Writing in 1928, the French psychologist Pierre Janet suggested that time seems to speed up as we get older, because we measure passing time against the length of our lives.

Being President of BASEES has taken just over 4% of my life, and this time has truly passed very quickly, so quickly indeed that April 2016 feels like only yesterday. This feeling of time passing quickly, or, more accurately, not passing at all was reinforced when I glanced back at my first Newsletter editorial from June 2016. My opening words were "I am anxious". About what? Well, unsurprisingly: Brexit, President Trump, war in Ukraine, the rise of right-wing parties in East Central Europe, University ‘right-sizing’ exercises and visa difficulties (in both directions) for scholars travelling between Russia and the UK. These issues remain at the top of the list of concerns for members of our Association today.

But I will not dwell on the negatives of the past three years. Instead, borrowing from Sun-Tzu’s The Art of War (or, alternatively, from the latest arguments of hard-line Brexiteers) the view that ‘in the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity’, I can say that the threats I described in 2016 have spurred the Association to launch a series of initiatives to meet the challenges they pose. These have included two Europe-based regional conferences, one in 2016 in Hungary and one in 2018 in Uppsala, Sweden; co-opting an EU representative to the BASEES Committee (currently Professor Libora Oates-Indruchova of the University of Graz); the introduction of an Institutional Membership scheme open to higher education institutions and certain other organisations involved in Slavonic, East European and Eurasian Studies; the expansion of the support the Association provides to its study groups and to postgraduates to facilitate workshops and research trips; the introduction of formal mentoring schemes like the Women’s Forum; and the BASEES Committee’s decision to host our annual conference in UK locations other than our long-standing Cambridge base.

All these new initiatives have been possible only because of the solid foundation of core support we enjoy from our membership, our hard-working Committee, and our traditional sponsors, chief among whom are Routledge. We approach the next few years of general financial uncertainty in a relatively healthy state, thanks to careful management and to a proactive approach by our Committee to raising funds and expanding our sponsorship base. One exciting development of the past twelve months has been the Association’s involvement in the Oxford-Russia Fund’s “Russian Readings” programme, which brings scholars and civil society activists to the UK from the Russian Federation for specialist workshops focused on contemporary political and social issues.

As I look forward to the next three years, I can identify two agenda items that will demand my successor’s attention (fear not, I have no plan to sit on the back seat of the tandem whispering suggestions in his ear or to invent a new post on the BASEES committee as head of internal security). The first is the 2021 BASEES Annual Conference. Just this week, Matthias Neumann (President-elect) and I visited Glasgow for the preliminary planning meeting for this event. It dispelled any doubts we might have had about moving away from Cambridge, the site of our annual conference for the past thirty years. There are risks associated with changing location, but we are now confident that the opportunities outweigh them. Apart from the new ideas for the ‘scientific programme’ that our colleagues in Scotland will bring to conference planning, holding the event in a large metropolitan centre opens up many possibilities for diverse and exciting parallel activities. We fully expect the move to appeal to a new cohort of conference participants and to stimulate some
News from the Profession

Awards and Appointments

The BASEES Newsletter is recruiting a new editor, as the position of Information Officer on the BASEES Committee will be vacated in June 2019. For more information or to apply for the post, see here >>

Dr Victoria Donovan, Lecturer in Russian at the University of St Andrews, has been awarded a British Academy Rising Star Award for her project “Slavic Studies Goes Public: Creating an ECR network for knowledge exchange and capacity building in the public humanities”. This project aims to bring together ECRs from Russia, Ukraine, and the West to share knowledge about the public engagement work currently underway in the field, explore challenges and new directions, and, perhaps most importantly, to discuss the politics and practicalities of engaging communities (including communities in Russia and Eastern Europe) in academic research.

In other promising news for the BASEES field, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) signed in Moscow on 13 March 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding with the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR). This collaboration will provide for a series of future seminars and round tables to promote knowledge exchange between arts and humanities researchers in Russia and the UK.

New Publications from BASEES members

Cambridge University Press will release the latest monograph by Professor Simon Franklin (University of Cambridge), The Russian Graphosphere, 1450-1850, later this month. This book promises a ‘new approach to the study of writing, with a focus on Russia during its “long early modernity” from the late fifteenth century to the early nineteenth century. Taking an inclusive approach, it charts unmapped territory, uncovers sources that have almost entirely escaped attention and therefore provides, in the first instance, a unique reference guide to cultures of writing in Russia over four hundred years.’

continued on page 3 >>
New Publications from BASEES members

Also from CUP comes a new book by Agnieszka Kubal (UCL), Immigration and Refugee Law in Russia: Socio-Legal Perspectives, also out this month, which confronts the issue of access to justice and the realisation of human rights for migrants and refugees in Russia. It focuses on everyday experiences of immigration and refugee laws and how they work “in action” in Russia. [...] By this focus on individual views and opinions, Kubal highlights the complexity and nuance of everyday experiences of the law, breaking away from the portrayal of Russia as a legal and ideological monolith.

Several articles by BASEES members appear in Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War, a volume edited by Simo Mikkonen, Giles Smith, and Jari Parkkinen (De Gruyter), which focuses on cultural diplomacy and artistic interaction between Eastern and Western Europe after 1945, aiming to provide “an essentially European point of view on the cultural Cold War, [with] fresh insight into little known connections and cooperation in different artistic fields”.

Palgrave has recently published a new book by Anna Batori (Babes-Bolyai University Romania), Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema, on “the structuring of space in Romanian and Hungarian cinema, and particularly how space is used to express the deep imprint of a socialist past on a post-socialist present. It considers this legacy of the Eastern European socialist regimes by interrogating the suffocating, tyrannical and enclosing structures that are presented in film”.

Balletomanes and historians alike will be enticed by the forthcoming appearance from Oxford University Press of Marius Petipa: The Emperor’s Ballet Master by independent scholar Nadine Meisner, described as the first biography in English of the creative genius behind Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker.


This new collection of essays on the spiritual aspects of art in Russia challenges Clement Greenberg’s influential theory of formalist modernism, highlighting its irrelevance to the analysis of Russian modernist visual culture. As volume editors Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow point out, all the contributors believe that “in Russia, extrinsic ideas and influences – and, most of all, those of Russian religious and spiritual traditions – were of the utmost importance in the making, content, and meaning of modern art” (p.10). While the relationship between modernism and the spiritual has been discussed elsewhere in relation to such major artists as Vasily Kandinsky and Natalia Goncharova, this exciting collection offers a broader perspective on Russian modernist artists and critics by reassessing the influence of icons, theological ideas, Russian Orthodox and the spiritual traditions of Old Believers on their works and beliefs. There are insightful articles on Russian, Georgian and Ukrainian artists from several leading specialists in the field, including Nina Gourianova, Oleg Tarasov, Wendy Salmond, and Myroslava Mydrak, as well as younger scholars. All the chapters are of outstanding quality: well-researched, innovative and highly informative. A variety of artists and periods are discussed here, including Mikhail Vrubel’s depiction of Angels and Demons; Aleksandra Pogosskaia’s interest in esoteric spirituality and the occult; Kazemir Malevich’s use of the icon as a source of inspiration for his paintings; the semiotics of Russian culture and spirituality; Goncharova’s and Larionov’s indebtedness to the cultural practices of Old Believers; the German reception of the spiritual in Kandinsky’s art; Nikodim Kondakov’s 1927 book The Russian Icon; Stelletsky and the neo-Russian style in emigration; Nikolai Punin’s works on the rediscovery of Russian icons in the 1910s; and the spiritual in painting in Soviet Georgia. The Selected Bibliography, Index and Illustrations enable the reader to navigate this wealth of information. Hardiman and Kozicharow’s book will be a welcome addition to university library collections on Russian culture. It offers rewarding reading to anyone who studies, or simply enjoys, the richness of Russian modernism.

Alexandra Smith


The town of Novorossiisk on the Black Sea coast was the site of a successful Soviet military operation to retake enemy-controlled territory in 1943. The operation has been lavishy commemorated by numerous monuments in the town and its environs, and remains a focus for gatherings and rituals to this day. Her decision to focus on war myths associated with this small provincial town allows Vicky Davis to consider both Soviet-era and recent commemorative practices from an unfamiliar angle. Top-down initiatives, such as the construction of monuments, are shown to have been accompanied by local efforts in shaping the ways in which the town remembered its own war. Through interviews with local residents, Davis succeeds in showing what exactly is remembered, and how people relate to their town’s wartime legacy. That legacy owes a great deal to the myth of the Malaia zemlia (’Small land’) campaign built up in memoir accounts, the most famous of which appeared in 1978, ghost-written for Leonid Brezhnev, the aging General Secretary of the Communist Party. Brezhnev had been in the Novorossiisk area at the time of the landings in 1943 as a colonel in charge of the political section of the 18th Army. Davis shows how the myth of Brezhnev and Malaia zemlia was proliferated through school textbooks, a film, and a musical, and reinforced by Brezhnev’s visit to the town in 1974 (shortly after the latter received the status of Hero City). A particular strength of this study derives from material gathered in interviews conducted by Davis among the town’s residents; Brezhnev’s visit is still remembered warmly, even commemorated by a statue in 2004. This book touches on many facets of local remembrance pertinent to Russian memory of World War Two as a whole, including the marginalisation of events such as the mass killing of Jewish residents and civilian collaboration with enemy occupiers. Davis extends her enquiry into the very recent past, exploring the revival of war remembrance under Putin as both a formal, collective phenomenon and an informal and individual experience.

Katharine Hodgson
Elliot, tell us about your academic career to date.

In 2009 I began a BA in History and Politics at the University of East Anglia, eventually focussing on two main areas – the conflict in Israel and Palestine and the collapse of Yugoslavia. After graduating with first class honours in 2012, I left the UK for eight months backpacking in India and Nepal. While travelling, I applied for an MA in Modern European History at UEA and was fortunate enough to be awarded the Leipzig Scholarship. I graduated the following year with distinction. My MA dissertation studied population decline in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus introducing me to the complex period of history which has occupied me ever since. After successfully applying to study for a PhD at UEA, and receiving a studentship award from the Arts and Humanities Faculty, I began my research in January 2015. Since then, I have split my time between the former Yugoslavia (primarily Sarajevo) and the UK. I submitted my thesis in January 2019 and passed my viva with minor corrections the following month.

The stand-out moment of my career so far came when I gave a lecture on military integration in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina to an audience of academics, research students, military personnel, and peacebuilding practitioners at the International Peace and Security Institute’s 2018 Sarajevo Symposium on Post-Conflict Transitions. My research findings – particularly regarding the process of unifying the formerly warring armies in Bosnia and Herzegovina – were directly relevant to the work of much of the audience, thus facilitating a detailed and rewarding Q&A.

Why did you choose your current research?

I wanted whatever I was doing to have, on some level, a practical application in understanding, or indeed preventing, armed conflict. Hence my work has focussed on enhancing understanding of states, nations, and armies, and the relationship between them. Bosnia and Herzegovina not only represented an excellent case study for the exploration of these themes but had also remained in the forefront of my mind since a backpacking trip there before university. Studying Yugoslav history in my third year and writing my MA dissertation on post-war Bosnia reinforced this interest and provided the foundation of my PhD proposal.

You lived in Bosnia for several years during your PhD. What were the challenges and the rewards?

I spent over two years living in Bosnia during my PhD. The main challenge I faced was learning the language; after numerous courses and lots of practice I could read well enough to conduct archival research, use local sources and literature and understand most conversations. I still have a long way to go, however... A challenge I could not overcome was the indifference of various Bosnian state institutions to my research. I was unable, for example, to interview any representatives of the Ministry of Defence or the armed forces. Despite numerous attempts I was unable to gain access to three regimental museums which would have offered fascinating insights. I was told that I was the first foreign to civilian to request access, and that there simply was not a procedure in place for my visit.

Frustrations such as this dogged my research, causing me to rely on archival sources and interviews with officials and military personnel from the international community. The best part was my time in Sarajevo. Almost everywhere I went in the region, I was greeted warmly and treated to a humbling degree of generosity and hospitality, but in Sarajevo, this hospitality was unmatched, and I am now irrevocably attached to the city. I’ll be returning whenever I can, and I strongly recommend that anyone who hasn’t been should pay a visit!

How important is BASEES to emerging Slavic Studies scholars?

Very important. Primarily, BASEES helped me to understand the breadth and scope of the Slavic Studies academic community – not only illustrating the range of disciplines and perspectives that could help me better understand my subject, but directing me to researchers and scholars in allied fields. Furthermore, BASEES has offered support throughout my PhD. In 2017 a BASEES grant enabled me to conduct research in Bosnia which was invaluable for my thesis. At UEA, I was lucky enough to work alongside Matthias Neumann and Chris Jones, whose guidance and support helped me to prepare to present my work at a major academic conference for the first time. With my PhD now complete, the BASEES network enables me to map researchers and institutions with whom, and where, I hope to work in my future academic career.

We wish you the best, Elliot, and look forward to the published version of your thesis! You can read a 2018 article by Elliot here >>. If you have news items for the fortnightly BASEES Bulletin, please send them to bulletin@basees.org.
New Books in the BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies

We at Routledge are really looking forward to the BASEES conference on the 12-14 April 2019 and look forward to seeing you there. We also hope you can join us for our ‘How to get published’ session on 13 April at 11:00 - 12:30 and our drinks reception on 13 April at 19:00 - 19:45. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy browsing through and using your range of benefits below.

The BASEES/Routledge Series on Russia and East European Studies comprises original, high-quality, research-level work by both new and established scholars on all aspects of Russian, Soviet, post-Soviet and East European Studies in humanities and social science subjects.

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Record number of theses added in UTREES update

This year’s annual updating of the UTREES database of theses in Russian and East European studies saw a record number of new entries.

This year’s annual updating of the UTREES database of theses in Russian and East European studies saw a record number of new entries. The bibliographic details of 242 doctoral theses have been added, bringing the total number on the database to 5,638. Another record was set by the number of British and Irish institutions represented in the update: 68 in all, with 25 of these contributing one thesis each, ranging up to one university which yielded 31 entries.

As usual, the diversity of topics treated is striking. There is a study of the Soviet influence on Cuban culture; a feminist exploration of Sofia; and a look at wine-making in Tokaj. And one has to wonder what intrepid fieldwork went into assessing the soundness of Kazakhstan banks, or investigating professional online poker players in Estonia.

UTREES is supported by the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA), and can be accessed free at http://utrees.mhra.org.uk. A paper by Gregory Walker, 'Doctoral Research in Russian and East European Studies: Trends and Realities from the UTREES Database' (2017), can be accessed at: mhra.org.uk/pdf/utrees-paper.pdf

Corrections, additions and comments are very welcome, and should be sent to the Editor at gpmwalker@btinternet.com.

Gregory Walker
Editor, UTREES

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Selected New Titles from Glagoslav Press

We Are Building Capitalism! Moscow in Transition 1992-1997 by Robert Stephenson

Glagoslav Publications, 2019

Robert Stephenson’s book focuses on Moscow post-1992, providing a unique pictorial view of daily life in Russia’s capital during the turbulent early years of transition to market capitalism. Original photographs and supporting narrative by the author, resident in Moscow at the time, show how the old Soviet city and its inhabitants opened their doors wide to capitalism’s new influences, ideas and possibilities.

http://www.glagoslav.com/en/Book/1/206/We-Are-Building-Capitalism.html

Little Zinnobers by Elena Chizhova

Glagoslav Publications, 2018

Is it possible to cultivate fundamental human values if you live in a totalitarian state? A teacher who organizes the school play sets out to prove that it is. When her pupils rehearse Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, they come into conflict with Soviet reality. This is a book about love, the tough kind that gets you through life – and death.


Vladimir Lenin: How to Become a Leader by Vladlen Loginov

Edited and introduced by Professor Geoffrey Swain

Glagoslav Publications, 2019

In his book Lenin: How to Become a Leader, Vladlen Loginov, one of Russia’s leading authorities on Vladimir Lenin, discusses the revolutionary leader’s early years, his family, his political awakening and subsequent activities.