The presentation of Old Finland in the descriptions of Russian travellers and observers from the end of 18th to the beginning of the 20th century

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Abstract

This paper deals with the origin and development of the Russian image of the Vyborg province or “Old Finland” (the Karelian Isthmus and Northern Ladoga region) from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century. This region aroused the interest of Russia from three viewpoints. Firstly, the area had a developed economy and it was located not far from St. Petersburg. That was why its economic potential attracted Russian scientists. Secondly, the Vyborg province was of interest due to its military-strategic position. The territory was the most important bridgehead close to St. Petersburg. That was why the territory was subjected to close scrutiny by the Russian military officers. Thirdly, from the middle of the 19th century the Russian middle class citizens considered its area to be the part of Europe located nearest to Russia. The Ladoga region became an attraction for Russian tourists. Accordingly, the image of Vyborg province in 19th-century Russia was not homogeneous. The area aroused interest and was of importance for Russia due to various reasons and aspects. The formation of the image underwent considerable deformation after 1917. Nonetheless, it should still be stated that the variety of images of Vyborg province, which were formed during 19th century, did not disappear but continue to develop even at present.
Throughout the 19th century Finland thrives in partnership with Russia. The Finnish language is encouraged in schools and in government offices. From 1878 the grand duchy even has its own army. But in the early 20th century there are attempts by the Russian government to tie Finland more closely into the empire, merging Finnish units within the Russian army and imposing Russian as the official language. The degree to which any of this is acceptable becomes the main issue of Finnish politics, with resistance extending to national strikes and acts of terrorism. With the outbreak of World War I,