Nikolai Karamzin

letters of a Russian traveller

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The *Letters of a Russian traveller* (1797) are the most important expression of Enlightenment thought from the pen of a Russian writer. In 1789 Nikolai Karamzin (1765-1826), a leading historian and author of sentimental fiction, embarked on an unprecedented intellectual Grand Tour. His itinerary, which took him from St Petersburg through Germany to Revolutionary France and finally to England, served as the basis for this semi-fictional narrative. The narrator visits among others Kant, Herder and Wieland, makes pilgrimage to the resting places of Voltaire and Rousseau, and observes both the revolutionary Assemblée and the English Parliament at first hand. The resulting work is one in which fiction, philosophy, literary and art criticism, historical and biographical writing coalesce, producing nothing less than a wholesale anthropology and evaluation of the Enlightenment from the unfamiliar perspective of a Russian intellectual writing after the outbreak of the French Revolution.

This is the first ever complete translation of Karamzin’s work into English. The introduction and concluding study explore the intersection of Russian and European intellectual and literary movements, and illuminate questions about travel literature; history of the book and the growth of readership; the self as a philosophical subject; the growth of perceptions of the public sphere; the pre-Romantic fascination with funerary monuments and theories of sociability. This book is aimed at both Russian specialists and Enlightenment scholars who do not read Russian.

Introduction: Karamzin and the creation of a readership

Nikolai Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian traveller*
The appearance of Nikolai Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveller* in an articulate and richly annotated English translation by Andrew Kahn gives cause for celebration. Andrew Kahn has amplified and enriched the commentary of the Lotman-Uspenskii edition. The scholarly apparatus that accompanies his fluent translation astonishes the reader with its breadth and erudition.
Though a seminal work in the history of Russian literature and culture, Nikolai Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveller* has long languished in the shadows of his more famous short prose and highly influential *History of the Russian State*. [...] In response to this relative neglect, Andrew Kahn has now translated and published the entire text in English for the first time. The result is a fine work, a fluent rendition of the original Russian that will be appreciated for years to come.

This admirable translation of Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveller* will be of interest to teachers, students and scholars. It provides rich material for scholars working in diverse disciplines, especially the cultural, intellectual and literary history of eighteenth-century Europe, the Enlightenment, and the history of travel writing; these areas are explicitly addressed in Kahn’s study of Karamzin’s “Discourses of Enlightenment”.

An impressive work that deserves a wide readership.