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ELKE STADELMANN-WENZ zu berichten. JENS GIESEKE informiert über das sogenannte DDR-Programm von Infratest, welches mittels moderner Befragungstechniken anhand von zeitweilig in der Bundesrepublik befindlichen DDR-Bürgern noch die zuverlässigsten Informationen über die DDR einholte.

Der vorliegende Tagungsband kann dieses spannende, insgesamt noch wenig bearbeitete Thema natürlich nicht erschöpfend abhandeln. Doch Hinweise auf das Vorhandensein von Quellen (Jens Gieseke, Rudolf Stöber) und auf zielführende Auswertungsstrategien von Stimmungsberichten (Martin K. Dimitrov) gehören auf jeden Fall zum erwähnenswerten Positiven in diesem Sammelband.

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Solvejg Nitzke

### **Die Produktion der Katastrophe. Das Tunguska-Ereignis und die Programme der Moderne**

Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017. 355 S. ISBN: 978-3-8376-3657-4.

In the early summer of 1908, the Tunguska region in Siberia was impacted by an enormous explosion that ripped out trees and left a huge, largely unpopulated, area devastated. The catastrophe is well known but has never been fully explained. Since it occurred in such a remote area and has yet to be satisfactorily explained, it has been the subject of numerous scientific expeditions and fanciful stories. In *Die Produktion der Katastrophe. Das Tunguska-Ereignis und die Programme der Moderne*, Solvejg Nitzke rightly asserts that the production of stories is ultimately as important as what can be said to have actually happened on that summer day over a century ago.

Unfortunately, the structure and organization of the book makes it incredibly difficult to follow the thread of those stories. The title of the book provocatively uses the words *Ereignis* (“event”) and *Katastrophe* (“catastrophe”) but only after a hundred pages does the author clarify their structural significance (p. 103). All too often, explanations about narrative and discourse, ageing theories at this point, sidetrack scrutiny of science fiction novels and geological publications.

For example, Nitzke wants to make the point that searching for clues to the Tunguska-event can be paralleled with the work of a detective and thus, borrowing from Carlo Ginzburg and Franco Moretti, uses Sherlock Holmes as a model. Yet so much time is spent on Sherlock Holmes, the book reads more like an analysis of detective novels; when Nitzke indicates that late nineteenth century detective novels were

conservative, this conclusion has no relation to the Tunguska explosion. When a detective link is finally made to the explosion, it is done tangentially. Surendra Verma's book *The Tunguska Fireball. Solving One of the Great Mysteries of the 20th Century* (Thriplow, Cambridge 2005) has "mystery" in the subtitle but subsequent references to Verma's book focus on the chapter epigraphs that invoke science (p. 85). The detective theme is largely forgotten but when it resurfaces, then it is used in the sense of "searching for".

*Die Produktion der Katastrophe* also looks at the efforts of scientists who have tried to explain the physical properties of the explosion. Here the author employs the lack of certainty in the scientific community as evidence for the lack of objective truth about the event. This position, however, confuses a healthy scientific uncertainty with a deeper epistemological uncertainty. Instead of looking critically into the actual methods of the scientists, as historians and philosophers of science have done for decades, the author invokes a few pithy and rather innocent quotes from scientists such as: "the workshop has not definitely clarified" (pp. 64, 81 – the quote is repeated). A brief statement of uncertainty is translated into a profound statement about knowledge without ever exploring how scientific methods have changed since the first expedition in the 1920s. Rather, the scientific quotes all appear to come from a single conference in the late 1990s. Science is presented as unchanging and timeless which seems to be the opposite of what Nitzke intended.

In general, so much time is spent on narrative theoretical models, the author has little space to focus on accounts of the Tunguska explosion. When they do appear, they tend to come from the same authors: Angelika Jubelt, John Baxter and Thomas Atkins, and Surendra Verma. The introduction celebrates the explosion's ability to produce a broad storytelling industry but additional works are difficult to find in the book. The lacuna can be partly explained by the lack of Russian language sources. The Soviets wrote about the explosion but except for some references to Leonid Kulik's expeditions (from secondary sources) and Aleksandr Kazantsev's *Explosion (Vzryv)* from 1946, Nitzke has ignored Soviet science and literature (absent as well is Manuil Semenov's *Prisoners of the Earth [Plenniki Zemli]* from 1937 which – *pave* Nitzke – first introduced aliens into the Tunguska legend) (p. 25). Similarly, the author invokes the eyewitness accounts of the Evenks who lived in the region but makes no effort to integrate these local inhabitants into a cultural or political context (p. 87). This approach reappears when the author asserts that it was "a catastrophe without victims", rather than a catastrophe without identified victims who most likely would have been Evenk (p. 106). In other words, the book sidelines the social context in which the explosion occurred and the ways in which that context could impact the storytelling. Much like the science, the reference to the Evenks is out of space and out of time.

Even the later sections, which have more specific references to science fiction authors such as Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatskii brothers, are challenging to navigate. Nitzke links Arkadiy and Boris Strugatskii's *Roadside Picnic* from 1972, the story of

aliens landing on earth, to Tunguska but provides little evidence. Readers learn that the Strugatskie brothers are intentionally vague about when the alien invasion happened but this is awkward because Tunguska happened on a specific and known date (p. 200). The narrative discrepancy is not explained.

The book is a cautionary tale but a tale that extends well beyond the author. *Die Produktion der Katastrophe* reflects a stubborn desire, evident in so many contemporary works, to reduce the world to discourse, narrative, and rhetoric. This triad becomes the story itself and marginalizes what were and are ultimately intriguing renderings of inexplicable events. As such, the Tunguska explosion remains a mystery in search of courageous individuals willing to head into the Siberian taiga.

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**Velikaja rossijskaja revoljucija, 1917. Sto let izučenija. Materialy  
Meždunarodnoj naučnoj konferencii (Moskva, 9–11 oktjabrja 2017 g.)**

[Die Große Russische Revolution 1917. 100 Jahre Erforschung. Materialien der Internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz (Moskau, 9.–11. Oktober 2017)]

Otv. red. Jurij A. Petrov. Moskva: IRI RAN, 2017. 807 S. ISBN: 978-5-8055-0335-2.

Wer sich vornimmt, dieses voluminöse und großformatige Werk von vorne bis hinten durchzulesen, muss einige Zeit einplanen. Es gibt die Beiträge zur Konferenz wieder, die vom 9. bis 11. Oktober 2017 anlässlich der hundertsten Wiederkehr des Revolutionsjahrs 1917 in Moskau stattfand, und stellt beinahe einen enzyklopädischen Überblick über die Erforschung des Themas in der Russischen Föderation dar. Auch einige wenige westliche sowie chinesische und japanische Historikerinnen und Historiker wurden aufgenommen, ebenso solche aus den Ländern der GUS. Die Mehrzahl der über 120 Autorinnen und Autoren mit fast ebenso vielen Beiträgen stammt jedoch aus den verschiedenen wissenschaftlichen Einrichtungen Moskaus. Drei Aufsätze sind in englischer, der Rest in russischer Sprache abgefasst.

Die Aufsätze umfassen 4–10 Druckseiten und sind inhaltlich überaus heterogen. Eine große Zahl setzt sich mit Einzelfragen anhand der russischen Forschungsliteratur auseinander, es gibt aber ebenso Überblicksdarstellungen und Mikrostudien. Jeden Beitrag zu würdigen ist im Rahmen einer räumlich beschränkten Rezension nicht möglich, es soll nur ein allgemeines Bild gegeben werden.