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Russian agitational postcard: Information graphics in action

The terms "open letter", "postcard", "card" refer to a small form of graphic expression. The postcard originated in the middle of the XIX century and went through the development path together with the poster, following stylistic changes in the schedule along with it, simultaneously solving various social, cultural and economic problems. One of the functions of the postcard, as well as the poster, was agitation and propaganda, in some cases carried out with the help of information graphics. Both forms were widely used in various propaganda campaigns that took place in the twentieth century in the Soviet Union.

At the end of the XIX century in Russia there is an explosive growth in the number and assortment of printed graphic works of an applied nature. This was due, first of all, to the development of the domestic printing base, and secondly, to the emergence and widespread use of color printing technologies. The preserved price lists of printing services allow us to evaluate the range of small forms of graphics common at the turn of the century [1, p. 168]. Among them are open letters or postcards.

In Russia illustrated postcards began to be printed in 1895. And in a short time, they have become part of the cultural life of the country. The postcards showed views of cities and landscapes, demonstrated important events that took place in the state and society, printed stories from the life of ordinary people and portraits of public figures. They reproduced paintings by famous masters, book illustrations for fairy tales, folk splints, etc.

Almost immediately, the postcard becomes a carrier of advertising information, which was facilitated by its initially poster character. During its manufacture, the image was reduced and the font inscriptions were adapted, which

was a simple matter. Many enterprises and companies have used this small graphic form to promote goods and services or to strengthen their image.

One of the typical examples is the advertising of the Singer company specializing in sewing equipment. She published art postcards with drawings by famous Russian and European artists. In a series of art postcards entitled "Russian Proverbs in Faces" (1905), scenes from folk life were presented in the manner of a splint, accompanied by humorous proverbs, with the presence of an image of a sewing machine and a trademark of the Singer company.

Another function of the postcard was agitation and propaganda, which was facilitated by socio-political changes in the public life of Russia in the early twentieth century, which turned it into an information platform. "A useful format, a large edition and the possibility of mass distribution have made the postcard an indispensable means of propaganda and a news information source" [2, p. 247].

The first examples relate to the period of the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905. The variety of the plot allows us to talk about the birth of a new medium for the promotion of ideas, slogans and appeals. In addition to battle scenes, the military postcards also featured caricature sketches in the spirit of the Russian splint. We will see the continuation of this in K. Malevich and D. Moore in 1914. The images of epic heroes were sufficiently presented. For example, on the postcard "In the Far East" N. Roerich showed images of Russian warriors and Japanese samurai in traditional national armor. And again, in the propaganda graphics of the First World War this technique will be widely used, for example, by V. Vasnetsov or K. Korovin.

Despite the continuity of the plots, the Russian propaganda postcard of the initial period of the First World War received a new tool. Visual statistics debuted in the arsenal of agitators and propagandists. In fact, the diagrams on the postcards appeared a little earlier. We are talking about several series of open letters, united

by the common name "Russia in Numbers", printed based on the materials of I. Ozerov from his "Atlas of Charts on Economic Issues" (1908–1909).

In addition to bar and pie charts multicolored postcards also contained figure diagrams based on the proportional change of images depending on the values represented. Colorful images of teapots and coffee pots, ears and rolls of fabrics showed the average per capita consumption of tea and coffee, wheat yield and textile production in various countries (Fig. 1–2). The authors of these miniatures were guided by similar diagrams from the publications of A. Marx. First of all, this concerned the "Universal Geographical and Statistical Pocket Atlas" of the Austrian cartographer Anton Hickmann. The Russian reader could get acquainted with it in four editions (1900, 1903, 1908, 1915).

The beginning of the World War initiated the introduction of the visual statistics tool into the propaganda policy of the state and society. In 1914, Mamontov's printing house printed a series of open letters showing proportional ratios of the territory, population and economic potential of the belligerent states (Fig. 3). The black-and-white postcards "Army of the Belligerent Powers", "Space of the Belligerent Powers", "Population of the Belligerent Powers", "Number of Horses of the Belligerent Powers", "Grain Reserves of the Belligerent Powers" clearly show the absolute advantage of the Russian Empire over the opposing side: Germany and Austria-Hungary. Superiority was demonstrated by the dominant image of a Russian soldier, a horse, a sheaf of wheat, etc.

In fact and in content, similar postcards were produced at the beginning of the war by other publishing houses. For example, the series "The Armed Forces of the Belligerent Powers" was published by the printing house of the partnership "Gramotnost" ("Literacy") and was printed lithographically in two colors (Fig. 4). It should be noted that pictorial statistics were practically not found in the pre-

revolutionary poster. An exception is the advertising poster of Mutual Zemstvo Insurance Company of Kostroma province (1915).

After the October Revolution of 1917, the center of gravity of agitation and propaganda was transferred to the poster, which became the main graphic tool of influence. According to V. Polonsky, "having received a development that Europe and overseas countries did not know, the revolutionary poster is a picturesque monument, the like of which no epoch has left" [3, p. 3]. The propaganda postcard of those years was closely adjacent to the poster, was its reduced copy. The plots were devoted to the fateful moments of that era and were based on very specific calls to fight. The slogans of the Civil War in Russia did not require the availability of statistical data supporting the ideological message. Therefore, propaganda isostatistics in posters and postcards of the early 1920s is extremely rare.

Data visualization will be in demand later. During the industrialization of the USSR, posters of the first five-year plans began to be filled with charts of planned indicators, maps of future construction projects of socialism, diagrams of railways and canals. But in a postcard, pictorial statistics appear quite independently. This was due to the specifics of this type of printed matter, its accessibility to the general population and the relative cheapness of production.

In 1927–1934, the People's Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs issued a series of advertising and propaganda postcards (Fig. 5–6). The goal was to make workers widely aware of the achievements of the USSR in the socio-political and economic life of the country, about the tasks facing the first five-year plan, about the situation in the world and, of course, about the advertised goods and services. The topics were completely different. These are assistance to prisoners of capital and victims of fascism, calls to join the ranks of public organizations and the Red Cross, and, of course, the slogan "Strengthen the Defense of the Country." Advertised were toothpaste and powder, Soviet perfumes, a trip along the Volga

and the Caucasus from an Intourist, rubber boots and tires, mineral water and property insurance.

At the same time, in general, the popularity of infographics is increasing, due to the introduction of the Viennese method of pictorial statistics. In 1931, in Lenizogiz, the Department of Fine Statistics published a set of 72 postcards-posters "To Catch up and Surpass the Leading Capitalist Countries in Technical and Economic Affairs in 10 Years." (Fig. 7). These postcards were mostly original. They did not have stand-in posters. These postcards were mostly original. They did not have duplicate posters. But some plots were originally presented in the form of separate large-format charts sheets (37 x 54 sm) — the album with the same name was published in 1931 [4, p. 5]. They contained statistical data of the first five-year plan (1928–1932) in various areas of the Soviet economy, society and culture.

On most of them, illustrative miniatures served as a background for pictorial statistics, made both according to the Vienna method and using domestic original developments (the method of illustrated tapes by I. Ivanitsky). These postcards were supposed to give an account of the achievements of the country, but "not in dry and boring figures in the form of columns and tables, but in the form of figurative or pictorial charts that could interest every working person of the Soviet Union and a foreign worker" [5, p. 3]. For this, the text was printed on the back in Russian, English and German.

The postcards were in demand by the reader. This was facilitated by a successful and accessible format, detailed images and a colorful background. It is no accident that the series withstood a reissue, and in 1934 the next work of Lenizogiz artists was published. It was a series of color postcards dedicated to the second five-year plan (Fig. 8). Compared to previous issues, the charts have become more expressive. They are no longer so suppressed by the background

image. The illustrated tapes were replaced with lighter scales to improve the composition.

Agitational postcards of the early 1930s became an integral part of the propaganda campaign of socialist construction in the country. The peak of their publication falls at the stage of the formation of infographics as a type of communicative design and the formation of the Soviet propaganda style. At the same time, the isostatistical poster, which was born in Lenizogiz and combined a figure chart and elements of a graphic message, was released in a much smaller range of topics (Fig. 9). Thus, in the early 1930s, we can see the predominance of postcards in Soviet agitation and propaganda, as the most accessible and mass tool for conveying information to the masses. Together with the isostatistical poster, chart albums and isostatistical exhibitions, they played a role in promoting the formation of a new society.

The post-war postcard turned to pictorial statistics only sporadically. These were poster solutions adapted to a smaller format. The well-known propaganda posters of N. Dolgorukov, V. Elkin, L. Ushakov containing elements of information graphics were simply duplicated in the small form of open letters (Fig. 10). The series of postcards "Let's Fulfill and Over-fulfill the New Five-year Plan" released by the publishing house "Sovetskaya Kniga" ("Soviet Book") in 1946 was formed exactly like this.

The changes concerned font inscriptions, the proportions of symbols and their location. The color scheme of the work also partially changed. The format of the postcard imposed certain printing restrictions on the resolution of illustrations. Therefore, they became less clear and expressive compared to the original poster images.

Postcards were also issued with a simpler image. On the model of the early 1930s, postcards with calls for the implementation of the new Stalin five-year plan

went into the series. On the front side, along with the lined part, there were images of workers and peasants, reinforced with curly charts on production topics (Fig. 11). Printing was carried out in two colors, for example, crimson with green or red with blue. The reverse side of the card remained free for writing.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the isostatistical postcard finally lost its relevance in Soviet agitation and propaganda. The actual indicators are being replaced, clothed in the form of the slogan: "Will Increase Coal Production by 24%", "Steel Production Growth by 1.2 Times", "Will Grow 75 Million Heads of Cattle". These are the appeals that migrated from the materials of party congresses into a poster, brochure, postcard and postage stamp.

The artist no longer had the task to visualize these changes in comparison with the past, to show the dynamics of progress. No. It was only necessary to depict the figure in close-up, to focus on the indicator. Figurativeness faded into the background, as, for example, on the postcards of the artist K. Ivanov from the series "Control Indicators of the Development of the National Economy of the USSR for 1959–1965" (Fig. 12) It was published by the publishing house "Sovetskij Hudozhnik" ("Soviet Artist") in 1959. The dominant numerical data and the background object of its application allows you to do with only two colors: red and black.

A postcard can be considered as a source of information on history and culture. This document of the epoch can become a source for research of a stylistic, artistic and design nature. Considering such a small graphic form in agitation and propaganda, we can conclude that the elements of infographics begin to be present in the postcard from the beginning of the XX century. In comparison with a poster of a similar purpose, the agitational isostatistical postcard became most widespread during the formation of the Soviet propaganda style in infographics in the first half of the 1930s and has been losing its significance since the 1950s.

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