

POMPEII: RUSSIAN REFLECTION

LITERATURE

PICTURES

ARCHITECTURE

DECORATIVE ARTS



ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 1705, Peter the Great ordered the court nobility as well as the rest of the urban male population of Russia to shear their beards (with the exception for priests). It was one of his painful reforms which “cleaved the window to Europe”, according to the famous Pushkin line. Twenty two decades later, in 1917, the Soviet regime shut that window to the West again. For the two centuries in between, Europe has been extremely influential for Russian education, customs and lifestyles, and easily accessible for Russian travelers.

It is interesting to examine the impact of one particular place - the excavation sites at Pompeii and Herculaneum - on the whole of Russian culture.

This project concentrates on recorded descriptions and impressions of Russian visitors to these sites in order to trace possible shifts in their perception and to recognize importance of the rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum for Russian culture. Archaeologists, courtiers, artists, poets and writers, diplomats, geographers - all were drawn to the Bay of Naples. Some were deeply in love with classical literature and with antiquities; others were more interested in ascending Vesuvius; and almost everyone wanted a souvenir dating back to AD 79. The period to be studied covers almost two centuries -from the moment when the reforms of Peter the Great opened the borders of Russia for traveling and cultural exchange until the moment when October revolution of 1917 and its consequences made the Russian intelligentsia escape in hurry.