences), so I worked on these topics also... But simultaneously I wrote about women. I wrote about them for my pleasure and was inspired by support from abroad.

In a situation of moral pressure, my connections with scholars from the United States played a huge role. Their embodiment for me since 1981 was my friend - I consider her my American sister - Eve Levin. Now she is a professor at the University of Kansas and editor-in-chief of the well-known journal *The Russian Review*. But many years ago we started our scientific path together. Her translation of my book *Women in Russian History* was a huge work that needed a lot of her free time. I'm proud that her efforts were rewarded with the Heldt Prize.

I consider myself an extremely lucky person - just because I met my Evie once, and she introduced me to the world of her friends - medievalists, specialists in Russian Studies, and they learned about me. But to be a medievalist in Russia is not a profession, it's a sort of medical diagnosis. It's hard work, not well paid, as you can imagine. Only very persistent researchers can remain medievalists, ready to spend fast all free time in the archives where you can find something not every day, but only sometimes. What about me, I wasn't so resistant.

At the end of the 1990s I was charmed by the concept of gender and began to investigate theoretical issues. The results of this work one can see in my special monograph *The Gender Concept and Historical Knowledge* (2007). At the same time, I intensified my efforts to unite

colleagues of mine into an institutional structure for women researchers in our field. Marianna Muravieva, the contemporary well known Russian historian (now she is professor at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, but 15 years ago she was my "student" at Foros Gender School) and some other friends and former graduate students helped me to find the Russian Association of Researchers in Women's History (RAIZHI). In 2008 it was registered by our Ministry of Justice. This Association now embraces more than 400 researchers in 52 cities and universities in Russia.

And once more our American sisters – I mean the Association for Women in Slavic Studies - gave us support and began to help us, our organization, all of us - Russian women historians. These efforts cannot be overemphasized. I hope that this was the beginning of our long and successful association. We will do our best to make it so!

Old attitudes treating women's history as some sort of illustrative addition to "big" history (the history of social classes, and political and economic phenomena), which is traditional and "male", are far from a vestige of the past in Russia now. Unfortunately, it is true. The history of women in Russia cannot be written without a drastic change in the academic "lens". I mean the knowledge of the methods of feminist anthropology. But it seems impossible now! Contemporary Russian women, whose quality of life is far from that of Western European and American women, and who work in underpaid economic sectors, cannot formulate a social demand for a new vision of their own history. Their minds are typically dominated by old stereotypes about what is expected and what is correct, and conservative approaches to tradition and family values are forced on them by the mass media.

This is why the representatives of the feminist movement in Russian historiography, our Association (our RAIZHI) are fulfilling – sorry for the pathos! - an important social and historical mission. I think that my colleagues and I are fated to use academic boldness to formulate new problems in the history of women, and to deliver words of truth and justice to female readers. I hope that the relationship between our Association (our RAIZHI) and the *Association for Women in Slavic Studies* will become stronger with time.

Thank you once more for your decision to give the Award to me.