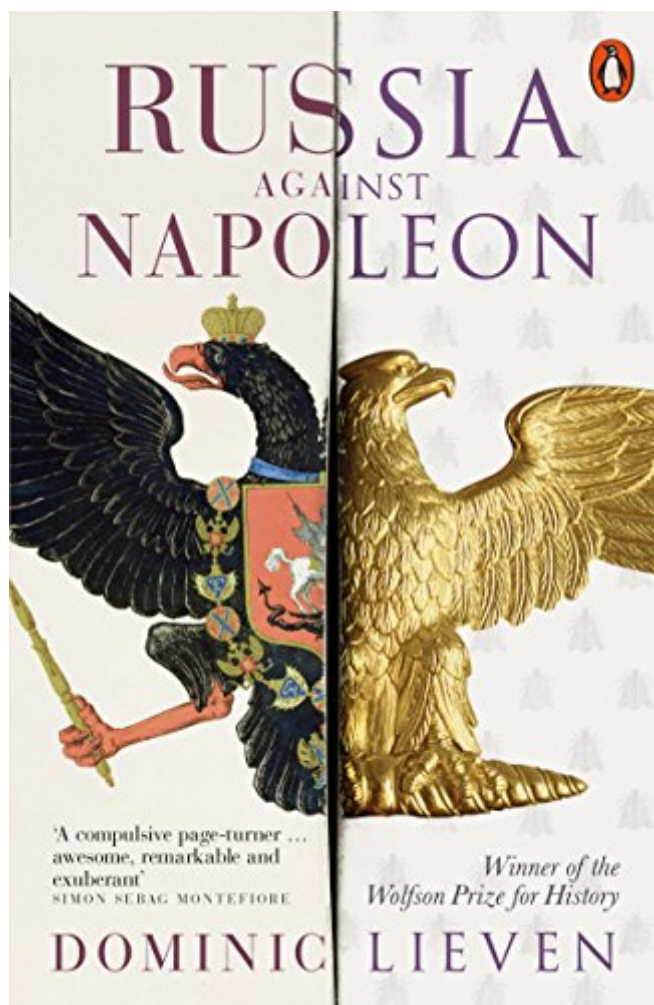


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Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle For Europe, 1807 To 1814



Synopsis

'A compulsive page-turner ... a triumph of brilliant storytelling ... an instant classic that is an awesome, remarkable and exuberant achievement' Simon Sebag Montefiore Winner of the Wolfson History Prize and shortlisted for the Duff Cooper Prize
In the summer of 1812 Napoleon, the master of Europe, marched into Russia with the largest army ever assembled, confident that he would sweep everything before him. Yet less than two years later his empire lay in ruins, and Russia had triumphed. This is the first history to explore in depth Russia's crucial role in the Napoleonic Wars, re-creating the epic battle between two empires as never before. Dominic Lieven writes with great panache and insight to describe from the Russians' viewpoint how they went from retreat, defeat and the burning of Moscow to becoming the new liberators of Europe; the consequences of which could not have been more important. Ultimately this book shows, memorably and brilliantly, Russia embarking on its strange, central role in Europe's existence, as both threat and protector - a role that continues, in all its complexity, into our own lifetimes.

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Customer Reviews

This is the best history of Russia's part in the Napoleonic Wars that I've read thus far. Unlike some of the other books on the topic, which cover only the 1812 campaign, this volume covers all of

Russia's wars with Napoleon from 1805 to 1814. The author does a really good job of describing the strengths and flaws of many of the main characters--Alexander, Kutuzov, de Tolly, and many others. He also does an admirable job of bringing to light many of the usually nameless Russian bureaucrats and soldiers that helped ensure victory by organizing replacements, fodder, uniforms, etc. The challenges that some of these logisticians faced must have been staggering, and yet they succeeded. The author also does a great job of breathing life into many of the significant players in the drama, such as Toll, von Diebitsch, Arakcheev, Ermolov, etc. The battle descriptions are good, but generally a bit brief and greatly hindered by the lack of adequate maps. While there are a handful of campaign maps clumped at the beginning of the book, there are only one or two battle maps (IIRC Borodino and Leipzig), and even these show only the localities, and not troop locations or movements. Generally, I would subtract at least half a star from this book for the poor maps. Finally, the author does a decent job of describing some diplomatic aspects of the wars, especially Alexander's views towards Napoleon, although the diplomatic coverage is not what I'd call comprehensive. Overall, a highly recommended book for anyone interested in Russia in the Napoleonic era, but I'd recommend bringing your own military atlas for a better understanding of how the campaigns and battles unfolded.

Napoleon is a divisive figure. Adulated in France, despised by the English: besides leaving parts of Europe in ruins by incessant wars and so many killed including the French male population, he left a lasting legacy not the least the Napoleonic code of laws still largely used. This book shows in great details how Alexander, tsar of Russia, not only defeated Napoleon on Russian soil, but gathered a coalition of allies to lead a remarkable strategy to crush Napoleon's Grande Armée in France. The author recounts in details the battles and tells the stories of the great and not so great men in the coalition, especially from a Russian point of view. Napoleon was a genius but nonetheless had to be stopped, and the brave men of Great Russia lead by an unassuming monarch, brought peace to the continent. I am Canadian by birth, French and have lived in Russia. My vision of the Napoleonic wars has been tainted by the hatred of the English, the adoration of the French for Napoleon and of course "War and Peace". This book presents a less sentimental, and probably more accurate point of view. It also highlights the great role Russia played for the good of Europe, and hopefully will do so again if the country joins back its natural place in the continent.

As a history buff whose favorite novel is War and Peace, I found this scholarly study, based primarily on recently opened Russian archives, fascinating and enlightening. As the author states

several times, our view of the 1812 campaign is heavily influenced by Tolstoy's view of history as a clash of impersonal forces. In fact, as Lieven demonstrates, the Russian conduct of the 1812 campaign was part of a carefully thought out strategy, based on previous experience with Napoleon by Alexander I and Marshall Barclay de Tolly (the leading Russian general at the outset of the campaign, not Kutuzov, who arrived late on the scene). The success of this strategy and the often neglected campaigns of 1813 and 1814 brought about Napoleon's downfall, not the Russian winter. The author's detailed descriptions of the 1813-1814 campaigns also helps explain the subsequent Vienna settlement. The Congress of Vienna is often described as if the map of Europe were redrawn on a blank sheet of paper. In fact, as Lieven shows, the territorial settlement in Poland, Norway and Germany very much reflected the military situation at the end of the conflict, which resulted from the strategy of Alexander, Barclay and their Prussian, Swedish, and Austrian allies. The book is very well written and carefully indicates sources without letting the scholarly citations get in the way of the narrative.

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