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Chistikov, Aleksandr N.

Saint-Petersburg Institute of History of Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Federation

Transcripts of the Leningraders' Narratives as a Source on the History of the Blockade:
1941–44

Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of creation and characterization of transcripts of narratives of the Leningrad citizens who lived in the besieged city during the war. The article is to determine the significance of this historical source for the study of the siege of Leningrad. The

idea to collect materials on the wartime city emerged in autumn 1941 and was implemented by the staff of the Leningrad Institute for the History of the CPSU, who began to prepare chronicles of Leningrad and its region during the Great Patriotic War. A notable part of this work was stenography of stories of the soldiers and partisans who fought in the Leningrad region and of the residents of the besieged city. The work of the Leningrad historians began in spring 1942, intensified in April 1943, and was completed in early 1948. The prepared shorthand notes were preserved in series 10 of the fond R-4000 of the Central State Archive of Political and Historical Documents of St. Petersburg. Over 350 of the 650 archival documents are records of conversations with the Leningrad residents. In the 1960s, 130 items (duplicates) were transferred to the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, forming the body of fond 332 of the Scientific-Historical Archive of the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. As a rule, the respondents were middle-ranking executives: directors and chiefs, chairmen and secretaries of district executive committees (raikoms); but there also were ordinary workers and engineers, teachers and policemen, scientists and artists. Questionnaires were prepared for representatives of some professions and positions in 1944–45, which permitted to identify common features in the life of citizens and specifics of the respondents' activities. Varied scope of the interviewees and wide range of questions were supplemented by the possibility for the narrator to use various documents in their answers. The "freshness of memories" and narration to a Leningrad resident, who had undergone the same ordeal, contributed to creation of voluminous and relatively objective picture of life and activities of citizens in besieged Leningrad. Nevertheless, self-censorship was apparent, and while few made direct distortions, exclusion of some "inconvenient" (in narrator's opinion) details from the final text was quite common. The study of transcripts permits to reveal new facts about the history of wartime Leningrad, to broaden our understanding of the blockade everyday life, and to give impetus to the analysis of the era in terms of history of emotions and micro-history. Most valuable and interesting transcripts can be published in anthologies.

Keywords

Great Patriotic War of 1941–45, Leningrad, blockade, historical source, archive, transcript.

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About the authors

Chistikov Aleksandr Nikolaevich, D.Sc. in History, St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Department of Modern History of Russia, Head of Department, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, 8-812-235-15-80, 8-911-281-00-93.

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