

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, when a good friend of mine, a Dutch diplomat in Moscow, approached me with the question whether our museum wanted to do something for the Dutch-Russian Friendship Year 2013, I asked him in surprise: why 2013? I would have expected 2016, three hundred years after Peter the Great paid another visit to the Netherlands. I was not at all aware of the role of the Sixth Coalition against Napoleon, led by the Russian Emperor, Tsar Alexander I, and the Russian troops, under the command of the cavalry general Alexander von Benckendorff, who led a daring campaign, breaking Napoleon's rule over the Netherlands, just within a few weeks. I remembered from my high school history lessons, that there had been some 'Cossacks', but that had something to do with Napoleon's dramatic campaign against Russia and the return over the Berezina, where Dutch army engineers had constructed a bridge. Many Dutch conscripts had become casualties. Thereafter the Dutch had turned against the French usurper and called for the return of the Orange Dynasty. The triumvirate, led by Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, had sent a letter to the Prince of Orange, pleading for his return, and after his arrival in Scheveningen, he was proclaimed Sovereign of the Free Netherlands in the capital city Amsterdam. Therefore, in 2013 the 2nd Centenary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was to be celebrated. But what of the Russians? If my schoolbooks are anything to go by, I suspect hardly anyone in the Netherlands has any notion of the crucial role, which the Russian troops performed in liberating the Netherlands out of Napoleon's tied grip.

Intrigued, that reality must have looked quite different, we dived into researching this history. In 2013, together with the State Pushkin Literary Museum and the Glinka National Museum of Music, Museum Geelvinck presented the exhibition '1813: The Netherlands liberated by Russians!'.

Since my ancestors were somehow linked to the wars of 1812 and 1813, I also delved into their personal stories: one greatgreatgrandfather was a medical officer in the Napoleonic army, which marched to Moscow: and he survived. This is a love story, which I will spare you now, but it is the reason I am sitting here before you! Another greatgreatgrandfather had been appointed Mayor of Wijhe by Napoleon in 1812 and would remain so for 44 years: Gillis Schouten. His story of 1813 was recorded by his grandson in the commemorative book for the centennial in 1913. It was a story about Bashkirs, who were stationed in Wijhe. I'll tell you honestly: I had never heard of Bashkirs before, but the village of Veessen is nicknamed the Cossack Village and there was something about a ship-bridge that these horsemen had built over the River IJssel. Well, this is how this project of our shared cultural heritage arose.

Since 2018, 'Northeren Amurs', a monument displaying a mounted Bashkir, created by Alexander Taratynov, a gift from the Republic of Bashkortostan, can be admired in Veessen. Soon, another monument by Taratynov, marking the location of the Bashkir's camp in Wijhe, will be unveiled.

However, collaborating with the Historical Association of Wijhe and our partners in Bashkortostan, more intriguing details surfaced and that is the reason to call for a future conference on the subject, which we envisage for next year or 2023.

An quick overview: we can distinguish different strata within the historiography:

Firstly, **world history**: the events in the Netherlands in 1812-1815 are at most a footnote; it seems as if the Netherlands had evaporated. And in a sense, it had: the Dutch republic had merged into the great French Empire. However, shouldn't we also consider other aspects. For instance, the Amsterdam elite, ran a worldwide banking and insurance network and were able to finance states, such as for the purchase of Louisiana by the United States from Napoleon in 1803. Since Catherin the Great, Russia's national debt to the Amsterdam banking families was huge; Alexander I managed to reduce this considerably in 1814. And then there are the enormous colonial possessions, which should in fact be regarded as a form of private property; through the share system of the Dutch stock exchange this was widespread through the Dutch higher society. In the spring of 1813, the Prince of Orange managed to conclude an arrangement with Alexander I, that he would return as sovereign of the newly to be formed Dutch state. Was that the result of his close family ties to the King of Prussia, or possibly also of his good relationship with the bankers of Hope & Co.? The name of this bank may not sound familiar with you, but maybe the name of their English partners still rings a bell: Barings.

In the same way, you can see the importance of Goethe's encounter with the Bashkirs: it was, as Dr Gabriele Ziethen will make clear, an encounter that had a significant influence on Western thinking about Islam.

- the **national histories**: if you compare the national histories from different countries and look at how the events in the Netherlands have been described, it is striking that there are many fathers of the victory over the French. Undeniably, it can be concluded from the way in which Alexander I made a triumphal tour through the Netherlands on his return to Russia in 1814, that at that time he was seen as the real victor. But gradually, also for political and nationalistic reasons, that perspective has changed in most countries outside Russia. Dr. Yuri Bavykin will expand on this aspect in his presentation.

As far as the Netherlands is concerned, you may place question marks, whether the call for the Orange party, countering Napoleonic rule, can be viewed as being the same as the call for the return of the Orange dynasty. This question arose as a result of our intervention in the annual symposium which the Dutch-Flemish Working Group for the Modern Age organized in 2014. The formation of the Netherlands after 1814 can also be seen from the perspective of the political card game during the Congress of Vienna, or either from the perspective of the dynastic politics pursued by both the Romanovs and the Oranges. In any case, it seems very useful to compare these alternative perspectives and arrive at a communis opinio.

- the **regional histories**: anyone who reads the commemorative book series, that was published in the Netherlands at the centennial in 1913 and in which the local histories are recorded, will come to the conclusion, that it is a patchwork, the puzzle pieces of which do not always fit together. If you put the report of Benckendorff himself next to the puzzle pieces of local histories, again it turns out that there are discrepancies.

- the **personal histories**: there is an almost fluent transition to the personal manuscripts, letters, diaries and archival documents. The digitization of archives unlocks an abundance of new material. Here, too, it is of particular importance to consider networks, such as family ties. Much research has already been done on the

dynastic networks of the Orange-Nassau in Germany. But the network of the Baltic Russian nobility is equally interesting: was the sister of Alexander Khristoforich Benckendorff not Dorothea von Lieven, married to the Russian Ambassador in London, also Baltic-Russian nobility? Was their brother, Konstantin von Beckendorff, not adjutant of Alexander I? And their mother the Queen Mother's best friend, who retained significant influence within the court of the Romanovs? Did not Benckendorff himself, looking back on his Dutch campaign, indicate that he had acted in the spirit of orders given to him by the Tsar? This is an intriguing aspect, that requires further investigation. An this history certainly does not end at 1814: for instance, look at the role which Dorothea von Lieven played in resolving the Belgian question. Therefore, I am most honoured, that prof. Dominic Lieven, himself a direct descendant of Dorothea, indicated to be interested in making a contribution to our effort.

Archival research can also lead us to more material, which is related to this period. For instance, the invoices submitted to the Dutch authorities by pubs with outstanding bills for services rendered to the allied military. Gerrit Kouwenhoven has already carried out an interesting study in the Regional Archive Epe-Hatter-Heerde, on the basis of which he was able to give an impression of the numbers of military, that must have passed through this area. During the development of our exhibition in 2013, handwritten orders surfaced with his help, which, after being translated for us by Prof. Efim Rezvan of the Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg, turned out to be by Narishkin and Benckendorff. We suspect, that there is much more material in archives scattered throughout the Netherlands and beyond, waiting to be made available, so that a more realistic picture of this story can be built up.

- **forensic investigation:** Jasper Vosselman of the archaeological research bureau RAAP will explain the field research, which his team carried out on behalf of the municipality of Olst-Wijhe with financial support from the Province of Overijssel, at the location of the Bashkir encampment. A spearhead, which was found at the site of the ship bridge at Fortmond some years ago, is now in the collection of the Historical Association of Heerde.

And there more potential material, especially in combination with oral history. For instance, in Heerde goes the story, that some families descend from "the Cossacks". Perhaps here is meant "Bashkir": DNA research could substantiate the truthfulness of these stories. In addition, there are numerous places in the landscape, which claim to be connected to the story: Cossack oaks, which would have served as a lookout; a Cossack lime tree near Wapenveld under which a Cossack horse is said to be buried. It is useful to map these stories.

Research into the structure of the landscape can also contribute here. A good example is the location of the ship bridge. Four separately made images of the ship-bridge by Barend Westenberg are known. On the basis of the depicted buildings, we get an impression of where the ship bridge must have been. The question arises as to why this particular location has been chosen: one look at the map makes it clear that the spot lies just past the inflow point of the so-called High Water Ditch (Hoogwatergeul). This choice has logic, because that is where the water pressure of the river is lowest. In that context it is interesting to look at the role that General Andries van der Plaat may have played in this choice of location. Van der Plaat is an

intriguing figure: he had previously been in Russian military service in St. Petersburg for several years. Benckendorff was pleasantly surprised to greet him in Zwolle. However, Van der Plaat is also the brother-in-law of the celebrated fortress builder and hydraulic engineer Cornelis Kraijenhoff, who occupied an important position within the provisional leadership of Amsterdam after the French had left the city and a popular riot had broken out there. I can't go into too much detail on this now. This interesting story will soon be featured on the bashkirs.nl website, we are preparing. Already for several years, Van der Plaat had been involved with the national water management of the Netherlands under French rule. Could he possibly have advised Benckendorff to build the ship-bridge at that very spot on the River IJssel near Veessen? The role of Van der Plaat has also been neglected in other aspects. He certainly deserves more historical attention. You see, there are various aspects that require further investigation.

But now the role of the Bashkirs. If you look in Dutch publications from the 19th century about the events of 1813-1814, you will invariably come across the Bashkirs, separately distinguished from the Cossacks. This is quite remarkable, because the army with which Benckendorff liberated the Netherlands from French rule, consisted of eight Cossack regiments, of which only one was Bashkir. In addition, he had about 1.900 regular troops with him, hussars, infantry, etc. The 1st Bashkir Regiment had lost casualties in the battles on the German plains, including at the Battle of Nations in Leipzig. The regiment's Russian commander Lichanov had to be replaced by Major Fjedor Fjedorovich Prince Gagarin. Only about some 350 mounted Bashkirs must have arrived in Wijhe. That is only a fraction, some 5% or less, of the total Russian forces, that drove the French army from Dutch territory. The Bashkirs stayed in the Netherlands for a good six weeks: after their courageous actions at the French siege of Breda on December 20-22nd, the Bashkir regiment moved on towards Belgium and finally to Paris. So, solely during that period they had a bivouac in Wijhe and for just a month they made use of the ship-bridge near Veessen. During that brief time, they fanned out from Wijhe over the Netherlands. You see Bashkirs depicted not only at the encirclement of Deventer, but, much more importantly, with the first Russian mounted units to reach Amsterdam and The Hague. They made an unforgettable impression on the Dutch population.

This deployment of Bashkir horsemen is striking, since Bashkir mounted units were not known as very useful in the warfare of the time. Dr Ramil Rakhimov will explain this extensively in his keynote talk. In fact, the Bashkir regiments were still feudal military units with Bashkir nobles leading their own warriors. These saddle-born riders were trained archers. The 1st Bashkir Regiment apparently already had pistols, but their fighting style was based on late medieval techniques, which were still useful for the border defense in the Orenburg area. However, it was extraordinarily outdated compared to Napoleonic warfare. It seems to me, that Benckendorff, who must have been acquainted with the Bashkir-Meshcheryak mounted units earlier in his career in Orenburg, turned this disadvantage into his advantage. The mounted Bashkirs were excellently deployable as a swift vanguard to push past the fortifications manned by the French. Compared to the considerably larger French troops, Benckendorff had not stood a chance in a frontal attack. That was the reason why he was ordered to wait for reinforcements at the River IJssel. However, the Prussian troops under General von Bülow were delayed. With a very modest military force and with really daring actions, Benckendorff managed to achieve his goal. The deployment of Bashkir

mounted units fitted like a glove within this strategy, with which he successfully ended the French rule over the Netherlands. Even with, compared to the previous battles on the German plains, very little bloodshed. The courageous actions of this relatively small group of Bashkir horseman must be understood within this strategy.

Benckendorffs campaign has been crucial for a swift turn of powers, while the actual administration mostly remained in tact and kept the population from revolting against the often French-orientated elite. Instead of a return to the pre-1787 federal state structure headed by a stadholder, as was apparently preferred by Van Hogendorp, the Amsterdam elite managed to push forward a union state constitutional monarchy, hitched on the model introduced by the French. It is intriguing to think of the possible influence, which Benckendorff may have had in these early hours of our fledgeling constitutional monarchy. Together with the English ambassador, who had accompanied, the Prince of Orange to Amsterdam, Benckendorff stood next the new sovereign when he was presented as such to the crowds on the balcony of today's Royal Palace on the Dam Square. In front of the Palace, Russian military paraded. A true victory for Alexander I, which had a lasting influence in the years thereafter.

In short, this is an overview of topics, which need further investigation. This webinar is intended as the kick-off for such, leading to a future conference on the theme.

I would now like to give the floor to Dr. Ramil Rakhimov.