

Ladies and gentlemen, friends in Bashkortostan, Russia, Estonia, Germany, France, the UK, the US and Canada!

My name is Jurn Buisman, director of Museum Geelvinck, house museum in Heerde and Amsterdam, which is mainly known for its extensive collection of stringed keyboard instruments from the 18th and 19th century. On behalf of Museum Geelvinck, I would like to welcome you to this webinar, which was established as a joint grass-root initiative in collaboration with our friends in Bashkortostan and the Historical Association Wijhe and with the support of the Ministry of Culture of Bashkortostan and the municipality of Olst-Wijhe. I especially wish to mention Valentina Latipova, former Vice-Minister of Culture, and Venera Farganova of "Art unites-Art connects People" in Bashkortostan, and Freerk Kunst and Gerard Nanninga, the volunteer researchers of the Historical Association of Wijhe, without whom, we would not have been able to develop this project in the past years.

In 1810, Napoleon annexed the Netherlands to his French Empire. Within just a few weeks during November-December 1813, the Russian general Alexander von Benckendorff managed to break French rule with a daring campaign. Commissioned by Tsar Alexander I, he has made an essential contribution to the formation of our current monarchy.

His horsemen of the Russian 1st Bashkir Regiment – fearless archers – were among the first to advance to Amsterdam and The Hague. Benckendorff camped his Bashkirs in Wijhe for about a month. Near Veessen, they have built a ship-bridge across the River IJssel. For two months, the ship-bridge formed an important strategic connection across the river for Bashkirs, Cossacks and regular troops.

The story of the military campaign under command of general Benckendorff and especially the role of the 1st Bashkir Regiment, became a footnote in historical writing on the Napoleonic wars. Interestingly, when you do research on the subject, you'll find, that during those few weeks of turmoil the existential foundation of the current monarchy of the Netherlands was formed. It inspires even more interest in the researcher, when he comes to the conclusion, that the perspectives on these events differ depending on the nationalities of the historians. Apparently, these perspectives are somewhat blurred by national political interests. Now, over two centuries later, it is time to have a new look on these events and to reconcile these alternative perspectives to a more balanced historical view. The webinar is the kick-off for the preparations for a conference addressing this goal.

With pleasure, I have to mention this effort has the support of many historians, some of which are now participating in the webinar and others who expressed their support, such as, just to mention a few, Dominic Lieven, Dave Schimmelpenninck van der Oyen, Beatrice de Graaf, Efim Rezvan, Alexander Orlov, Grigory Bibikov, Christiaan van der Spek, Ben Schoenmaker, Bart Funnekorter, Jeroen van Zanten, Walter Bruyere-Ostells, Munro Price, Rory Muir, Munro Price, Michael Broers, Alan Forrest, Martin Aust and Alexander Mikaberidze.

Also, we received a very kind personal message in support of our effort from dr. Mikhail Shvydkoy, the former Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation and now special presidential representative for international cooperation in culture. Here I do

want give a personal remark, that my assiduity is based on the memory of both my deceased friends, dr. Piet Buwalda, the last Dutch Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and prof.dr.amb. Vladimir Petrovsky, the former Director General of the UN in Geneva. Both were much in support of our museum and our efforts for cultural dialogue.

I would like to give the floor to the Mayor of Olst-Wijhe, Mr. Ton Strien, for a word of welcome and thereafter to Mrs. Valentina Latipova, former Deputy-Minister of Culture of Bashkortostan, who will read a message from the Minister of Culture of the Autonomous Republic of Bashkortostan, H.E. Amina Schafikova.

Before that, I kindly request to take note of the house rules, which you probably are already used to for such zoom meetings. Please see the chat. We kindly ask you to put your name and institution in the chat. If you have a question or remark, please raise your hand during the Q&A. We apologize, that we had a few last-minute changes in the program, partly due to the changing situation with Covid. In addition, please be aware that we are recording this webinar. Taking part in it means, that you agree on the recorded webinar being publicized on our website afterwards.

I now hand over to the Mayor of Olst-Wijhe, Mr. Ton Strien.