THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

THE MAKING OF A STALINIST MYTHOS:
POLITICS, BUREAUCRACY, AND NATION-BUILDING IN SOVIET HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1939-1953

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Spring 2019

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for baccalaureate degrees
in History and International Politics with honors in History

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the intersection of politics, bureaucracy, and ideology on the Soviet historical front in the latter half of the Stalin period from 1939-1953. In formulating this topic, I was motivated by a personal interest in the society and culture that my family fled from in the 1970s and by an interest in the contemporary implications of political interjections into academia in contemporary nation-states. In my writing, I sought to understand how it was that the Soviet system was able to subordinate the production of academic historical research within a rigid ideological framework and to trace the artifacts of nation-building processes apparent in the work produced by the Soviet historians.

I chose to focus on two historians as archetypal characters in the Stalinist Soviet drama: a dutiful soldier and a collaborator. In contrasting their experiences and opinions before, during, and after the Second World War, I hope to have provided a unique perspective to scholarship on Soviet academia. While I embarked on this project expecting to find a system of extensive state coercion, what I also uncovered was a web of human motivations and experiences that profoundly impacted the form Stalinist thought took. Stalinism did not happen in a vacuum; it was, in-part, facilitated by the ambitions and insecurities of the men and women who made up the academic establishment. The Russo-centric Soviet national identity crafted by these scholars appeared robust and yet was built on shoddy foundations. In hindsight, it is no surprise that this national ideal crumbled in the face of emergent nationalisms along the Soviet periphery and brought the Soviet ethno-federal system, and its inherent contradictions, down with it.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to use this space to thank everyone who directly or indirectly helped make this thesis possible. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Tobias Brinkmann, who helped guide me in my search for a topic, steered me to sources, and provided his support and advice as I wrote. I would also like to thank Dr. Cathleen Cahill, my honors advisor, who helped make sure I met various deadlines, understood the requirements of this project and provided invaluable feedback. Additionally, I'd like to thank Dr. Catherine Wanner, who helped me first formulate this topic in an undergraduate history seminar, provided me with sources, and shared her enthusiasm for this topic and its broader conceptual questions with me. At an institutional level, I would like to thank the Schreyer Honors College, the College of the Liberal Arts, and the Penn State Department of History for providing me with the education and access to resources necessary to embark on this project. The Schreyer Honors college in particular awarded me a grant that helped me travel to the NYPL during the summer while I was working in Washington, D.C. The funding I have received from the university towards my studies helped make my education financially feasible for my family, and for that I am forever grateful.

In addition, I would like to thank my family and friends who encouraged me through this process. My mother, father, and grandparents have always inspired a deep passion for history in me and have kept the memory of our family history a central part of our identity as Russian-American Jews. Without their efforts, I would likely not have developed such a keen interest in the subject of Russian and Soviet history. Finally, I'd like to dedicate this work to both of my grandfathers, who passed away eight years ago. They were raised in the place and period I've studied in this thesis and I find it appropriate to dedicate this work to their memory.

"Historians are dangerous, and capable of turning everything topsy-turvy. They have to be watched" – Nikita Khrushchev, 1956

INTRODUCTION:

A MULTIFACETED QUESTION

On the evening of February 28th, 1953, Joseph Stalin had enjoyed a jovial dinner with members of his inner circle. The next evening, his staff found him prostrate on the floor in a puddle of his own excrement, the victim of a cerebral hemorrhage. For three days, Stalin would fade in and out of partial consciousness, before finally succumbing to his condition. On March 5th, 1953, Stalin, the man whose shadowy influence had publicly loomed over nearly every aspect of Soviet life for three decades, was officially dead.

At the moment of Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union was a radically different socio-political entity than the fledgling polity that had been born out of the Russian Revolution and subsequent Civil War. Thirty-one years had passed since the legal inception of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR in 1922. In that span of time, industry had been forcibly expanded, social life had been painfully re-cast in the mold of the "New Soviet Man", and a war of gargantuan proportions had thinned the population by the tens of millions. For better or for worse, Stalin's reign over the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had left no realm of society unchanged. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the academy, where bureaucratic creep, political pressure, and ideological realignment served to continually create turmoil and generate sets of ideas that would attempt to substantiate and legitimize the Soviet state. It is within the span of time encompassing the Second World War and

Stalin's postwar repression; between 1939 and 1953, that we will direct our analytical attention. This period saw the emergence of a Soviet identity rooted in Russian nationalism that has been dubbed National Bolshevism.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, the country had been a conglomerate of disparate peoples and nations, inherited from an antiquated empire that ruled over a semi-feudal society. The Soviets were faced with the gargantuan task of building a new national identity, one rooted in the ideals of Marxism-Leninism and uniquely Soviet. It was in part because the Soviet state blurred the lines between academia and bureaucracy that such a project could be undertaken to varying degrees of success. History plays a fundamental role in the nation-building process and in Stalin's Soviet Union, it was the state's academic bureaucracy that would be assigned the tall order of piecing together national narratives. Using a wide variety of primary sources, which include the historiographic works and personal writings of prominent Soviet historians such as M. N. Pokrovsky, A. M. Nekrich, Konstantin Shteppa, B. D. Grekov, I. I. Mints, and E. V. Tarle, coupled with analysis of theoretical approaches to the subject, this thesis will address the fundamental question of how exactly the Soviet state's bureaucratic apparatus went about crafting a framework for a cohesive Stalinist national identity. My aim in analyzing the lives of academic historians and their writings in this period is to form a better understanding of how the "National Bolshevik" ideological orientation arose in the Soviet Union and in a broader sense, to understand how modern nation-states control the production and use of historical narratives to build political legitimacy. Of course, issues of nationality tend to correspond to issues of ethnicity and culture and a vital piece of the Soviet national puzzle was its ever-shifting approach to the multitude of ethnic groups that fit within its borders. Many of the historians who partook in the Soviet national project were themselves Jewish and had to grapple with their cultural

identities as Soviet Jews and the nebulous dusting of anti-Semitism that only intensified leading up to 1953. Over the course of this thesis, we will explore guiding questions of nationalism, narrative, myth, and memory, all present in the journal articles, scholarly texts, personal memoirs, and official communications penned by the individuals in focus.

This thesis will also involve analysis of certain policy directives mandated by Joseph Stalin. Stalin's writings and speeches are a treasure trove of primary source material for this topic and will shed light on the relationship at play between the dictator and academia. Purges played a significant role in the political calculus for all public figures and officials in this period and for academics, who were already under intense scrutiny by other members of the political class, every word they put to paper was of significance. A misplaced implication or slip of the tongue could earn a "class traitor" a one-way trip to Siberia, or worse.

Finally, while conducting research for this topic, it would be negligent of me to exclude the body of works and personal writings of the historians who left the Soviet Union. As many émigré historians felt free to write candidly about what they observed and experienced, their perspectives offer an invaluable glimpse into the personal aspects of living and working as an historian for the Soviet academic bureaucracy in the latter half of the Stalin period. With all this in mind, a clear answer to our question of research, namely, how the Soviet state mobilized historical academia, should emerge.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE:

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1: Historiography and *Imagined Communities*

In order to grasp how modern, bureaucratic states can use history as a means to suit a socio-political end, an exploration of the term 'historiography' is necessary. Historiography is simultaneously the study of how historians write history, and the process of writing history, coupled with an overarching philosophical approach to truth claims. There are a vast multitude of historiographical schools of thought, ranging from empiricism to post-colonialism, within the context of any society that studies history. Each historiographical school has a methodological system for approaching claims to truth and analyzing sources, making it distinct from others. To demonstrate with a few examples, empiricists believe in objective universal truths and focus their attention towards verifiable sources such as government archives, while Marxists are interested in social and economic trends in the pursuit of material truths. Postmodernists attempt to deconstruct narratives and accepted facts along the lines of power dynamics, while post-colonialists focus this postmodern train of thinking onto the effects of colonialism and imperialism in the developing and developed worlds. These four are only a sample of the wide range of historiographical approaches that have existed in Western societies for as long as history has been rigorously studied. To provide some context, historiographical trends in the West since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment period were primarily rooted in empiricism. As such, history was understood as the science of the past. According to empiricists, there was a true,

objective past that had occurred and it was the task of the historian to parse through archived sources for information that would lead to the discovery of the truth. This sort of historical study lent itself well to the study of political and military history, as archived sources presented a sampling bias towards individuals in governance and military roles.

For the purposes of this thesis, Marxist historiography will be of primary focus. This school of historiography builds on a highly deterministic and positivist empiricist foundation as it seeks to affirm Karl Marx' grand narrative of a trend toward a classless society. Marxist historiography is most concerned with the role of social class and economic factors in shaping historical trends and outcomes.[1] Its determinism is manifest in the centrality that it gives to the notion of a direction of history; that all human history progressively flows towards the end state of a society without social classes and towards a "new man".[2] With some notable deviations, Marxist historians have traditionally not argued for objectivism in historical study, though debates on this principle did have ramifications for those involved during the Stalin period. Marxist historiography would become the officially sanctioned historiographical methodology approved by the Soviet state.

With the basics of historiography addressed, the remainder of this section will address the issue of nationalism. The rise of European nationalism was a phenomenon that corresponded to the development of Marxism in the mid to late nineteenth century. Nationalism is a difficult concept to define because of its murky relationship with both biology and statecraft. Nationalism exists independent of states and yet can be created by states to suit their goal of establishing a cohesive social order while simultaneously having the capacity to be ethnocentric or multi-

[1] Robert Conquest, *The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1967), 13.

[2] Conquest, The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R., 16.

ethnic. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to a definition of nationalism that comes from the left-leaning political scientist and historian, Benedict Anderson, and his work *Imagined Communities*. Anderson's assessment is by no means the only way to understand nationalism, but it lends itself to an analysis of history's role in the construction of national narratives.

> In setting about a definition of nationalism, Anderson notes three paradoxes:
>
> (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept - in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality…vs the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality is sui generis [unique]. (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words… nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers.[3]

With this in mind, Anderson posits that nationalism should not be understood as an ideology along the lines of liberalism or fascism, but as an analytical expression much like kinship or religion because of its universality. A nation is a socially constructed "imagined political community" that has definable boundaries and sovereignty.[4] Nations are limited in that they have physical, cultural, and ethnic borders beyond which other nations exist. They are also sovereign because of their roots in a refutation of the sort of divinely ordained sovereignty once enjoyed by Europe's monarchs. Finally, they are understood as communities because of how comradery and sacrifice are expected of their members, even though they can never meet the entirety of those who they are being asked to sacrifice for. This working definition of nationalism can be applied along all axes of the political spectrum; left, right, authoritarian, libertarian and so forth. As such, we can apply this framework towards a Marxist state like the Soviet Union that ideologically opposed 'Nationalism', yet was wholly concerned with the idea of nation-ness within its borders.

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[3] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 2016), 5.

[4] Anderson, Imagined Communities, 6.

Anderson further addresses nationalism by looking at its apparent manifestations in culture. Nations often express themselves in terms of mortality and immortality; the nation provides metaphysical continuity and salvation to a secular society just as Christianity once did to a pre-enlightenment Europe. Nations construct monuments to the national spirit, such as tombs to ephemeral 'unknown soldiers' that often contain no human remains, yet command solemn respect. They burn perpetual flames at the hearts of their capital cities to symbolize the eternal continuity of the nation's vitality and soak their political rhetoric in the language of birth and rebirth. For Anderson, nationalism needs to be understood not as a manifestation of political ideologies, but as a cultural system in line with the 'religious community' and the 'dynastic realm'.[5]

Finally, Anderson elaborates on the institutions that arise from and legitimize nations. He points out that nationalism's development corresponds with the advent of print capitalism and the proliferation of printed books across Europe in a variety of native languages. Language is crucial to nations as it serves as a medium through which to build a cohesive set of terms and phrases that facilitate communal consciousness. Also vital to communal consciousness are three institutions of the modern nation-state: the census, the map and the museum. The census allowed for the categorization of individuals into members of in and out-groups; citizens and noncitizens, and for the measuring of national population growth. The map facilitated the process of defining clear national boundaries, where one nation ends and another begins, in geographic terms. Finally, most crucial to my analysis of historiography's role in the nation-building process is the museum. Museums are where nations choose to highlight elements of their history to build a collective national narrative. Whether they be works of art or artifacts from a bygone era,

[5] Anderson, Imagined Communities, 12.

museum pieces are presented deliberately in an effort to create a foundation upon which to build a set of shared ideals. This is the fundamental role of history to nations and will be at the crux of my analysis of the Stalinist national project.

1.2: Totalitarianism and Revisionism in Soviet Studies

No excursion into the realm of Soviet historiography would be complete without proper context for understanding the body of scholarly research that has been written on Stalinism in Western academia since the close of the Second World War. When one dips their foot into Soviet Studies research in the West, it quickly becomes apparent that there are decades-old disagreements among the historians, political scientists, and anthropologists who call this niche subject matter their home. In the crucible of the Cold War, with tensions running hot, two prominent and competing approaches to the historical questions of the Stalin period emerged; Totalitarianism and a body of counter-narratives lumped together as Revisionism.

Popularized by Robert Conquest, a prominent historian at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, was Totalitarian theory, an approach to Stalinism that posited a "top down" interpretation of the Terror and other deadly aspects of Stalin's reign. In the introduction to *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, Conquest writes "we see a vast, dark figure, looming over the century, and we know much of the devious and brutal maneuvers by which he achieved and maintained despotic power. But above all, perhaps no other system has been so completely based on falsehood and delusion," openly revealing his personal orientation towards Stalin's legacy.[6]

[6] Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), xv.

Though Conquest wrote this in one of his later works, many critics were quick to pick up on his not-so-subtle disdain towards Stalin, criticizing his personalist approach to writing history. His relationship with western academia in the years before the true extent of Stalin's system of state terror had been made public was fraught with conflict. He routinely criticized intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertolt Brecht for being apologists of Stalin's regime. In *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, he cited comments made by western thought leaders that he claims denied, excused, or outright justified the purges and show trials of the 1930s.[7] Of notable example were Walter Duranty, Owen Lattimore, and Joseph Davies:

> Walter Duranty of the *New York Times* spoke Russian, had been in Russia for years, and knew some of the accused. For years, he had built a disgraceful career on consciously misleading an important section of American opinion… Professor Owen Lattimore was another noted apologist for the Stalin and similar regimes. In his *Pacific Affairs*… he described the trials themselves as a triumph for democracy on the grounds that they could only "give the ordinary citizen more courage to protest, loudly, whenever he finds himself being victimized by 'someone in the Party' or 'someone in the Government.' That sounds to me like democracy." … The American Ambassador Joseph Davies reported to the Secretary of State that there was "proof… beyond reasonable doubt to justify the verdict of guilty of treason."[8]

Conquest writes his history of the Stalin period with a focus on the personalities in power and their use of institutions to pursue political aims. His 1967 work, *The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R.*, is entirely written from the perspective of the men and institutions that imposed top down controls on the generation of ideas. According to Conquest, in the fields of economics, philosophy, psychology, education, literature and history, the early Stalin period saw fundamental shifts in principle which were directly connected with the emergence of totalitarian

[7] Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), 466–75.

[8] Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 468.

institutions. The notion of objectivity was tossed out for partisan and propagandistic considerations and all thought came subject to direct intervention by the state.[9]

Totalitarianism would eventually see a growing adherence among dissidents and émigrés from the U.S.S.R. such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Roy Medvedev. Like Conquest, they too believed that Stalin's personality and personal ambitions were what drove the increased brutality and repression carried out by the Soviet state from the late 1920s to 1953. From my own personal experience with older relatives, Russian popular cultural approaches to digesting and analyzing history have long been rooted in personalistic analysis. Conquest's approach to studying the Stalin period appears to be based within a paradigm that mirrors the one found in the culture he studied. It is also from this theoretical background that we get the idea that Stalin orchestrated the terror to eliminate his Bolshevik rivals and secure power.

By the 1970s, Totalitarianism was the widely accepted means of interpreting Stalinism, but it was around this time that academics like J. Arch Getty and Sheila Fitzpatrick began to challenge what they viewed as overly dogmatic doctrine. The Revisionists, as they came to be known, handled the issue of Stalinism from a variety of perspectives, many of which were rooted in approaches from social and cultural history. In her 1974 paper, *Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32,* Fitzpatrick laid out her Revisionist interpretation in an analysis of the early years of Stalin's rise to power, arguing that Stalin's first Five-Year Plan ran parallel to a "proletarian cultural revolution" that was "violent and iconoclastic…an aggressive movement of the young, proletarian and communist against the cultural establishment – that is, against the conservative

[9] Conquest, *The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R.,* 18.

alliance of Narkompros… and the bourgeois intelligentsia."[10] Fitzpatrick frames her analysis of the period in the language used by the actors of her narrative, lending a sort of detached objectivity to her writing. This is even more apparent in her more recent book, *Everyday Stalinism*. In the introduction to the book, she wrote;

> This book is about the everyday life of ordinary people, "little men" as opposed to the great. But the life these ordinary people lived was not, in their own understanding and probably ours, a normal life. For those who live in extraordinary times, normal life becomes a luxury. The upheavals and hardships of the 1930s disrupted normalcy, making it something Soviet citizens strove for but generally failed to achieve. This book is an exploration of the everyday and the extraordinary in Stalin's Russia and how they interacted… It presents a portrait of an emerging social species, *Homo Sovieticus*, for which Stalinism was the native habitat.[11]

While the Totalitarian approach of Conquest applied more of a personalist and political methodology, many of the Revisionist approaches, like Fitzpatrick's above, focused on sources such as memoirs, diaries, and correspondences in an effort to capture daily life as seen through the eyes of the average person who lived through the period.

The body of research on the Stalin period is extensive and has been rife with heated debates over the nature of politicization of arguments and discoveries made during the Cold War. Though each side has criticized the other for focusing on the wrong aspects of study, and sometimes ascribed nefarious motives to opposing arguments, for the purposes of this thesis, both will be given equal standing and weight. While the nature of research into Soviet historiography often leads the researcher to state-published documents, historical journals, and political correspondences, I will actively engage in a broader assessment of the lives and

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[10] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 1 (1974): 34. The term Narkompros refers to the government Commissariat of Enlightenment (or Education), which was the government entity that administered public education in the USSR. The head of the Narkompros at the start of Stalin's rule was Anatoly Lunacharsky, who used the agency to promote avant-garde art and culture, which put him into conflict with Stalin.

[11] Sheila Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

personal experiences of the historians under scrutiny. Neglecting either official or personal sources would not do justice to the topic and would limit the effectiveness of my argument.

CHAPTER TWO:

CONTEXTUALIZING THE MARXIST HISTORIAN

2.1: Marxism-Leninism and Historical "Science"

In attempting to understand the conditions of the historical craft in the Stalin period, a familiarity with the context of the historian's role in Bolshevik ideology and bureaucracy of the Revolutionary and Lenin periods is necessary. There was perhaps no greater unifying force in the Soviet Union's development preceding the Second World War than that of its state-sponsored history. The work of historians in the USSR was not relegated to academic fringes or intelligentsia discussions, but was a massively influential element of Soviet life. As such, the ideological and institutional frameworks within which these historians operated, were elaborate structures that regulated their professional activity and personal life far more than in typical liberal or autocratic regimes. The Marxist historians were assigned the task of justifying a slew of events that seemed to fail to meet the expectations of the revolutionary government, amongst the cultural backdrop of a nation of peasants that had yet to even come close to adopting functional capitalist market practices before the adoption of Marxist-Leninist communism.

At its most fundamental level, Soviet Historiography is built on the Marxist theory of historical materialism. Marx and Engels' philosophical roots in Hegelianism provide context for their theoretical understanding of human historical development and the methodologies that evolved out of it. Hegel, one of the philosophical titans of nineteenth century Germany, posited that history should be viewed as a dialectic. As such, human history is a continual narrative that

trends from chaos to order and towards greater rationality. In this sense, history has a predetermined direction wired into it; there is a right and wrong side of history that individuals can orient themselves towards if they derive the proper lessons from their historical studies. Human nature, in this paradigm, is not conceptualized in a constrained sense, where it is understood as an unchanging constant throughout human history. Rather, human nature is malleable and is shaped by social conditions that arise from the historical trend towards progress. Marx, as a follower of Hegel, took to this idea and built his own historical theory around it, though he rejected its idealist connotations and tried to frame the dialectic in "objective," material terms:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.[12]

In the Marxist historical paradigm, history is understood as the continual development of social classes, constrained by economic and material factors, but always trending towards the end result of a classless, stateless society. Social development comes from contradictions in economic interactions and the social "superstructure" such as overproduction in a capitalist economic system, which Marx predicted would usher in the next stage of development. This is what he coined as "communism"; the end stage of history. It is this understanding of history that is echoed by the generations of Marxists that succeeded him.[13] Out of this theoretical framework

[12] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 11.

[13] Conquest, The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R., 14.

arose Marxist-Leninist historiography in the early Soviet Union. This historiographical paradigm strove to subordinate the study of history to contemporary ideological considerations. The past was not to be viewed in a detached, observational manner, but instead through the value system and political framework of the historians themselves. This resulted in an all too common imposition of class analysis on historical populations that may not have had a robust concept of class in their own time.

By the early 1920s, two schools of historiography existed in the Soviet Union. In his scholarly article, *Marxists versus Non-Marxists: Soviet Historiography in the 1920s*, George Enteen notes that "non-Marxist historiography preempted the field in the early years of Soviet power, that is, until at least 1925."[14] Through the early 1920s, non-Marxist historical scholarship was noted for being particularly productive; technical analysis of documents was combined with new hypotheses on the historical issue of serfdom. These scholars had to pay to publish their works, and some were deported from the country, but the Soviet state was willing to permit non-Marxist work so long as it served the purposes of communism, as analytical work on feudalism and serfdom often did.[15] The old guard of non-Marxist historians found their home at Moscow University's Institute of History before being transferred to the Communist-organized Russian Association of Scientific Institutes for Research in the Social Sciences (RANION) in 1925.[16]

Simultaneously, the few historians of Marxist persuasion before the Revolution, were becoming prominent in their own right. Of note was M. N. Pokrovsky, who would be put in

[14] George Enteen, "Marxists versus Non-Marxists: Soviet Historiography in the 1920s," *Slavic Review* 35, no. 1 (1976): 92.

[15] Enteen, "Marxists versus Non-Marxists," 93.

[16] Ibid., 94.

charge of the Communist Academy, the Society of Marxist Historians, the historical division of the Institute of Red Professors, and the Central Archives.[17] The two historiographical camps were allowed to tenuously co-exist because they were understood by Lenin and his inner circle to be focused on different sets of historical issues. The RANION historians focused on the distant past, as it lacked contentious political and ideological implications in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, while the Marxists focused on more recent history leading up to the Soviet regime (with Pokrovsky being the major exception of note). These distinctions did not prevent the non-Marxists at RANION from presenting themselves as a possible liability to the regime. According to one of Pokrovsky's lieutenants, G. S. Fridlyand, the RANION "assembled within its walls all that remains of old bourgeois scholarship… Maximum freedom for scientific activity" was established there for "all those old luminaries." Even those who "on principle did not wish to work at the Institute of Red Professors were permitted to work in RANION."[18] This tenuous co-existence did not mean both camps were treated equally by the Soviet state. It was the Marxist historians who received the majority of funding and attention from the government; an early warning sign of an unfortunate future for the non-Marxists.

[17] George Enteen, The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat: M.N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist Historians (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1978), 37.

[18] G. S. Fridlyand, "Ob ideologiclieskoi bor'be na istoricheskom fronte," *Kommunisticheskaia rcvoliutsii*a, nos. 23-24 (1928): 30.

2.2: The School of Pokrovsky

Figure 1. Photograph of M. N. Pokrovsky, Photographer Unknown: 1930.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/28/Pokrovsky-MN.jpg

No single individual would have as much influence on Soviet historical scholarship in the 1920s as Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky. Pokrovsky was born in Moscow in 1868 into a noble family of state officials.[19] In 1891, he graduated from Moscow University with an education in history and would go on to become a teacher. In the years following the 1905 Revolution and ascension of the Bolshevik party as a major player in Russian revolutionary politics, Pokrovsky became

[19] Anatole Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), 7.

connected with a doctor, philosopher, and writer in the Bolshevik party named Alexander Bogdanov along with a young Nikolai Bukharin.[20] He spent the pre-revolutionary years in exile in Western Europe working on various revolutionary teaching projects through communications with leading party figures such as Vladimir Lenin. After the October Revolution of 1917, Pokrovsky's reputation of living abroad as an academic historian with strong ties to the party earned him the title of Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Moscow Soviet.[21] He was also a drafter of the first Constitution of Soviet Russia. At Lenin's recommendation, Pokrovsky would become the Deputy Commissar of the Educational ministry. In 1925, he was chosen as the first President of the Society of Marxist Historians. He would go on to edit the Soviet state's official historical journal, *Krasni Archiv* (Red Archive), and was elected to the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1929.[22]

To call M. N. Pokrovsky the "patriarch of Soviet historical research" would be to understate just how influential the man, his disciples, and the institutions he led became. A pivotal moment in the integration of the historical profession and Soviet bureaucracy was the formation of the Society of Marxist Historians in 1925, headed by Pokrovsky. At the time, the Bureau of the Central Committee called upon historians to "take part in the ongoing ideological campaign against 'all forms and varieties of counter-revolutionary ideologies."[23] The Soviet state demanded the creation of formal institutions that it justified by referring to an ideology based in historical science. An official historical institution was deemed necessary because the history of

[20] Enteen, The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat, 15.

[21] Ibid., 24.

[22] Ibid., 10.

[23] Iz Istorii Velkoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revolutsii i sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva v SSSR, (Leningrad: 1967), 193.

the Soviet state was understood to be conducive to a scientific discipline that could be used to strengthen its grip on political legitimacy within its own borders. The Society of Marxist Historians was deemed necessary in order to advance the "unification of all Marxists concerned with scholarly work in the field of history for struggle against the perversion of history by bourgeois scholarship" and a key task was the dissemination of Marxist propaganda and methodology.[24] The approach advocated by the Soviet government to members of the Society of Marxist Historians was that of collective consensus on historical events and themes in its reports. While the society acted as an avenue for research funding and work for historians, the effects of this bureaucratic regimentation and collective reporting ultimately served to stifle dissent and create a historical consensus that could be approved or disapproved by the state. Notable members of this society included Vilhelm Knorin, a specialist in party history and the head of the Byelorussian SSR, and A. L. Sidorov, a historian who would become influential in the post-Stalin years.

Pokrovsky was notably fond of the Society of Marxist Historians: "Pokrovskii referred to the Society of Marxist Historians as his 'offspring.' It was not a research center but a 'voluntary tribune,' Pokrovskii's chief instrument for containing the influence of non-Marxist historians, and it constituted the nucleus of the 'school of Pokrovskii."[25] The Institute of Red Professors, also chaired by Pokrovsky, would matriculate and eventually graduate a select group of 47 historians by 1928, among them were A. L. Sidorov, I. I. Mints, N. L. Rubinshtein, and G. S. Fridlyand. Historical study among members of the Society and Institute of Red Professors had a decidedly Marxist spin. The Institute was a state establishment under the authority of the

[24] Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat*, 67.

[25] Enteen, "Marxists versus Non-Marxists," 92.

communist party and it was frequently politicized, with "students being deployed in political campaigns."[26] Here we are already beginning to see signs of an inclination from Soviet authorities to take advantage of the political ramifications of historical research, an initiative that would emerge in full in the coming decade. At the same time, the relative tolerance afforded to the non-Marxists was beginning to wear thin.

Outside of his administrative and didactic roles, Pokrovsky contributed greatly to historical methodology in the Soviet Union. Although not a formal philosopher of history, he constantly reflected on the nature of the writing process and on historiography. His take on historiography emphasized historical determinism; that people, as is the rest of nature, are subject to natural laws. "The various human activities - writing literature and producing goods, for example - 'do not depend on our will, but develop according to certain laws, as immutable as the law which determines the rotation of the earth around the sun'" he claimed as his first principle.[27] From here Pokrovsky posited that the most correct way to interpret history is through economic theory; that being the dialectical materialist theory of the Marxists. He deemphasized the role of heroic individuals, favoring a broader analysis of economic and political systems. In this worldview, all human history was determined and is understood through class conflict. This was a historiographical line of thinking that lent itself to an ideological conformity of which Pokrovsky was wholly aware:

> What is ideology? It is the reflection of reality in the minds of people through the prism of their interest. That is what ideology is, and in that sense, any historical work is, first of all, a specimen of a certain ideology… All ideologies are composed of bits of reality: there are no completely fantastic ideologies; moreover, any ideology is a curved mirror giving by no means a genuine reflection of reality, but something that cannot even be compared to a reflection in a curved mirror. For in a curved mirror, you somehow

[26] John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis: 1928-1932*, (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, 1981), 15.

[27] Enteen, The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat, 30.

> recognize your face by some signs; there is a beard – there is no beard, there is a moustache – there is no moustache. But in matters of ideology, the distortion of reality can be so extreme that a brunette turns out to be a blond, a bearded person turns out to be as clean shaven as cherub, and so forth.[28]

Pokrovsky was quickly forced to correct his error of judgement by Nikolai Bukharin, as he had erred in classifying Marxist historiography as a manifestation of ideology and not as an objective, scientific, and historical theory. Such error would not be forgotten.

Early in his career as an historian, Pokrovsky had published articles on medieval Russian history. Between 1910 and 1915, he published a five-volume *History of Russia from the Earliest Times to the Rise of Commercial Capitalism*, putting forth his research within a broad area of expertise in the form of a textbook.[29] During the 1920s, his most prolific years, Pokrovsky would shift his focus to recent Russian history and the history of communism in Russia such as in his *A Brief History of Russia*. By the mid-twenties, much of his work shifted to more contemporary issues of ideology and political history in the revolutionary period to suit the demands of the day's politics.

1928-29 should be seen as a turning point year in the development of the Soviet historical apparatus. It was this year in which the First All-Union Conference of Marxist Historians would be held and the campaign against non-Marxist historians would kick into full swing. This was also the year that Joseph Stalin, who had become General Secretary of the Communist Party with Lenin's support back in 1922, saw to it that his grip on power over the Central Committee in Moscow became wholly solidified and Pokrovsky, after having been diagnosed with the cancer that would eventually kill him, began to publicly cast doubts about the supremacy of his own

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[28] M. N. Pokrovsky, Bor'ba Klassov I russkaia istoricheskaia literatura, (Petrograd, 1923), 8-9.

[29] Mazour, The Writing of History, 14.

methodology.[30] This public display of weakness would win him no favors with Stalin. Upon his death in April of 1932, his work was all but erased from academic circles. A series of criticisms were levied against him including: (1) That he was dictator of the "historical front" after 1928 and his interpretation became official interpretation. (2) That he was responsible for the purges of non-Marxist historians. (3) That he was not truly a Marxist, but just an economic determinist. (4) That he ignored the role of Nordic populations in Russian history. (5) That he couldn't provide consistent chronology of Russian historical development. (6) That because he viewed history as ideology projected onto the past, he allowed for historical presentism to sully his work.[31]

Pokrovsky's legacy is a unique one. Whole books have been written about the paradigmatic shifts in Soviet historical writing that followed his death. In life, he was perhaps the most politically connected and influential historian in modern times, brushing shoulders with Soviet dictators and Politburo members. In death, his work fell out of and back into favor with the prevailing socio-political winds. As this thesis is focused on the decades immediately following Pokrovsky, he will be rarely heard from again and I fear my summation of his life and contributions may not do justice to the significance of his legacy within Soviet historiography.

[30] Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat*, 93.

[31] Bernard W. Eissenstat, "M. N. Pokrovsky and Soviet Historiography: Some Reconsiderations," *Slavic Review* 28, no. 4 (1969): 604.

2.3: The *Short Course* and Shifting Trends in Historical Writing

In October of 1931, Joseph Stalin penned a seemingly innocuous letter to the editors of the historical journal, *Proletarskaya Revolutsiya*. In it, he voiced his concerns with the content of an article written by a young Marxist historian named A. G. Slutsky. Slutsky's article analyzed the thought processes of Vladimir Lenin in his dealings with the German Social Democratic Party in the years immediately preceding 1914 and framed Lenin as having underestimated the centrist tendencies of the SPD. He then drew the conclusion that Lenin miscalculated the dangers of political opportunism by working with them:

> Slutsky asserts that Lenin (the Bolsheviks) underestimated the danger of Centrism in German Social-Democracy and in pre-war Social-Democracy in general; that is, he underestimated the danger of camouflaged opportunism, the danger of conciliation towards opportunism… It follows, therefore, that in the period before the war Lenin was not yet a real Bolshevik… Such is the tale Slutsky tells in his article. And you, instead of branding this new-found "historian" as a slanderer and falsifier, enter into discussion with him, provide him with a forum. I cannot refrain from protesting against the publication of Slutsky's article in your magazine as an article for discussion, for the question of Lenin's *Bolshevism*... the question whether Lenin was or was not a real Bolshevik, cannot be made into a subject of discussion.[32]

Stalin also commented on a recent textbook by V. Volosevich and found errors in the official *History of the Communist Party*, edited by one of his staunch supporters, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky.[33] Stalin identified Trotskyism and liberal tendencies as the corrupting influences in these works and was quick to demand a shoring up of dissenting opinions among the ranks of the historians. The impact of Stalin's foray into criticism of academic works had a profound effect on the course of historical writing in the Soviet Union.

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[32] Joseph Stalin, "Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism," Marxists Internet Archive. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/x01/x01.htm (accessed September 12, 2018).

[33] John Barber, "Stalin's Letter to the Editors of Poletarskaya Revolutsiya," *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 1 (1976): 21.

In the weeks following the publication of Stalin's letter, Soviet historical academia was gripped by a self-initiated search for "politically harmful elements" in published writings. Slutsky lost his post at the Sverdlov Communist University. Volosevich was also dismissed. His associates, D. A. Baevsky, N. Elvov, I. I. Mints, K. A. Popov, N. N. Popov, and G. I. Vaks were subject to intense criticism. Yaroslavsky, was spared the worst by sending a letter to *Pravda* in which he recognized and apologized for his errors.[34] In December 1931, M. N. Pokrovsky averted becoming a target by virtue of his final public speech in which he scathingly critiqued pernicious influences in the academy:

> Science must be Bolshevik… all attempts to distort Leninist theory are in fact the attack of hostile classes, the attack of the bourgeoisie on the socialist revolution… and each distortion of the theory of Marx and Lenin means at the same time huge damage, dislodging the stone from the foundations of the socialist revolution, undermining its foundations.[35]

Despite this, his closest followers were all called out and forced to repent for mistakes made in their scholarship. The housecleaning on the historical front had kicked into full swing. In 1931, the Society of Marxist Historians held thirty-six meetings. 1932 saw only six take place and *Proletarskaya Revolutsiya* was shut down for the year along with other journals. Stalin's letter was used by other branches of academia to purge and target "Trotskyist contraband," reaching into the sciences, philosophy, and literature. At its peak in January of 1932, the craze over Stalin's letter had to be toned down by authorities who worried it would get out of control and completely stifle research and publication; "It was one thing, Postyshev maintained, to 'expose

[34] Barber, "Stalin's Letter," 22.

[35] "Za boevuyu perestroiku istoricheskogo fronta", *Bor'ba Klassov*, no. 2-3 (1931): 10.

those masked Trotskyists'… it was quite another to deal with 'the error of a comrade who must be criticized… so that he may correct his error."[36]

On the 10th of April 1932, after a half decade-long struggle with his health, M. N. Pokrovsky died of stomach cancer. He was afforded all the honors fitting of a Soviet leader; his body lay in state in the Kremlin and Stalin, Molotov, and Kalinin were included among the pall bearers. During his funeral in Red Square, speeches were given by Bukharin, Bulganin, and Kuibyshev, before his ashes were placed in the Kremlin wall.[37] Though Pokrovsky's death was handled delicately by the Soviet authorities and Stalin, it ultimately served as the final hurdle to clear before a complete overhaul of the historical field could take place.

In subsequent years, Pokrovsky's writings were deemed too narrowminded (rooted in economic materialism) and his historiographical approach was derided as under-emphasizing the role of the great personal figures of Russian history and being anti-patriotic; in sum, Pokrovsky's historical work was too esoteric to appeal to the masses of Soviet citizenry that Stalin sought to influence.[38] He needed an official state history that would entrench a singular national character that would legitimize both his hold on power and his ambitious collectivization and industrialization programs which had been undertaken at great cultural, human, and economic costs. Stalin would look to the creation of a standardized textbook as his solution.

Beginning in 1934, by joint decree of the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee, a series of textbooks would be written by various historians and party

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[36] Barber, "Stalin's Letter," 24.
P. P. Potyshev was one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and a candidate member of the Politburo.

[37] Barber, Soviet Historians in Crisis, 23.

[38] Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar Bureaucrat*, 119.

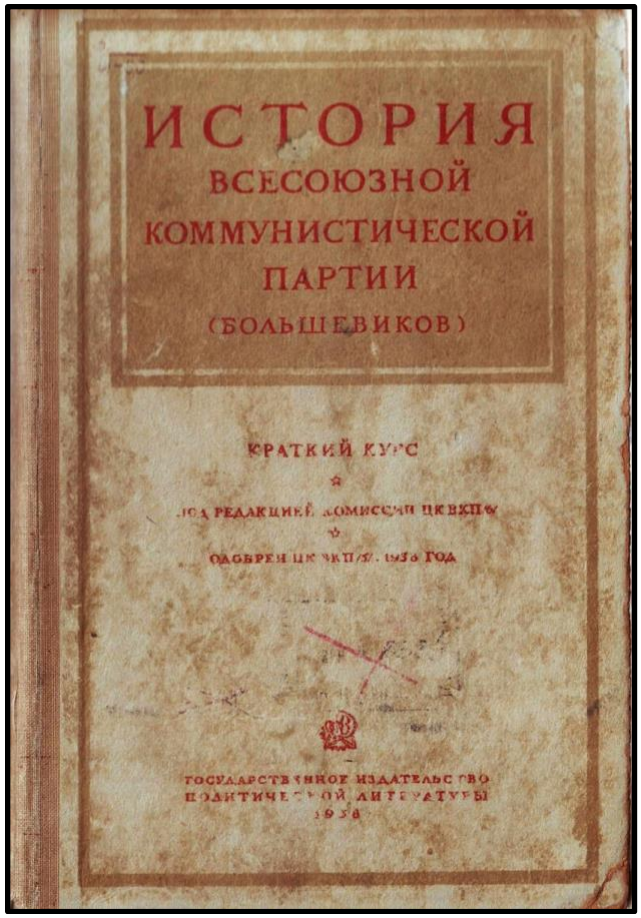
apparatchiks who would try to live up to Stalin's populist prescriptions for the Soviet state's historiography, but none would meet expectations. In 1935, Stalin commissioned the writing of the *History of the All-Union Communist Party*.[39] It was worked on in the context of the Great Terror and subsequent purges in which Stalin consistently removed party officials deemed too threatening to his grip on power or nonconformist to the party platform and so he sought a textbook that would serve as a sort of jumping-off point for his iteration of Bolshevik party history. Stalin's aim was to portray the Bolsheviks before his rise to power, as a cadre of backstabbers and traitors who consistently tried to undermine Lenin's vision. Additionally, there was a need to justify in Marxist theoretical terms, his five-year plans, dekulakization, and collectivization policies.[40] As collectivization had been largely unsuccessful, Stalin turned to historians to carry out damage control on the narrative constructed around it. Stalin also sought to contextualize the October Revolution of 1917 in a comparative analysis with the Bourgeois (French) Revolution of 1789. Initial drafts of the work did not satisfy him, however, as he found the lack of dialectical materialist theory (and reliance on empiricism), wordiness, and exaggerated role it ascribed to a conspiracy which undermined his plans to be excessive. He would spend most of the summer of 1938 stripping it of these excesses. Finally, after years of revisions, in the fall of 1938, the *Short Course* was published and made compulsory reading in Soviet universities and party schools and became one of the most widely distributed books in the communist world.[41] The finished product was an authoritative history of the Communist Party of

[39] David Brandenberger and M.V. Zelenov, "The Short Course on Party History," Stalin Digital Archive, accessed January 28 2018. https://www.stalindigitalarchive.com/frontend/the-short-course-on-party-history-bradenberger-zelenov.

[40] Brandenberger and Zelenov, "The Short Course".

[41] Brandenberger and Zelenov, "The Short Course".

the Soviet Union, written in tandem by high ranking members of the party including Vilhelm Knorin (the head of the Byelorussian SSR, who was later purged, executed and replaced by Andrei Zhadanov and Vyacheslav Molotov), Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, and Pyotr Pospelov. Stalin himself contributed a chapter on dialectical materialism and had been the chief editor of the project, supervising its overall message.



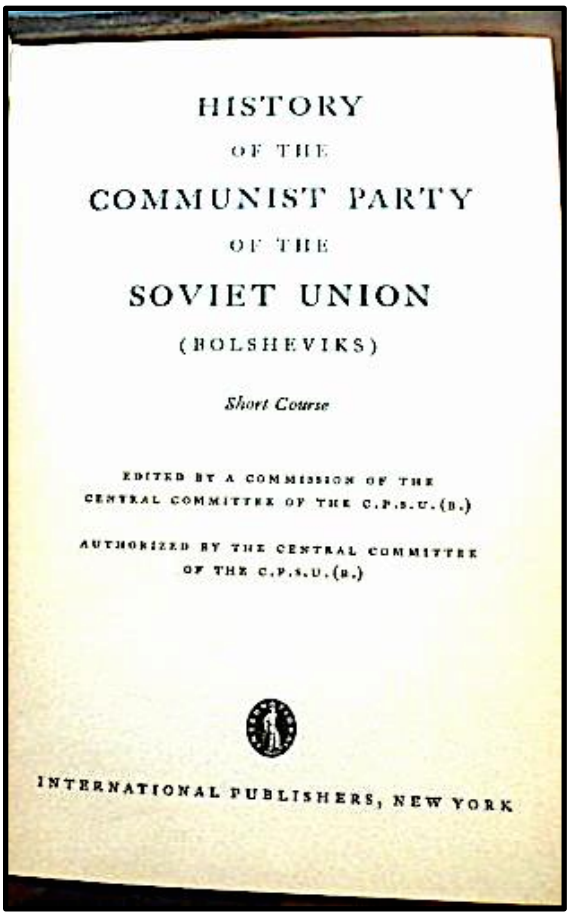


Figure 2. First Edition Front Cover of *The Short Course*: 1938.
http://www.rline.tv/news/2016-11-14-ispolnilos-78-let-kratkomu-kursu-istorii-vkp-b-/#gallery
Figure 3. English cover page of *The Short Course*: 1976.
https://www.amazon.com/History-Communist-Party-Soviet-Bolsheviks/dp/083718018X

While the *Short Course* is not the primary focus of this paper and I will not engage in a full-fledged rhetorical analysis of the entire text, some familiarity with its themes and rhetorical strategies is necessary to understand the orientation of future Soviet historical scholarship.

In the *Short Course*, Stalin and his coauthors went to great lengths to frame the pre-revolutionary period as a gloomy time in which a great imperialist scourge ruled over Russia, while revolutionaries and false revolutionaries bickered amongst themselves. The first four chapters of the *Short Course* primarily deal with the formation and maturation of the Bolshevik party and the delineation of its enemies in this time period; by extension it classifies the groups of enemies of the would-be Soviet nation. In the first chapter of the *Short Course*, a description of pre-revolutionary conditions in Russia is put forth. It is stated that "even after serfdom had been abolished the landlords continued to oppress the peasants. In the process of 'emancipation' they robbed the peasants by inclosing, cutting off, considerable portions of the land previously used by the peasants," making the argument that in freeing the peasants from serfdom, capitalist policies actually perpetuated their oppression.[42] This chapter also lays out the state of ethnic relations in the Russian empire:

> Tsarist Russia was a prison of nations. The numerous non-Russian nationalities were entirely devoid of rights and were subjected to constant insult and humiliation of every kind. The tsarist government taught the Russian population to look down upon the native peoples of the national regions as an inferior race, officially referred to them as *inorodtsi* (aliens), and fostered contempt and hatred of them. The tsarist government deliberately fanned national discord, instigated one nation against another, engineered Jewish pogroms and, in Transcaucasia, incited Tatars and Armenians to massacre each other… The tsarist government strove to extinguish every spark of national culture and pursued a policy of forcible "Russification." Tsardom was a hangman and torturer of the non-Russian peoples.[43]

The writing here is deliberate in framing the Tsarist period as one in which the state, and by extension the elite classes of Russian society, were responsible for repressing the peasantry and sowing ethnic tensions across their empire. Stalin emphatically hammers this point home, going

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[42] Joseph Stalin, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* (Moscow: OGIZ Gosizdat, 1938). https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/index.htm.

[43] Stalin, *History of the CPSU*.

to great lengths to discuss the imposition of the Russian language on minority groups. Given his Georgian background and the ethnic discomfort he likely experienced in his youth, this is hardly surprising.[44] The argument about the imperialism of the Russian language stems from a deep disdain for the Russian intellectual class. It was the "individualistic intellectuals who fear discipline and organization" that were responsible for the difficulties in the early organizing of the revolutionary movement.[45] Many joined the ranks of the Mensheviks and the Social Democrats, resulting in them being deemed enemies of the revolution by association with undesirable liberal elements and because of their opposition to Lenin's Bolshevik party. This implied a sort of traitorous class consciousness among the intelligentsia and was intended to propagate discontent for them among the population. The writers of the *Short Course* also lashed out at foreign émigrés: "they entrenched themselves in the Foreign League of Russian Social-Democrats, nine-tenths of whom were émigré intellectuals isolated from the work in Russia, and from this position they opened fire on the Party, on Lenin and the Leninists."[46] They were deemed enemies aligned with the imperialists, inundated with propaganda from the liberals and capitalists, and responsible for disarray among the revolutionary ranks.

For the Soviet state under Stalin, the policies of collectivized agriculture and dekulakization were topics of considerable difficulty in reconciling with the historically deterministic narrative of the inevitable progress of socialism. The collectivization of agriculture had not proceeded smoothly as many peasants either resisted or chose to act as inefficiencies in the system. The state was forced to resort to compulsion and violence in order to force the

[44] Hans Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernization and Revolution 1881 - 1917* (London: Routledge, 2016), 194.

[45] Stalin, History of the CPSU.

[46] Stalin, History of the CPSU.

peasantry in line. One particular subgroup of landowning peasants, the Kulaks, were hit hardest by dekulakization, the Soviet Union's repressive policy that was menacingly named after its targets.

In the *Short Course,* an entire chapter is devoted to the grand collectivization project. Chapter 11 opens by setting the stage with contemporary context; the Great Depression. Here, Stalin is quick to juxtapose the effects of the global economic crisis on the capitalist world and socialist world. The capitalist world was described by Stalin as having lost up to forty percent of is production output, condemning two hundred and forty million unemployed people to starvation, poverty, and misery: "This was but an additional proof of the superiority of the Socialist economic system over the capitalist economic system. It showed that the country of Socialism is the only country in the world which is exempt from economic crises" claimed Stalin.[47] The superiority of the Soviet system in exceeding production outputs during economic crisis is formally attributed in the *Short Course,* in part, to the collectivization of agricultural production. The official history presents a narrative of peasants willingly giving up their plots of land in favor of the collective model put forth by the Soviet authorities, yet a complicating obstacle stood in the way:

> Solid collectivization was not just a peaceful process—the overwhelming bulk of the peasantry simply joining the collective farms—but was a *struggle of the peasant masses against the kulaks*. Solid collectivization meant that all the land in a village area in which a collective farm was formed passed into the hands of the collective farm; but a considerable portion of this land was held by the kulaks, and therefore the peasants would expropriate them, driving them from the land, dispossessing them of their cattle and machinery and demanding their arrest and eviction from the district by the Soviet authorities. Solid collectivization therefore meant the elimination of the kulaks.[48]

[47] Stalin, History of the CPSU.

[48] Stalin, History of the CPSU.

The language used to describe the forcible removal of the kulaks from Soviet agrarian society is steeped in rhetoric of revolution. The elimination of the kulaks was a 'reintegration' on the basis of class. Kulak class consciousness was the ideological enemy of collectivization and had to be quashed out along with the principle of private property. Kulaks were associated with capitalistic ideas because of their ownership of land and as such demanded urgent removal. Stalin goes as far as to label the collectivization and dekulakization period of late 1928 through 1930 as a profound revolution, equivalent in impact to the 1917 October Revolution. It is a galvanizing turning point in the formation of Soviet national identity.

Perhaps most salient of all of the themes of the *Short Course* is the period of the Great Terror, especially because it was occurring as the work was being drafted and edited by politburo membership and Stalin himself. This was a series of purges and executions between 1936 and 1938 that targeted political rivals, dissidents, and class enemies of Stalin's regime. In chapter twelve of the *Short Course*, Stalin and the writers went to great lengths to frame the terror as a minor aside in the final steps of the construction of Soviet society. This was a period where the world was inching ever closer to war and the mounting threat of Nazi Germany loomed large on Stalin's mind and so it was tantamount that the Soviet state had a stable national identity to rally a push back against possible invasion. Of course, the cost in human lives was seen as a mere footnote in the grand narrative underpinning Soviet ambitions.

Finally, throughout the *Short Course*, its writers went to great lengths to frame Leon Trotsky and other internal rivals of Stalin's as lackeys of the fascists and spies. The entire topic of the Great Terror is addressed in four sentences:

> These contemptible lackeys of the fascists forgot that the Soviet people had only to move a finger, and not a trace of them would be left. The Soviet court sentenced the Bukharin-Trotsky fiends to be shot. The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs carried out the

> sentence. The Soviet people approved the annihilation of the Bukharin-Trotsky gang and passed on to next business.[49]

The brevity of this theme in the work is telling as it reveals a desire to shift attention away from the ambiguous brutality of the Soviet state. The rest of the chapter follows with discussion of a new constitution being ratified by the party congress and of the ninety million-person unanimous vote in support of said constitution affirming the moral and political unity of the Soviet people.

The *Short Course* serves as a manifestation of the tremendous change on the historical front that took place in the 1930s. The esoteric quibbling over applications of Marxist theory and historiography in the 1920s gave way to a populist historical approach with a pragmatic political purpose for the Soviet authorities. Stalin understood that controlling historical narrative could allow him to shape the zeitgeist of Soviet society and secure his legitimacy in the present.

[49] Stalin, History of the CPSU.

2.4: A Primer on Soviet Nationalities Policy

In order to provide appropriate context within an analysis of nationalism in the Soviet Union, a discussion of the evolution of Soviet policy towards ethnic groups is necessary. The society that the Bolsheviks inherited from the Tsarist and later Provisional governments, was a tapestry of varied ethnicities and cultural groups which had once resided within the largest continuous land empire since that of Genghis Kahn and his Mongol Empire. Despite its great size, prestige, and power, the Russian Empire struggled greatly with the issue of nationalism. When nationalist revolutions swept up the great powers of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, Russia was, on-paper, just ahead of the curve. In April of 1833, the policy of "Official Nationality" was proclaimed by the education minister, Sergei Uvarov, who put great stock in the works of enlightenment thinkers who tried to redefine political sovereignty in the manner of deriving its legitimacy from collective socio-political identity and consent of the public. The collective identity would, of course, be Russian in nature and would aim to Russify subjects of the empire. This policy would be embraced by the Tsar, Nicholas I and his intelligentsia class as it signaled Russia's entry into the age of modern politics.[50]

While such a policy should have, in theory, Russified the peoples of the Russian Empire, paradoxically, there was no sense of shared Russian national identity across the lands inherited by the Bolsheviks beyond the small enclaves of urban intelligentsia. Even in the first two decades of the twentieth century, three revolutions, two wars, and a civil war could not bring the process of nation-building to fruition. The Soviet authorities in the 1920s, found themselves in

[50] Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132.

charge of a country with what amounted to an amorphous identity that changed from province to province or even town to town. What seems to most account for this lack of national identity among Soviet (formerly Russian) citizens was a dearth of a sense of common heritage and little awareness of a glorious interpretation of Russian history, full of pseudo-mythologized heroes.[51] Leo Tolstoy, a Russian literary titan whose classic novel, *War and Peace*, glorifies and grapples with the social conditions of aristocratic life in Russia during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, wrote in the late nineteenth century:

> I lived among the Russian people for half a century and over the course of that time I never saw or heard even once any manifestation or expression of this notion of patriotism within the great breadth of the true Russian people… I frequently heard the most serious and respectable men from among the people express the most utter indifference or even contempt for every kind of patriotism.[52]

According to Tolstoy, who himself had a pulse on Russian culture as he had written novels that strove to capture the essence of the Russian mentality, common Russian citizens were uninterested or hostile to nationalism. The Soviets would later sense that same revulsion and, in line with Marxist theory that argued for proletarian internationalism as opposed to ethnic or national consciousness, they would attempt to placate the many peoples of the Soviet Union.

Through the 1920s, Pokrovsky and his followers avoided writing Russian and Soviet history along national lines, favoring class as the unit of analysis. Pokrovsky, entering the twilight of his career in 1930, argued that the term "Russian history" was counterrevolutionary.[53] In order to promote the Marxist project, party historians needed to reject the Tsarist historical

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[51] David Brandenberger, National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 11.

[52] L. N. Tolstoy, "Khristianstvo i patriotizm," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 39 (Moscow, 1956), 52.

[53] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 18.

narrative and avoid unifying the people around any myth of common national origin. Studies of civic history were replaced with the "social studies" which included subjects like labor, economics, and class conflict.[54] Along with this, the Soviet state implemented a policy called Korenizatsiya (putting down roots) that promoted ethnic minorities to high level government posts in their respective Soviet republics. Minority languages were elevated to official local administrative languages requiring ethnic Russians in local branches of the Communist party to learn said languages. Russian cultural influence, what the Bolsheviks referred to as Russian chauvinism, was actively reigned in by the Soviet authorities to help ethnic minorities feel socially and politically equal to Russians. Even Jews, it seemed, would fare better under the new Soviet government. In 1917, the Kerensky government abolished the Pale of Settlement, which had existed in Tsarist times to limit Jews to establishing permanent homes only in the westernmost parts of the Russian Empire.[55] Several prominent Bolshevik revolutionaries were Jewish and had risen to positions of power. Lenin publicly decried the anti-Semitism that was rampant in the old regime as a misdirection of working-class anger that needed to be redirected towards actual exploiter capitalists. As late as 1931, on the topic of anti-Semitism, Stalin wrote in response to the Jewish News Agency in the United States, that "in the U.S.S.R. anti-semitism is punishable with the utmost severity of the law as a phenomenon deeply hostile to the Soviet system. Under U.S.S.R. law active anti-semites are liable to the death penalty."[56]

In the early 1920s, the Bolshevik party even had a People's Commissariat for Nationalities tasked with helping to politically integrate the ethnic minorities into the Soviet

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[54] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 19.

[55]John Klier, "Pale of Settlement," The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, accessed October 24, 2018, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement

[56] J. V. Stalin, "Anti-Semitism" in *Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow, Foreign Languages Press, 1954), 30.

Union, headed by none other than Joseph Stalin. The great irony of future Stalinist policy is that Stalin, who was himself an ethnic Georgian, once echoed Lenin in advocating for a multiethnic alliance. In 1917, addressing Finnish socialists, he called for "complete freedom for the Finnish people, and for the other peoples of Russia, to arrange their own life! A voluntary and honest alliance of the Finnish people with the Russian people!"[57] That tune would not last long after Stalin's rise to absolute power.

Figure 4. The Pale of Settlement, 1835-1917: nd.
https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-pale-of-settlement
Figure 5. "Long live the unity and brotherhood of workers of all nationalities of the USSR!": 1934.
https://www.ebay.com/itm/Soviet-Russian-Original-POSTER-Unity-and-brotherhood-of-workers-USSR-propaganda-/311978375694

[57] J. V. Stalin, "Speech delivered at the Congress of the Finnish Social-Democratic Labour Party, Helsingfors" in *Works*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Press, 1953), 4.

PART II

CHAPTER THREE:

HISTORIANS AND THE "SACRED WAR"

The subsequent chapters of this thesis will engage with the period of Stalin's rule between 1938 and 1953 and will explore the lives of select historians who kept memoirs of their experiences in the period. Central to this will be the shared experience of the Second World War, dubbed the "Great Patriotic War" or "Sacred War" in cultural and propagandistic sources from the period. Scholarship on the Soviet Union's involvement in the Second World War is extensive and my writing, for the sake of this paper's scope, will be constrained to what I consider to be most relevant and revealing about the state of the Soviet historical front in particular and the qualitative impact that had on shifting attitudes towards issues of national identity in political and academic circles. The lasting memory of the war in Soviet and later Russian and post-Soviet cultures remains, to this day, a point of both tremendous national pride and tension. My aim is to unpack how that memory formally became such a powerful nationalizing impulse in the Stalin period.

3.1: The Patriot

I have chosen to explore the Soviet experience of the Second World War in a bit of a novel way, by assessing the lives of two historians in the manner of loose archetypes representing two courses of action taken by individual academics. While their specific experiences are unique to them, they were among many millions of Soviet citizens, who had to choose between dutiful

patriotism and collaboration with the enemy. In the heightened socio-cultural drama of existential conflict for Soviet society, such choices would not have been uncommon. This first section will assess the wartime experiences of Aleksandr Nekrich, who I have chosen to label as "the Patriot."

Aleksandr Moiseevich Nekrich was born on the 3rd of March, 1920 in Baku in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to Fanny and Moisei Nekrich, who were Russian Jews.[58] In April of the same year, the Red Army invaded and occupied Azerbaijan and by 1922, Azerbaijan was reestablished as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union.[59] By 1941, Nekrich had obtained an M.A. in History from the Moscow State University, having been trained squarely within the *Short Course* paradigm that had been established in 1938.[60] Soviet historical academia had changed significantly since the end of the Pokrovsky years. Back in 1934, the Central Committee and Council of People's Commissars had decreed the reorganization of the historical departments at the Universities of Moscow and Leningrad to train a new generation of historians less obsessed with sociological trends and more concerned with chronology, facts, and personalities.[61] At the height of the Great Purge in 1937, many Marxist historians who had trained under Pokrovsky, such as S. A. Piontkovsky, Nikolai Vanag, G. S.

[58] Online Archive of California, "Register of the A. M. Nekrich papers," accessed October 16, 2018, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt2q2nc417/entire_text/; JewishGen Belarus SIG, "Jewish Encyclopedia of Russia Surnames starting with the letter N," accessed October 16, 2018, https://www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/misc/JewishEncycRussia/n/index.html

[59] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Azerbaijan," accessed October 16, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan

[60] Online Archive of California, "Register of the A. M. Nekrich papers."

[61] "On the Teaching of Civic History in the Schools of the U.S.S.R.," Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R., *Pravda*, no. 133 (1934): 1.

Fridlyand, and others, were branded as Trotskyites and executed.[62] These executions served both to make an example of and to subjugate historians and other academics to the political will of Stalin; deviance from the party line that had in the past been punished with career assassination, shaming, and de-platforming, now became a fatal misstep. Nekrich, who was trained by survivors of the Purges, was a product of this new educational system through and through.

As a twenty-two-year-old in 1941, Nekrich, like many other highly educated men from the party schools, was assigned as a political officer of the 2nd Guards Army of the Soviet Red Army.[63] The 2nd Guards Army was a field army that earned distinguished honors for its successes on the battlefield, most notably at Stalingrad. In November of 1942, it had been sent in after Operation Uranus successfully encircled the German 6th Army. When the Germans counterattacked with their Operation Winter Storm, it was the 2nd Guards Army that heroically held back the Germans and foiled their last-ditch offensive, before engaging in its own series of counterattacks against the Italian forces attached to the Germans.[64] One of those counterattacks was the Kotelnikovo Offensive, which was an early stage of the greater Soviet military push out of the Caucasus that would end with the Red Army at the gates of Berlin three years later.[65]

The Battle of Stalingrad would become a symbolic and literal symbol of Soviet resilience and superiority over Nazi Germany in the latter half of the war on the Eastern front. Stalingrad, which had been renamed such from Tsaritsyn in 1925, bore Stalin's name and was a strategic

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[62] A. N. Artizov, "Nikolai Nikolaevich Vanag (1899-1937)", *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 6, (1992), 95-109; Memorial: "Zhertvy politicheskogo terror v SSSR [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR]," accessed October 17, 2018, http://lists.memo.ru/index.htm

[63] Online Archive of California, "Register of the A. M. Nekrich papers."

[64] John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 12-13.

[65] Jewish Virtual Library, "World War II: The Battle of Stalingrad," accessed October 17, 2018, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-battle-of-stalingrad

center beyond which lay the oil fields of the Caucasus. The city would become the site of the largest and bloodiest battle in human history, lasting six months and leaving approximately 1.8 million dead and wounded on both sides. At Stalingrad the Soviets, suffering a cost in men and resources equivalent to roughly twenty percent of their 1941 mobilization numbers, managed to halt the German advance of Operation Barbarossa and turned the tide of the war, starting a series of offensives that would end in 1945 with the Red Army capture of Berlin and the fall of the Third Reich. The symbolic importance of the victory at Stalingrad cannot be understated; in the Soviet Union's darkest hour, Stalin's city and the nation had survived everything the enemy had to offer and triumphed. This was as much a propaganda victory as it was a military one for the Soviets and their internal morale and national prestige was inflated to new highs.

Figure 6. "Our banner is a banner of victory!": 1942.
http://www.allworldwars.com/Russian%20WWII%20Propaganda%20Posters.html
Figure 7. "Let the courageous image of our great ancestors inspire you – J. Stalin": 1942.
http://www.allworldwars.com/Russian%20WWII%20Propaganda%20Posters.html

In fact, propaganda from the immediate aftermath of Stalingrad would begin to reflect a variety of salient nationalizing themes. Though I will dedicate much of the next chapter of this thesis to exploring the narratives and iconography of "National Bolshevism," I will briefly point out a few themes that will emerge consistently. Firstly, victory at Stalingrad gave the Soviet state an opportunity to invoke the historical heroes of Russia's past such as General Kutuzov (right) who fought back Napoleon when he invaded Russia in 1812 and the knights of Novgorod (left) who successfully defended their republic from Teutonic (German) invaders in the 13th century. It is no coincidence that during this period, Soviet historiography was formally focused on heroic figures who had repelled invaders. Secondly, the victory at Stalingrad was used as evidence of the inevitability of victory of the Soviet nation. For a nation to have cohesion in a time of crisis, a unifying expectation of superiority and invincibility needs to be affirmed in the public consciousness and Soviet propaganda worked hard to engrain this attitude into the popular psyche.

Returning to the focus of this section, Nekrich was attached as a political officer to the operations at Stalingrad and would eventually rise to the rank of Guards Captain. During the East Prussian Offensive, Nekrich's unit was part of the Soviet Army that broke through the German defenses south of Königsberg (modern Kaliningrad). His memoirs begin with his arrival home at the end of the war and his brief recollection of memories from the war. Despite membership in a prestigious unit, his time in the war left him deeply affected by the losses of loved ones, colleagues, and friends:

> Sometimes I felt I nostalgic sadness—for my older brother, Vova [Vladimir], killed in 1943; for fellow students from the university who had not returned from the war; for Run'ka Rozenberg and his brother Os'ka, or Misha Pollak and others. I remembered comrades in the political department who had been killed—Captain Sedov, Captain Lokhin, Lieutenant-Colonel Glinsky—the senseless death of Shura Averkieva (a stray

> bullet from a sudden pistol shot killed her instantly as she slept—that was in Lithuania in 1944), and the similar accidental death of the political department driver Tcheremisin.[66]

Nekrich returned from the war with the emotional wounds and psychoses one would expect, having experienced loss and horror. He describes a recurring dream of experiencing a grisly death by bombing raid as well as other symptoms of post-traumatic stress. As the dream stops recurring, Nekrich associates his relief with his memory of the war fading away and his youthful vitality returning. Like millions of other Soviet men from all walks of life, he had served his nation dutifully as was expected of a patriotic citizen, but he did not feel like a hero.

In his writings about this stage of his life, Nekrich identifies a unique circumstance brought on by the war; as a result of the Soviet army entering Europe, a whole generation of common Soviet men had encountered some of the worst atrocities to happen to mankind such as the death camps of Treblinka, Auschwitz and Dachau, while simultaneously fraternizing with Americans, Frenchmen, and Belgians. Nekrich describes this as having had a perception-altering effect on a generation of Soviet men much like the Napoleonic Wars did for a generation of Russians in 1815. The world beyond the Soviet Union was not so black and white and was teeming with a variety and nuance that most of the population could not afford to see for themselves in times of peace.[67] After returning home, like many other young scholar-officers who had served, he was enjoying wild parties and "encounters" and growing his social network in intellectual circles. It was from this point in his life that he would return to another form of service in academia and pursue his doctorate in history.

The academic environment that Nekrich returned to in 1946 was different than the one he had left before the war. He first returned to Moscow State University but was disenchanted with

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[66] Aleksandr Nekrich, *Forsake Fear: Memoirs of an Historian* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), 1.

[67] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 9.

the atmosphere there and so he left to look for graduate positions elsewhere. Though he initially considered attending diplomatic school, what he encountered in that admissions process was something seemingly new to him; institutional anti-Semitism:

> At the end of the war I had heard rumors that a political worker had been either demoted or not promoted because of his Jewish origins… I myself had never experienced any form of anti-Semitism. The Institute of History had two graduate level vacancies in the department of modern history and current events, and I was received there quite cordially. (I suspect my military uniform and medals played some part in this.)… [Dr. Khvostov] received me warmly, made an excellent recommendation and even told me he was sorry that he could not accept me as a student at the Higher Diplomatic School since "admissions were already closed." "Jews need not apply," I remember was the remark… and they don't bother to apply, I thought to myself.[68]

Nekrich was ultimately undeterred by the rumblings of anti-Semitism in academia and would secure a post as a graduate student in modern history under the esteemed former Soviet ambassador to the United Kingdom and historian, Ivan Maisky, at the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The Institute of History in which Nekrich was enrolled was headed by the acclaimed historian and expert on Russian feudalism, B. D. Grekov, whose work will be explored in the chapter on National Bolshevism. While there, Nekrich encountered a disgraced academic, Abram Deborin, who was now relegated to administrative work running Nekrich's graduate program because of his Menshevik views. Deborin, himself a Lithuanian Jew, had become highly influential in the Pokrovsky era of the 1920s, rising to high level academic posts in multiple universities and party schools before being elected to the Academy of Sciences. In 1931, during the craze over Stalin's letter, he was denounced by the party and forced to give up his right to publish academic works. Deborin had trained a whole generation of Soviet philosophers including Mitin, Yudin, Ralzevich, Luppol, and Sten. The first two became close allies of Stalin and the latter three disappeared in the purges. Mitin and Yudin apparently

[68] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 3.

confronted Deborin asking him to proclaim Stalin the leader of the Soviet philosophical front to which he replied, "Stalin has not written any work on philosophy."[69] His publishing career was effectively over after that. Nekrich uses Deborin's story to highlight one method of Stalinist censorship; de-platforming. Publishers would no longer publish his works after direct condemnation from Stalin for fear of being shut down by the government. Nekrich describes Deborin of being unable to control obstinate staff members and allowing an atmosphere of squabbling to develop. Perhaps he was disillusioned with the demands for regimented order in academia by Stalin, or perhaps it was his way of protesting.

By 1947, the Cold War was already in full swing. This was also the year in which political prisoners who had been sentenced to ten-year terms in prisons and labor camps during the 1937 purges began to reappear. "The front door would open and in would walk fathers, brothers, wives, sisters, those for whom there had been little hope of returning, for they were the 'enemies of the people'... stories of terrible places – about concentration camps in Kolyma, where thousands had died… spread throughout the country."[70] Nekrich confirms that rumors and whispers of Stalin's system of concentration camps had begun to spread, at least among his social circles.

In the spring of 1948, Nekrich was called into the office of the party bureau secretary for the Institute of History, Vasily Mochalov. Mochalov asked Nekrich a series of probing questions about Abram Deborin, which made Nekrich concerned. He answered the questions as innocuously as possible before Mochalov responded: "Aleksandr Moiseevich, not everything is fine in your department. It is quite possible that there will be some changes. Try to stay out of

[69] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 7.

[70] Ibid., 9.

it."[71] This would be Nekrich's first glimpse at the coming "war on cosmopolitans," a mobilization of the press, radio, and the entirety of the Soviet propaganda machine for a new ideological offensive against those deemed rootless by the Soviet state. Though intentionally made to appear vague, Nekrich explains that the "war on cosmopolitans" was in fact a systematic targeting of Jews within the party, with the occasional "Russian or Armenian thrown in for good measure."[72]

> Anyone inclined to believe that the crusade against 'cosmopolitans' was something out of the ordinary or merely the last gasp of the Stalinist era is likely to be misled. The ideological windstorms aimed at "cleansing" Soviet society was, and remains, one of the central features of the existing social order in the Soviet Union…The campaign against cosmopolitans forced me to give serious and profound thought to what was happening in my country. For I knew personally many of the historians who were being persecuted, and no speeches or newspaper articles or even Central Committee decrees could convince me that these people were hostile to our state or had defected to the enemy.[73]

It was under the shadow of these new purges that Nekrich began to truly doubt the moral validity of the social-political order that had arisen around him. Then he became a target. At a closed party meeting, members of the department took to the floor to discuss the issue of why Jews were inclined to be petty bourgeois ideologues and to decry Deborin. Nekrich spoke out to defend Deborin only to draw private warnings from his superiors. At this point he was resigned to keeping his mouth shut. No number of military medals could protect him from a slip of the tongue. Nekrich also observed the fall from grace of the esteemed historian I. I. Mints and his feud with A. L. Sidorov; an incident I will delve into in a future chapter.

Nekrich's story is particularly interesting as he was in many ways a model Soviet citizen. He had fought valiantly for his country in its darkest hour and returned to civilian life with the

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[71] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 19.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 20.

aim of being an historian in the state's academic apparatus. By virtue of his acceptance into the prestigious Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences, he was privy to the inner machinations of Soviet historical academia and witnessed much of the drama and tension of the postwar Stalin years. We will return to his story in the context of a broader discussion of émigré historians.

3.2: The Collaborator

The next archetypal character I will try to articulate in the Soviet experience of World War II is "the Collaborator." In times of crisis, individuals are often confronted with choices that must be made for survival. Sometimes those choices are made with an added element of passion or hostility towards a perceived injustice. In the context of the Soviet experience of World War II, such tensions manifested in certain peoples being inclined to collaborate with the Nazi invaders. After briefly assessing the wartime and immediate post-war experiences of Aleksandr Nekrich, who served valiantly in the Red Army, this next section of my thesis will explore the life of another historian and soldier, Konstantin Shteppa; "the Collaborator."

Konstantin F. Shteppa was born on the 3rd of December, 1896 in town of Lokhvitsa in Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire. His father was an Orthodox priest whose ancestors had emigrated from Germany and his mother hailed from a Ukrainian noble family.[74] Shteppa was enrolled in theological seminary in Poltova from 1910-1914 and went on to the University of Petrograd from 1914-1916, studying under the acclaimed ancient historian, Mikhail Rostovtsev.

[74] Alexander Dallin, foreword to *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, by Konstantin Shteppa (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

His education was interrupted by the Great War, when he was called into service in the Tsar's army and later with the White army during the Russian Civil War before being wounded and taken prisoner in November of 1920. In the hospital, Shteppa managed to obtain forged documents under the surname "Shtepa" and this allowed him to hide traces of his anti-Soviet past for years.[75] After the war he settled in Kiev, eventually earning his Doctorate of Philosophy in history in 1927 and earning an appointment to the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR in 1930. His areas of interest involved social history, antiquity, and medieval history and he would become one of the Soviet Union's foremost scholars on Byzantine history through the 1930s. His background and rise to prominence began to arouse suspicions with the NKVD, Stalin's secret police. To them he was a contradictory figure; he had fought in the White army, but could not be described as a reactionary as he had a progressive political orientation. He was the son of an Orthodox priest and took interest in Roman Catholicism, but was also an expert in Marxism. His interests in ancient and medieval history were deemed "escapist" by the NKVD and in March of 1938, during the purges, he was arrested on charges of "anti-Soviet activities."[76] That is, of course, Shteppa's own retelling of the situation.

A scholar at the University of Ottawa, Ivan Katchanovski, uncovered interesting information pertaining to Shteppa during research that he was conducting in 2006, in an attempt to apply the prisoner's dilemma to the Great Terror. While browsing the recently declassified Soviet archives, Katchanovski came across evidence of Shteppa's long history of collaboration with the NKVD. From 1927 until his arrest in 1938, Shteppa had acted as an informant for the NKVD as it investigated Ukrainian nationalist movements and in particular, he provided

[75] Alexander Dallin, foreword to *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*.

[76] Ibid.

information on the Ukrainian mathematician, Mikhail Krawtchouk.[77] Shteppa befriended Krawtchouk in the mid 1930s and kept tabs on him for his NKVD handlers, eventually leading to Krawtchouk's arrest and death in a Soviet labor camp in 1942. Shteppa's own arrest in 1938 involved charges of participation in a Ukrainian nationalist organization and spying on behalf of the Japanese, the former of which was dropped. His sentence was cut short in 1939 when he received an exemption due to his work for the NKVD. Katchanovski builds a strong case that Shteppa was not a victim of the Great Terror as much as he was someone who went to great lengths to protect himself, often at the expense of others:

> He is an example of a rational self-interested individual, unconstrained by any ethical values. Throughout his life, Konstantin Shteppa constantly changed his behavior and political stance according to changes in incentives. He fought the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, but turned into "a non-party Bolshevik" after they won the war. Archival documents recently uncovered by historians show that during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, Shteppa became a German secret police informer. He became the chief editor of the main pro-German newspaper in Kyiv in the end of 1941, after the Nazis executed the paper's previous editors for their association with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. He published many pro-Nazi, anti-Soviet, anti-Semitic and anti-American articles… [78]

This "survival, by any means necessary" attitude is even further exemplified by Shteppa's decisions during the height of the Second World War.

[77] Ivan Katchanovski, "The Political Prisoner's Dilemma: Evidence from the Great Terror in the Soviet Union," *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2006): 23.

[78] Katchanovski, "The Political Prisoner's Dilemma," 23.

Figure 8. "Join SS Infantry Division "Galitchina": nd.
http://www.allworldwars.com/Nazi-Collaboration-Posters-1939-1945.html
Figure 9. "The Jew is your eternal enemy. Stalin and Jews - the gang of murderers!": 1942.
http://www.allworldwars.com/Nazi-Collaboration-Posters-1939-1945.html

Nazi Germany launched its full-fledged invasion of the Soviet Union, "Operation Barbarossa," on June 22, 1941. By late August, Ukraine was fully under Nazi control and an occupation government called the Reichskommissariat Ukraine was established by Hitler's direct order. The Ukrainian relationship with the Nazi occupiers was a somewhat ambiguous one: ethnic Ukrainians had suffered mightily under the Soviet government over two decades and many viewed the Nazi invaders as either a lesser evil or a liberator. Many Ukrainians were conscripted or chose to enlist in divisions of the Wehrmacht and the S.S. and Ukrainian nationalist militias attached themselves as paramilitary units to Nazi forces fighting against communist partisans and Soviet troops. In fact, by 1943, when the Ukrainian Liberation Army was created as an umbrella organization to categorize all Ukrainian auxiliary units serving with

the Germans, about 180,000 Ukrainian volunteers were serving across Europe with Nazi forces.[79]

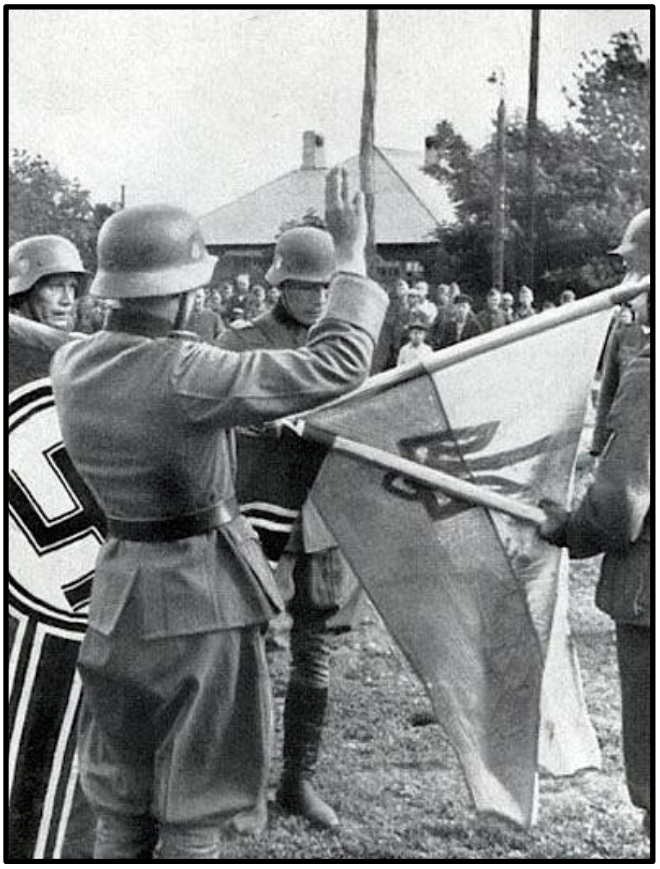

Figure 10. Members of the Ukrainian Liberation Army swear an oath to Hitler: 1943
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ukrainian_Liberation_Army_(%D0%A3%D0%92%D0%92).jpg

It was Ukraine's Jews living in the former Galicia and west of Kiev who bore the brunt of Nazi occupation as a deeply-rooted culture of anti-Semitism in western Ukraine burst to the surface. The city of L'viv (also known as Lvov or Lemberg) stands out as an exemplar of a place completely transformed from having a Polish majority with large Ukrainian and Jewish minorities, to being almost entirely Ukrainian. Some Ukrainians gleefully collaborated with the Nazis to deport or kill Jews (as well as Poles) in their towns and others engaged in the anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns to help win over the ethnic Ukrainian population.

[79] Carlos Caballero Jurado, *Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht 1941-45* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 1983), 29.

Konstantin Shteppa was involved in the latter. Interestingly, his future Jewish-American sponsor, Alexander Dallin, glosses over Shteppa's collaboration with the Nazi regime. He writes:

> In June 1941, he [Shteppa] became alienated from the Soviet milieu… All had seemed lost under Stalinism – including the hope for a better future. In the first days after the departure of the Russians, he hoped that a new and freer life could begin… But the tragedy was soon to unfold… The next two years were to cause Shteppa the greatest amount of anxiety and soul-searching, involving him in choices which most of his friends found impossible to understand, and leading him to espouse positions which were to net him public recrimination in later years. Having committed himself initially to the imperative of collaboration with any system that was willing to topple the Bolsheviks, he felt constrained to stick to his commitment… As editor of the Kiev Russian-language newspaper under the Germans, he was in an exposed position, attacked by, among others, both Ukrainian nationalists and Communists.[80]

The issue of collaboration with the Nazi invaders in the aftermath of the Second World War is a highly contentious one, and for good reason. What motivated men like Shteppa to collaborate is not something easy to pin down due to the ambiguity of notions of self-preservation and our inability to know his true feelings towards the Nazis. In his formative years, Shteppa was no fan of the Bolshevik revolutionaries and actively took up arms against them before spending over a decade collaborating with the NKVD. The writings of Shteppa and his friends', while likely indicative of Shteppa's views in the 1950s and onward, when he had already gone into exile abroad, do not unequivocally tell us what may have been his true motivations for collaborating. Anti-Semitism was the accepted cultural norm in much of Ukraine at the time and it would not be beyond reason to suspect that Shteppa obscured part of his true motivations in the immediate aftermath of the war, as Jewish scholars in the west reached out to sponsor Soviet scholars who were trying to escape. In fact, after the war ended, Shteppa used the support of Jewish scholars to emigrate out of Ukraine and to get his books published in the

[80] Alexander Dallin, foreword to *Russian Historians*.

United States.[81] Self-preservation is the element of this collaboration that is uncontroversial; Shteppa's odds of being killed would have been higher had he not chosen to work with the Nazis, but I find the narrative of a sympathetic intellectual stuck between two extremes that was spun by his friend and sponsor Dallin to be an unconvincing one, as Shteppa had himself willingly collaborated with the NKVD and floated around clandestine Ukrainian Nationalist circles that were operating in the academic world, though he had betrayed them and garnered a reputation that still plagues his legacy in Ukraine.

In presenting the wartime experiences of Aleksandr Nekrich and Konstantin Shteppa, I hope to shed light on issues pertinent to the historical front; namely those of narrative and memory. In a society in which historical narrative is fundamental to national identity, especially one where the state regulates and relies on historians to produce said narrative, historians play a central role in shaping the cultural milieu. Nekrich's and Shteppa's experiences in wartime were not uncommon ones, though the narratives they chose to construct reveal much about the social conditions of Soviet life in this period. Nekrich, as the distinguished veteran, reveals an academic world rife with anti-Semitism and mired in bureaucratic turmoil. Shteppa reveals a growing discontent among the peoples of the Soviet Union with their state of affairs; one so dire that many turned to the invading Nazis as a sort of liberating force, even as evidence of mass atrocities followed them. The rest of this chapter will redirect attention towards a slightly different subject as I delve into the administrative world of Soviet academic journals, where historians tested their narratives for collective approval.

[81] Katchanovski, "The Political Prisoner's Dilemma," 23.

3.3: Themes and Narratives: A Look at Historical Journals

Figure 11. Flowchart of Prominent Soviet Historical Journals.
http://online.eastview.com/projects/voprosy_istorii/en/index.html

When assessing the impact and proliferation of particular historical narratives that were generated in Soviet historical academia during the war, and the impact of Stalinist designs on that process, it is essential to be familiar with the developmental history of the Soviet historical publishing space. The first authoritative Soviet historical journal was published by M. N. Pokrovsky's Society of Marxist Historians. *Istorik-marxist (The Marxist Historian)*, which began publication in 1926, was the first exclusively Marxist historical journal to publish academic works in the Soviet Union and would operate under its title until 1941. In 1931, another academic journal became a prominent player in this space; *Bor'ba klassov (Class Struggle)*. The new journal saw many of the same historians published in it, but was more focused on sociological aspects of historical research into class conflict. In 1937, as Stalin was reforming the historical front, *Bor'ba klassov* was inconspicuously renamed *Istoricheskii zhurnal (Historical*

Journal) and placed under the supervision of a new editor, the Soviet-Jewish revolutionary Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, in order to lend a less ideological aura to the journal, while subordinating it to further state supervision. In 1941, the oldest of the journals, *Istorik-marxist* was merged with *Istoricheskii zhurnal* before the final renaming of that journal to *Voprosy istorii (Historical Questions)* midway through 1945. It remains in publication to this day as one of the premier academic historical journals in Russia and is accessible in full online.

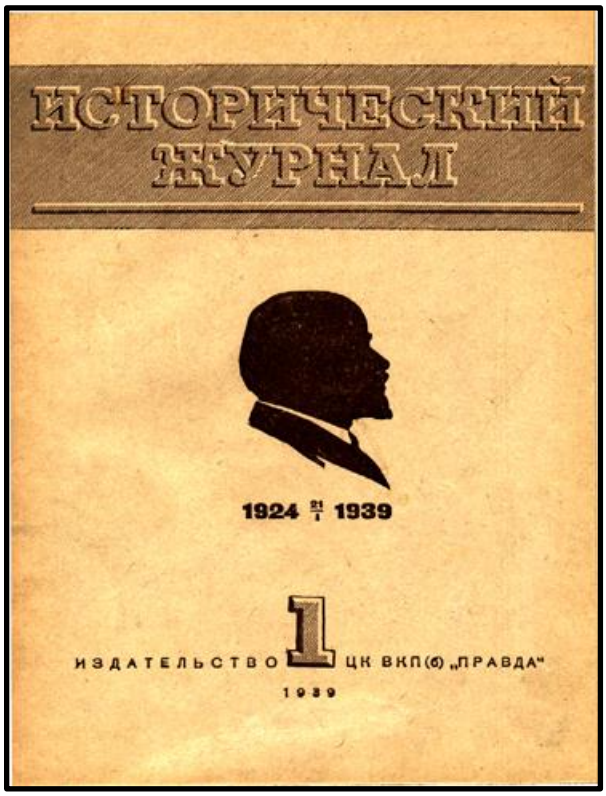

Figure 12. Cover of *Istoricheskii zhurnal*: 1939.
https://dlib-eastview-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/issue_images/pub-covers/big/isj.jpg
Figure 13. Cover of *Voprosy istorii*: 2001.
https://dlib-eastview-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/issue_images/pub-covers/big/vpi.gif

Istoricheskii zhurnal was situated neatly within the *Short Course* paradigm of Soviet historical research. From its very first issue in January of 1937, the journal featured personalistic articles about great Russian figures like the poet Pushkin and the Chinese revolutionary, Sun Yat-Sen. In fact, the very first article ever published in the journal was a summary of the redactional history of the three constitutions (1918, 1924, and 1936) of the USSR. After the

publication of the *Short Course*, the journal became even more personalistic and focused almost exclusively on research of important historical figures. In the October 1939 issue, after the Nazi invasion of Poland, the editors, supervised by Yaroslavsky, published a statement lambasting the corruption of the Polish ruling circles and arguing that Soviet intervention was necessary to rescue the Polish people, while justifying the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact.[82] Much of the rest of the issue was devoted to research of Polish and Ukrainian history. After the commencement of Operation Barbarossa and the invasion of the USSR in late June of 1941, *Istoricheskii zhurnal* began to shift its messaging quite dramatically. After a one-month hiatus on publishing, the journal returned with a vengeance in August, opening with a transcript of a radio broadcast speech by Stalin that appealed strongly to the national historical narrative:

> Our homeland is in grave danger. How could it happen that our glorious Red Army surrendered a number of our cities and districts to the fascist troops? Are the fascist German troops really invincible troops, as the tireless fascist boastful propagandists claim? Of course not! History shows that there are no invincible armies. Napoleon's army was considered invincible, but they were defeated alternately by Russian, British, and German troops. The German army of Wilhelm, during the period of the first imperialist war [WWI], was also considered an invincible army, but it suffered defeat several times from Russian and Anglo-French troops and, finally, was defeated by Anglo-French troops. The same must be said about the current fascist German army - Hitler. This army did not yet meet serious resistance on the continent of Europe. Only on our territory will she be met with serious resistance. And if, as a result of this resistance, the best divisions of the fascist German army are defeated by our Red Army, this means that the Nazi fascist army can also be defeated and will be defeated, as the armies of Napoleon and Wilhelm were defeated.[83]

Stalin's own appeal to a deterministic view of history that posits that no army is invincible is a glimpse into the manner in which historical narrative was put to use as propaganda during the

[82] V. M. Molotova, "Speech on Radio of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, September 17, 1939," *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 3, no. 10 (1939): 1-2.

[83] Joseph Stalin, "STATEMENT BY RADIO OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STATE COMMITTEE OF DEFENSE, July 3, 1941," *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 5, no. 7-8 (1941): 2-3.

war. For the rest of *Istoricheskii zhurnal*'s existence, the journal's articles were focused almost exclusively on the study of national resistance movements, popular uprisings, and military exploits of great Russian leaders, while sprinkling in a healthy dose of articles studying western and Russian international relations throughout history. The wartime editions also devoted publishing space to degrading the German people as a chauvinistic and warlike nation and created a regular section titled "Documents of the Great Domestic Warrior" publishing notes and letters written by Red Army soldiers at the front. The final issue of *Istoricheskii zhurnal*, in May of 1945, featured Stalin's victory message to the Soviet people, hailing the end of the "Great Patriotic War" and a future era of peaceful development.[84]

After *Istoricheskii zhurnal* shut down in May of 1945, a new journal was created that would replace it in a few short months. The mission of *Voprosy istorii* is outlined in the first few pages of the first issue of the journal in September of 1945. In an introduction titled "Tasks of the Journal 'Voprosy istorii," the publishers articulate the aims of this rebranded academic journal:

> The Central Committee of the Party decided to reorganize *Istoricheskii zhurnal* into *Voprosy istorii* and determined the main direction of the new journal, obliging the editorial board to "radically improve the work of the journal, to stop publishing articles that are not related to historical science, focusing the attention and strength of historians on the scientific development of questions concerning the history of the USSR and general history." *Voprosy istorii* is a scientific journal, whose task is to reflect the movement of historical thought in the USSR, and at the same time, to influence the direction of this movement. Our historical science, developing on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist materialist understanding of history, is the foremost in… international scientific thought. The international ties of our science will inevitably grow simultaneously with the growth of the international prestige of our Soviet socialist culture. The journal *Voprosy istorii* should become one of the means of scientific communication with foreign countries, thereby becoming one of the means of influencing international historical thought.[85]

[84] Joseph Stalin, "Appeal of Comrade Stalin to the People," *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 9, no. 5 (1945): 3-4.

[85] Editors, "Tasks of the Journal 'Voprosy istorii'," *Voprosy istorii* 1, no. 1 (1945): 3.

The new journal was to refocus its efforts to publish rigorous historical research as opposed to the politicized material that had become commonplace during the war and was designed to become the foremost Marxist historical journal in the world, reaching foreign audiences and influencing historical research worldwide. These were reflections of the aims of the Soviet government in the months following the end of World War II as a new post-war order began to emerge, Stalin's "socialism in one country" messaging began to shift to a more internationalist approach that would attempt to spread communism worldwide as the Soviet Union entered into direct geo-political competition with the United States.

Between 1945 and 1953, *Voprosy istorii* had four chief editors, each of which left their mark on the journal and the publishing space at large. V. P. Volgin headed the journal from 1945-1949, overseeing the transition from wartime material to the anti-cosmopolitan trend that became the party line. After Volgin, *Voprosy istorii* was taken over by A. D. Udaltsov, who was himself a medieval historian. Udaltsov oversaw the journal for one year before being replaced in 1950 by P. N. Tretyakov who was himself replaced in 1953 by Anna Pankratova.[86] Pankratova was herself a notable figure in Soviet historical academia. She hailed from Odessa and had engaged in Communist partisan activities during the civil war. In 1925, she graduated from Pokrovsky's Institute of Red Professors with a degree in history. During the Second World War, while under evacuation in Kazakhstan, she did research into Kazakh historiography publishing an extensive work on the topic in 1949. While she was at *Voprosy istorii*, the journal took on a more internationalist flavor as her Pokrovsky-era influences were permitted expression in the Khrushchev years. She would achieve remarkable prestige as a woman in Soviet society, getting

[86] "The Editors-in-Chief of 75 years of Voprosy istorii," http://online.eastview.com/projects/voprosy_istorii/en/editors.html, (February 19, 2019).

elected to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and becoming one of the most influential Soviet historians. In 1956, she denounced Stalinist influences on historical academia in a speech at the twentieth Party Congress, which was met with mixed response.[87] Pankratova died in 1957 having left a lasting impact on Soviet historical writing.

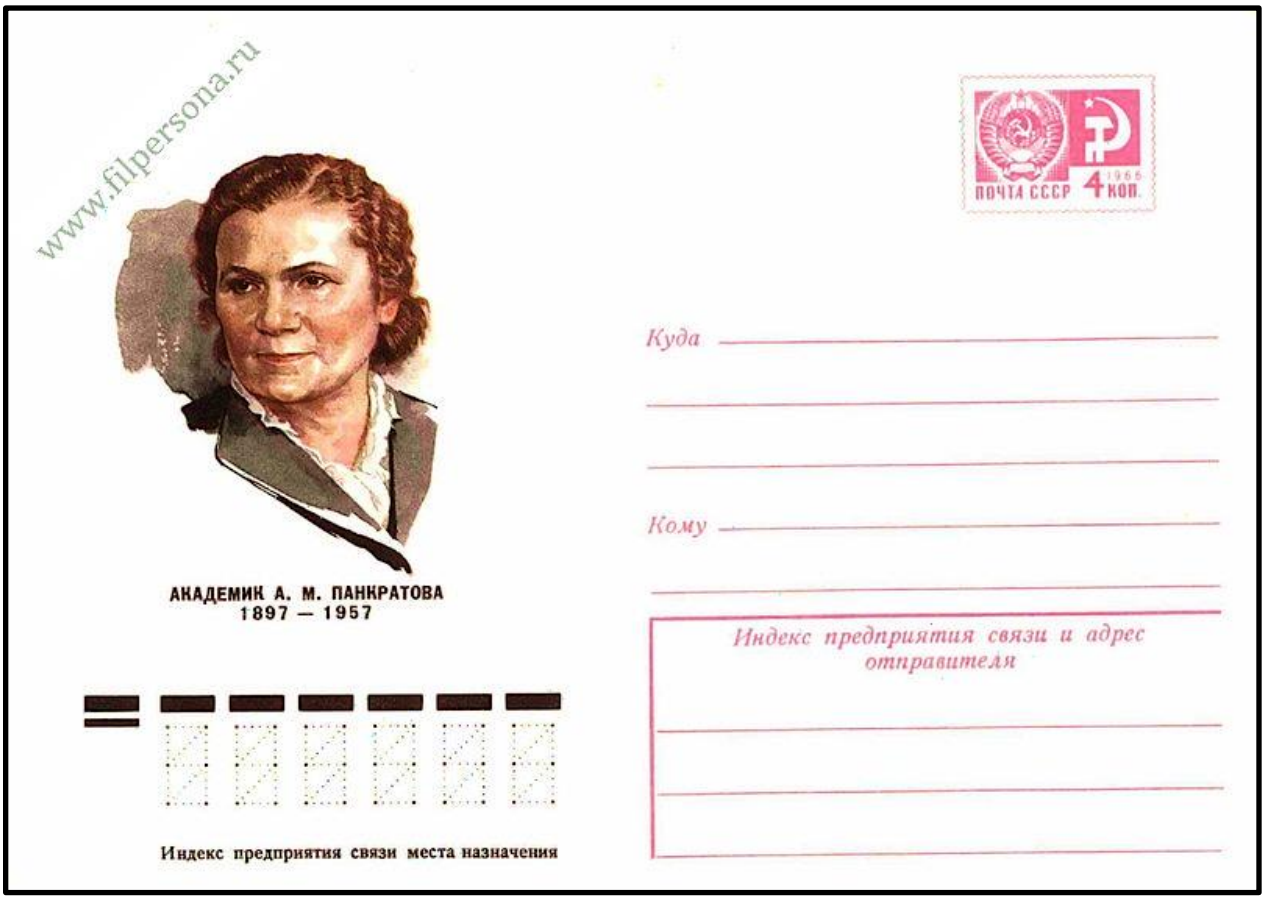

Figure 14. Portrait of Anna Pankratova on a 1977 postal cover from the Soviet Union. http://filpersona.ru/index.php/category/31

[87] Kathleen E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 63-64.

CHAPTER FOUR:

NATIONAL BOLSHEVISM:

ON MEMORY AND MYTH IN WARTIME SCHOLARSHIP

4.1: Soviet Nation-ness

In prior chapters of this thesis, we have spent a great deal of time and attention outlining the developmental history of the Soviet historical apparatus and have delved into examples of individuals who helped create and were a part of that institution. This chapter will reorient our attention towards ideology; namely the ideology of National Bolshevism which became the driving ideological basis for the profound cultural changes that were made in the Stalinist period. This was a socio-political milieu crafted by the brightest academics and propagandists Soviet society had to offer, in an effort to meet the needs of Stalin's wartime and post-war ambitions and it deliberately affected everything from literary and academic writing to popular cultural genres such as art, cinema, and theatre. At its most fundamental level, National Bolshevism can be identified as a sort of official Russo-centrism that relied on historical narratives to integrate itself within populist sentiment. As we have discussed in prior chapters, the Tsarist state tried unsuccessfully to promote a popular national identity and their failure to achieve this rested mostly in the ancient differences between the disparate peoples of their empire and the state's inability to effectively insert itself into all aspects of people's lives. Even most ethnic Russians – those outside of the wealthy classes and intelligentsia – had been resistant to adopting a national identity and this attitude continued well into the Soviet period.

National Bolshevism was largely successful at achieving what it was designed to do. In the Stalin period, a Russian national identity did emerge that would persist until an upwelling of nationalist sentiment among non-Russian ethnic groups in the late twentieth century helped to tear the Soviet Union apart. Stalin's ideology achieved this in two distinct ways; by agitating within the educational system and by monopolizing popular culture under the umbrella of the state. Whereas most of the European national identities were forged during a period of liberalization in the nineteenth century, the national identities that exist today in the post-Soviet states bear the scars of their formation in one of history's most authoritarian societies. The Soviet case is quite unique, as even its parallel totalitarian movement in Germany materialized out of the deepest abyss of an already-existent German national identity as opposed to creating its own identity from scratch. In this first section of the chapter, I will provide a coherent outline of National Bolshevism, before diving into discussion of its implementation in the school systems and its dissemination into popular culture.

National Bolshevism has its roots as an idea in the 1930s when the increasing pace of military buildup in Europe and Asia began to worry the Soviet authorities. During the Great War, the Russian people did not mobilize the whole of society effectively and disillusionment ran high among the armed forces, actually helping to facilitate the Bolshevik takeover in the following years. Many party figures who had lived through that time were still around and understood that if war with Germany or Japan were to break out, Soviet society would not mobilize effectively. Thus initially, party officials identified a need for fostering patriotic sentiment and crafted propaganda to try and achieve this outcome. Whereas before, Soviet leadership had scoffed at notions of patriotism as "imperialist" and counter to their socialist ideological orientation, by the mid 1930s, there was widespread recognition of its necessity in order to effectively mobilize a

population for war. Stalin and his colleagues had realized by then that the materialist and antipatriotic themes of Marxism-Leninism were too abstract for the poorly educated Soviet masses and did not provide a meaningful rallying call. In the mid 1930s, *Pravda* promoted this view: "Soviet patriotism is a burning feeling of boundless love, a selfless devotion to one's motherland and a profound responsibility for her fate and defense, which issues forth like mighty spring waters from the depths of our people."[88] Class based internationalist loyalty had been replaced by patriotic loyalty to the motherland.

Soviet leadership understood that in order to effectively reach the masses with their new messaging, history had to be central to its expression. Stalin was the driving force behind the push to "search for a usable past" and reframe Soviet historical study around the study of national heroes who could be portrayed in an unabashedly populist light. Initially, especially during the *Short Course* years, such heroes came from the recent past: they were Red Army soldiers, activists, and industrial workers who had helped build the state. In a 1934 report to the Politburo on the current teaching of history in the USSR, the head of propaganda, A. I. Stetskii, remarked:

> The textbooks and the instruction [of history] itself are done in such a way that sociology is substituted for history… What generally results is some kind of odd scenario for Marxists – a sort of bashful relationship – [in which] they attempt not to mention tsars and attempt not to mention prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie… We cannot write history in this way! Peter was Peter, Catherine was Catherine. They relied on specific classes and represented their mood and interests, but all the same they took action. They were historic individuals [and even though] they are not ours, we must give an impression of the epoch… Without this, we won't have any sort of civic history.[89]

[88] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 28.

[89] Ibid., 32-33.

Stetskii was correct in pointing out this failure of the Pokrovsky school of historical research; it was firmly focused on sociology and economics and was likely too arcane to be effective populist material.

As the Politburo brainstormed ideas, it convened committees of historians to formulate the new paradigm. S. A. Piontkovsky, one of the historians present at these committee meetings, sheds light on the tenor of these gatherings:

> In all there were about a hundred people in the room… Stalin stood up frequently, puffed on his pipe, and wandered between the tables, making comments about Bubnov's speech… He held the middle school textbooks in his hands and spoke with a small accent, striking a textbook with his hand and announcing: "These text-books aren't good for anything… what… the heck is 'the feudal epoch,' 'the epoch of industrial capitalism,' 'the epoch of formations' – it's all epochs and no facts, no events, no people, no concrete information, not a name, not a title, and not even any content itself. It isn't any good for anything… History must be history.[90]

Stalin continued by rejecting the multiethnic history of Russia put forth by the historians in favor of a narrative that focused implicitly on Russian state building through history. Stalin would get his wish as the *Short Course* paradigm took hold. Its integration into the Russo-centric etatist historical lens became the basis for future efforts on the historical front.

When war did break out, the Soviet propaganda machine was initially in disarray, publishing various rallying slogans that did not fit a coherent theme. After a few months of disorder, propaganda settled into a few key motifs: the military history of the soviet peoples in the Napoleonic wars and the Middle Ages, patriotism and national identity, and revenge. A. M. Dubrovsky notes the passing out of a pocket-sized paperback to political officers that contained stories about the greatest Russian military leaders such as General Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky.[91] Such material for non-academic consumption mirrored the articles being published in

[90] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 34.

[91] Ibid., 118.

academic journals indicating a sort of trickle-down of ideas. In 1941, Stalin himself declared to the public "In this war, may you draw inspiration from the valiant example of our great ancestors – Alexander Nevskii, Dmitrii Donskoi, Kuz'ma Minin, Dmitrii Pozharskii, Aleksandr Suvorov, and Mikhail Kutuzov" and the declaration was published far and wide, complete with an accompanying illustration by the propaganda artist Aliakrinsky.[92]

Figure 15. Stalin's November 7, 1941 Declaration Poster, by D. Aliakrinsky: 1942.
http://archive.artic.edu/tass/heroic-past/

These men had traditionally been considered heroic military leaders in Russian folk culture and encapsulated the personalism and heroism that propaganda in wartime sought to emphasize. To complement the barrage of messaging on this front, the Soviet government even introduced a number of military awards and honors named after Suvorov, Nevsky, and Kutuzov with simultaneously published biographical articles in the press. Following this surge in focus on

[92] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 119.

Russian heroes, historians began to rehabilitate names from the Tsarist past that only a half-decade before would have resulted in their work being censored or worse.

Historiography in the later Stalin period also interestingly seemed to accept the development of the centralized monarchy in the sixteenth century as a progressive moment and emphasized that "the Tsar honorably fulfilled a dual purpose: he promoted the economic and cultural life of the state at the same time that he successfully provided for national defense."[93] One particularly revealing motif of National Bolshevik ideology was the elevation of the Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible), into the pantheon of national heroes. The reign of Ivan IV (the Terrible) was treated as favorable development in Russia's history and the Tsar was depicted as both an idealized strongman and a tragic figure.[94] Historical writing in this moment sought to support, as opposed to undermine, the legitimacy of centralized power in Russia. Stalin capitalized on this by infusing strong appeals to the newly revisionist legacy of Ivan IV into his personality cult. Brandenberger and Platt argue that Ivan IV's rehabilitation as a historical figure was a pragmatic move on the part of Stalin, particularly because Stalin was able to spin Ivan's brutality as a necessary evil that had to be undertaken to further the goal of uniting the Muscovite state. Stalin sought to paint himself as a modern-day parallel to Ivan IV; a man who united the Soviet people and was the glue holding the country together by any means necessary.[95]

Other Tsarist-era figures coopted into National Bolshevik propaganda and historiography included the Tsar Peter I, the writers Lev Tolstoy and Nikolai Leskov, the poet Aleksandr Pushkin, the Russian martyr Ivan Susanin, and the romanticist Mikhail Lermontov. Their

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[93] Mazour, The Writing of History, 67.

[94] Ibid., 71.

[95] David Brandenberger and Kevin M. F. Platt, "Terribly Pragmatic: Rewriting the History of Ivan IV's Reign, 1937-1956," in *Epic Revisionism*, ed. Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 159.

canonization as popular heroes elevated what the Bolsheviks had once sought to suppress. We cannot know for sure what Stalin's deepest motivations were for permitting such a radical realignment of historical research and propagandistic messaging, but in an interview that he gave to the German biographer Emil Ludwig in 1931, Stalin was asked how he reconciled Marxism and its sharp critique of personality in history with his own budding cult of personality. His response was "There is no contradiction… Every generation is met with certain conditions that already exist in their present form as that generation comes into the world. Great people are worth something only insofar as they are able to understand correctly these conditions and what is necessary to alter them…"[96] Stalin was a pragmatist through and through and this reflected in his approach to ideology and history: ideology was useful inasmuch as it served the needs of the state and history could be used to publicly highlight character traits he believed himself to embody.

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, memory of the war came to represent a sort of foundational myth for Soviet society; in the crucible of existential conflict between the allied world and especially the socialist world against fascism, the Soviet Union had triumphed and unequivocally vanquished its tormentor.[97] This theme was reflected in the wartime propaganda song *The Sacred War* which was composed by Aleksandr Aleksandrov. The lyrics compel the listener to rise up against "a dark fascist force" and "cursed horde" in order to fight in a sacred war, "the people's war." The song would become the official song of the Soviet army color guard during its annual Victory Day parade. For propagandists, in the immediate postwar

[96] David Brandenberger and Kevin M. F. Platt, "Introduction: Tsarist-Era Heroes in Stalinist Mass Culture and Propaganda," in *Epic Revisionism*, ed. Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 1.

[97] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 183.

years, the war, which was a uniquely modern and Soviet event, became a wrinkle that needed to be reconciled with the Russo-centric focus of National Bolshevism. G. F. Aleksandrov, the Agitprop chief, called on historians to view history as a single, unitary, and organic process and reemphasized the need for continued Russo-centrism in work, but he also argued that wartime historical narratives had gone too far in completely neglecting the merits of class analysis and Marxist historiography.[98] As a result, Agitprop made a concerted effort to make sure that the historians reigned in their excesses and instead focused their attention towards making sense of "the myth of the war" as a unique accomplishment in the history of mankind.[99] For about a year, between 1945-46, it seemed as if study of the war would supplant Russo-centrism, but eventually the former was integrated into the latter.

Figure 16. Captured German Standards at the 1945 Victory Day Parade in Moscow: 1945.
Image captured from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCWVM5bUZmE&t=241s

[98] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 184.

[99] Ibid., 185.

There is of course, a more malicious aspect to the effects that National Bolshevik ideology had on ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union. Though there is some controversy over whether or not propaganda and historiography intentionally downplayed achievements of the non-Russian peoples, in the post-war years, it seems clear based on Stalin's own comments, that the government's intent was to systematically dampen the nationalist sentiments of minority groups. In a discussion with the acclaimed director Sergei Eisenstein (whose work will soon be addressed), Stalin commented that "we must overcome the revival of nationalism that we are experiencing with all the [non-Russian] peoples"[100] Stalin, ever concerned about maintaining political stability, directed Agitprop to crackdown on the ethnic republics' party organizations. As a result, local historians, playwrights, and journalists who had written works glorifying their own ethnic historical milestones were harshly rebuked. Of particular note were the Tatar, Bashkir, Uzbek and Kazakh party organizations who faced rebuke for their attempts to popularize unique national historiographies distinct from the Russian one. Concurrently, Jews were accused of being Zionists with loyalties to the newly formed nation-state of Israel and faced sharp criticism as the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was shut down and the Jewish playwright S. M. Mikhoels was assassinated. Between the late 1940s and 1953, Jews became the primary targets of the War on Cosmopolitans and the Doctors' Plot, where a group of mostly Jewish doctors in Moscow had been accused of and arrested for conspiring to assassinate Soviet leadership including Stalin. Upon Stalin's death, the case was dismissed by the new leadership made up of his old inner circle and the charges were dropped. Some historians have speculated that this incident was intended by Stalin to be used as justification for a wider purge of Jews from the Communist party.

[100] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 187.

With hindsight available to us, National Bolshevism may seem as if it was an inevitability. After all, what state in an age so divorced from political-theological notions of divine-right rule could coherently articulate sovereignty without a cohesive national identity? What else could it use to unify its people and legitimize itself as a manifestation of a broader community if not ethnicity or religion? Placing ourselves in the perspective of the Soviet leadership, it was certainly no given in the 1930s that this project would be received warmly by the population, let alone succeed in creating a national identity that would persist in various forms into the twenty first century. The next sections of this chapter will explore the mechanisms by which the Soviet state implemented these ideological reforms: by way of the printing press, public school, and mass culture.

4.2: Beyond the *Short Course*

Textbooks and historical literary works played a vital role in the process of disseminating information to the Soviet public. We have already covered the *Short Course* in much detail, and for the purposes of this study, it should serve as a marker for the initiation of the Russo-centric etatist historiographical reorientation of the educational system by Soviet leadership, but the *Short Course* was not without its drawbacks. The textbook was limited in scope to only the history of the formation of the Bolshevik party and the revolution. It was a static work that could not be updated or revised to reflect the onset of the war, especially not as that war was ongoing. Additionally, it was written so early in the National Bolshevik project that already by 1941, just three years after its publication, the textbook was failing to meet the evolving needs of the Soviet

authorities to promote personalist heroism through Russian history. Historical literature was thus expected to fill the gaps and supplant the official party line and some historians of note, such as E. V. Tarle and B. D. Grekov rose to the occasion with zeal.

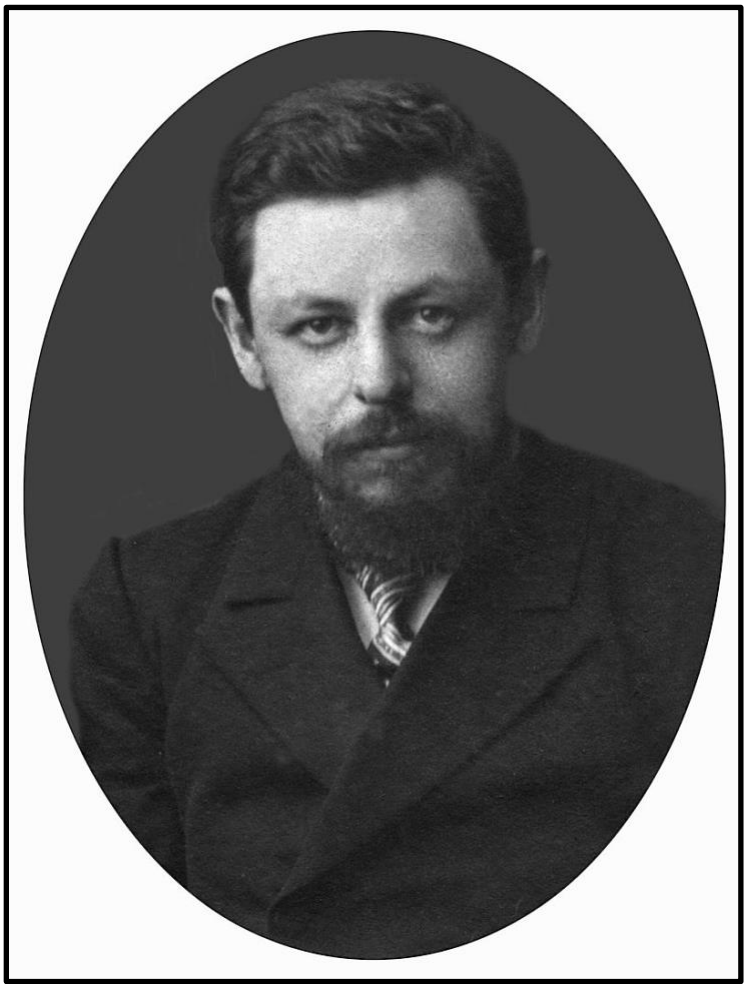

Figure 17. Photograph of E. V. Tarle: 1903.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yevgeny_Tarle#/media/File:E_V_Tarle.jpg

Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarle was born into a Ukrainian Jewish family in 1874, but chose to convert into Orthodox Christianity in order to marry his wife, Olga Mikhailova, who hailed from the Russian nobility. As a history student at the University of Kiev, Tarle joined a Marxist organization and was involved in advocacy for social democracy in Russia. This eventually caught up with him and he was arrested by the Tsarist government before being allowed to move to Poland with his wife and children. He would eventually settle in St. Petersburg, where he lived

and worked at the university until 1917.[101] His area of expertise was in French revolutionary, Napoleonic, and nineteenth century European history. After the formation of the Soviet Union, Tarle was granted a professorship at Moscow University and was admitted to RANION and the Academy of Sciences. In the later Pokrovsky years, his work came under intense criticism from the Marxist historians.[102] Although politically a Marxist, Tarle had been trained by non-Marxists and thus wrote history in a more traditionalist manner, with many of the "Ancien Régime" sensibilities that became taboo in the years of the Pokrovsky school. Tarle was a pragmatist when it came to the issue of territorial expansion by the Russian Empire, arguing that it's presentation in a positive light served the aims of the Stalinist state more effectively than the anti-expansionist stance that was put forth through the 1920s.[103] The scholar of Jewish history, Yuri Slezkine, notes that Tarle stands out as a unique figure in Soviet historical academia in that, as an ethnic Jew, he seemed to be a fervent proponent of Russian nationalism at a time when internationalism was in vogue.[104]

In 1931, the Soviet government exiled Tarle to Kazakhstan for four years. When he returned to Leningrad in 1935, he immediately began work on *Napoleon* and *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia, 1812*. The former work built on the Marxist historiographical school as Tarle managed to frame Napoleon's exploits through the framework of class. He built on some of Pokrovsky's work, but deviated significantly by avoiding arcane economic analysis and instead favored focusing on the role of individuals as catalysts of historical change. Although he had

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[101] Boris Kaganovich, *Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarle and St. Petersburg School of Historians* (St. Petersburg, 1995), 3-13.

[102] Kaganovich, Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarle, 45-46.

[103] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 122.

[104] Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 279.

used some of Lenin's own words to describe the state of class relations during Napoleon's invasion, he was met with harsh criticism by a changing academic party line. With this first attempt, it seems that Tarle had tried to appease his former critics, only to learn that those critics had shifted towards his original position. The latter of his Napoleonic-era series of works was published in 1938 (with an English translation published in the United States in 1942) with this audience in mind and would set the tone for much of National Bolshevik historiography. When war broke out, *Napoleon* was "discovered" by a new audience: the general public.

Tarle's *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia, 1812*, was his piece de resistance, putting forth his ideological worldview in a detailed account of the ill-fated invasion of Russia. He structures his work chronologically, detailing each stage of the invasion and subsequent retreat by highlighting key battles and actions taken by Napoleon's Grande Armée. Tarle writes the work from a purely Russo-centric perspective, immediately hitting the reader with a Pushkin quote: "The storm of 1812 had not yet broken… Napoleon had yet to put the great people to the test. He was still threatening, still hesitating."[105] Here, Napoleon is framed as a brooding, imperialist scourge; a man assigned to represent the interests of the French upper middle class as they endeavored to monopolize the European markets. Tarle analyzes an oft-forgotten aspect of the Napoleonic invasion which was the issue of serfdom. Napoleon was faced with a choice between freeing the Russian serfs as his armies swept through Russia, or leaving them in their feudal bondage. Tarle argues that those serfs may well have offered manpower to Napoleon's armies, but Napoleon's final decision to not free the serfs was out of fear of what an underclass of men instantaneously

[105] E. V. Tarle, *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia, 1812*, trans. by G. M. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 3.

freed from bondage may do the future stability of Russia. "Napoleon invaded Russia not as a liberator but as a conqueror."[106]

Napoleon's Invasion met all the guidelines set out by the new party line. Tarle focused intensely on the roles of the Russian leaders Alexander I, Kutuzov, Barclay, Bagration, and Bennigsen and highlighted their relationships and decision-making. It was also a work that successfully blended elements of Marxist class analysis with fervent Russian nationalism, going so far as to downplay the role of the Russian winter in handicapping Napoleon's army, instead emphasizing the sacrificial determination of the Russian armies and the failure of Napoleon's supply lines that led to his retreat. Though written before the onset of the Second World War, Tarle seemed to foreshadow in his historical work, the messaging employed by the Soviet authorities upon the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler. Once war did break out, the serendipity of his works with the propaganda effort made his works immensely popular with the Soviet public:

> Key to Soviet wartime propaganda efforts was the state publishing industry, which produced a remarkable amount of rousing, patriotic material between 1941 and 1945… N. K. Verzhbitskii noted in his diary that Tarle's *Napoleon* was in great demand in the Soviet capital during December 1941. Motivated by the topicality of the book's focus on enemies at the gates of Moscow, *Napoleon's* popularity even led people to inquire in person at the Institute of History in hopes of obtaining a copy of the much sought-after volume. "If only you could have seen what took place when Red Army soldiers and officers came by," a historian named Gopner recalled later. "Colonels, commanders, and majors – they were all asking and pleading for an extra copy of the book." Witnessing such scenes proved to Gopner that the war had led people "to take a real interest in history."[107]

[106] Tarle, Napoleon's Invasion, 8.

[107] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 170.

Tarle's works and thoughts had reach beyond the Soviet Union. In 1943, he co-authored an article in the U.S. Marxist journal *Science and Society* along with the acclaimed academician B. D. Grekov. Their paper highlighted key issues within Soviet historical research.

Tarle's contribution to the paper included an anecdote about an interaction he had with Charles Langlois, the director of the National Archives in Paris. Langlois remarked to Tarle that the fact that "his revolution," the Russian revolution, preserved rather than destroyed the Church archives in juxtaposition to the French revolution was odd.[108] Tarle mentions this to frame the Soviets as a generous and thoughtful revolutionary movement that sought to preserve the cultural artifacts of Russia even as they upended the social order. Tarle then goes on to levy his criticisms of the school of Pokrovsky; that it was anti-personalist, sought to destroy patriotism, and devalued Russian history. He then makes the case that Pokrovsky's historiography stripped the Soviet Union of the moral system it had inherited from its Russian forebears and that this was objectively harmful in the war against the Nazis: "What went on, in essence, was the moral disarmament of the Russian people. If a nation consists only of drunkards, sluggards, and idlers, of Oblamovs, is such a nation worth much?... is General von Reichenau right in saying that there are no cultural values in Russia?"[109] Tarle continued by explaining that since the end of the school of Pokrovsky, much work had been done to remedy the situation and restore a sense of a shared value system in the Soviet Union. He ended the paper by describing the inevitability of Russian domination over Prussia by pointing to historical conflicts between the two nation-states in which Russia had prevailed.

[108] B. D. Grekov and E. V. Tarle, "Soviet Historical Research," *Science and Society* 7, (1943): 229.

[109] Grekov and Tarle, "Soviet Historical Research," 230.

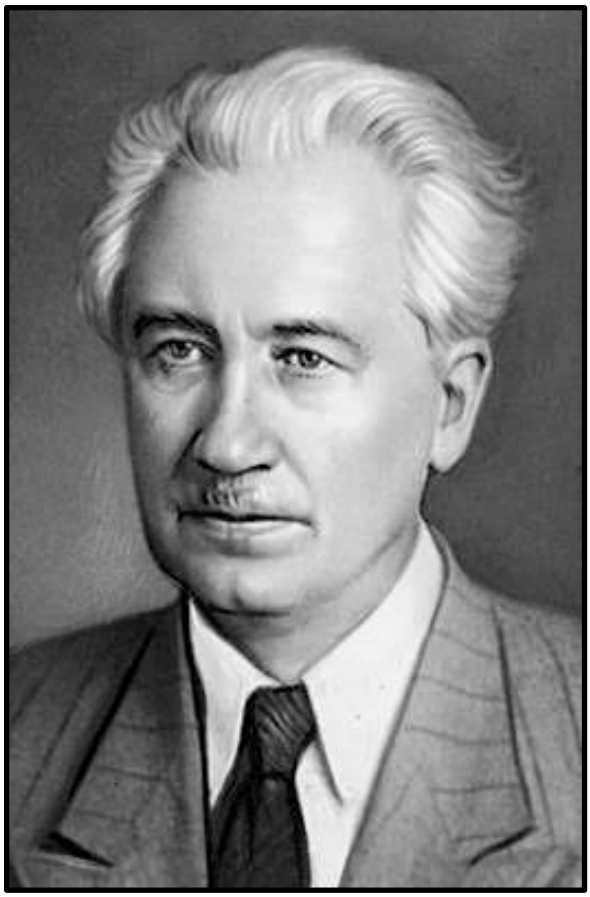


Figure 18. Photograph of B. D. Grekov: 1940s.
https://w.histrf.ru/articles/article/show/boris_dmitriievich_griekov

B. D. Grekov's contribution to the jointly-penned article was also a harsh critique of the Pokrovsky school. Grekov was born in 1882 in Myrhorod in the Ukraine. In the pre-Revolutionary years, he studied at Moscow University and conducted economic and social historical research into the Novgorod Republic.[110] During the Revolution, he was involved in the White movement and his son was arrested by the Soviet authorities. Because of this counter-revolutionary past, he went above and beyond to demonstrate himself to be a staunch supporter of Stalin and essentially wrote works on-order for the government. He was elected to the Academy of Sciences in 1934 and over the course of his career was awarded the Stalin Prize

[110] A. H. Plakhonin, "Hrekov, Borys Dmytrovych," in Entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy, vol. II (Kiev, 2004), 189–90.

thrice and the Order of Lenin twice.[111] We have briefly mentioned Grekov before as he served as the chair of the Institute of History, in which Aleksandr Nekrich was enrolled postwar. One of Grekov's milestone works, *The Culture of Kiev Rus*, which was published in 1944 (and translated in to English in 1947), serves as another prime example of wartime National Bolshevik historiography.

The Culture of Kiev Rus was meant by Grekov to be a detailed exploration of the development of the civilization that preceded the development of the state of Russia. In conducting this research, it seems that Grekov was able to wrestle the heritage of this culture away from modern Ukraine, where many of his Ukrainian-nationalist inclined peers placed it, and instead molded the history of the Dnieper peoples and the Kievan Rus into a foundational myth for the Russo-centric ideological orientation of the Stalin years. Grekov does this in a few distinct ways; first, he attempts to articulate a coherent sense of identity for the peoples who inhabited Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages. He identifies these peoples as Slavonic and as the ethnic forebears of the modern-day Russian people.[112] Appeals to ethnicity are a powerful tool for Grekov, as they permit him to establish a continuum that runs deeper than culture; ethnicity becomes a tidy heuristic that allows him to articulate a sort of "rootedness" and biological basis for the continued settlement of modern Russian peoples in the lands once inhabited by the Rus. Ethnicity as evolutionary biologists and social scientists conceive of it today is, of course, a multi-variate identifier influenced both by biological selective pressures and social constructions, but in using it as a heuristic, Grekov is able to simplify his argument into laymen's terms. Though it may seem to mirror the ethno-nationalism of the Nazis that so reviles modern

[111] Plakhonin, "Hrekov, Borys Dmytrovych," 189-90.

[112] B. D. Grekov, *The Culture of Kiev Rus*, trans. by Pauline Rose (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 18.

audiences, in 1944, during a time of what many in the Soviet public perceived as an existential cultural conflict as well as a military one, such a manner of framing an argument about the roots of Soviet culture would have resonated widely. After all, for Marxist-Leninists who believed in deterministic grand narratives, what could be more strikingly apparent than the ancient feuds between the Russian peoples and the West repeatedly ending in Russian survival or victory? Was that not to be interpreted as an indicator of the inevitability of Soviet triumph over their ancient Teutonic rival, now manifest in the body politic of Adolph Hitler, as it once did in Napoleon and in Charles XII (a Swedish King of Bavarian royal origins)? Such narratives are remarkably powerful because they can create an aura of inevitability.

Grekov then employs another effective technique by framing the young Russian state, and by proxy the future Soviet state, as an inheritor of Byzantine culture and civilization. He details interactions between the Greeks and Slavs in his account of the spread of Christianity into the Dnieper region. Grekov points out this cultural diffusion in architecture, religious practices, and art from the Kievan Rus, all of which was heavily influenced by Byzantine culture.[113] Finally, Grekov tries to draw implicit parallels to the National Bolshevik paradigm in Kievan Rus culture:

> Rus became the pupil of the Greek masters. But this concerns form only. As regards content it must be said that, like all other peoples, the Russians, at a certain stage in the development of their own civilization, found it necessary, without any outside influence being brought to bear upon them, to look back upon their past and to interpret it for themselves. This need is a very old one. At one time it was satisfied by poets, bards, and the tellers of stories. Now came a public order for a history of their native land, and the opportunity for filling the order was at hand. Specimens of this type of literature were to be found in translations from the Greek. The preparatory work had been done a long time ago, and the talent and inspiration were to be found in the Russian people themselves.[114]

[113] Grekov, The Culture of Kiev Rus, 71.

[114] Ibid., 85.

This impulse manifested itself in the writing of the *Chronicle of the Ancient Years*. Grekov argues that this work articulates the first Russian conceptualization of the theory of the state as a central authority manifest in the sovereignty of a Prince. He writes that this idea was itself passed down from the Byzantines along with their Christian faith and culture.[115] In concluding his work, Grekov reminds the reader that when the Kievan Rus society collapsed under Mongol conquest, "the masses, who had never forgotten their unity and had always been interested in their past, fully appreciated their ancestors, of whom they were duly proud, ancestors who had selflessly given their energy and lives for their people and for their state – these masses preserved… and handed down their historical reminiscences to our days."[116] Grekov's works, like Tarle's, were printed for mass consumption and became very popular in wartime.

In assessing the examples of works by Tarle and Grekov, we form a better understanding of the types of historical texts that were used to supplement the *Short Course* and reached a popular audience. The ideological orientation of these works was decidedly nationalistic and emphasized Russian nationalism above Marxist class analysis. In the Pokrovsky years, such books would have been rejected outright by the academic establishment, but after Pokrovsky's repudiation and the introduction of National Bolshevism, the historical establishment shifted decisively towards Tarle's and Grekov's kind of analysis and presentation.

[115] Grekov, The Culture of Kiev Rus, 133-34.

[116] Ibid., 140.

4.3: In the Classroom

Figure 19. A Soviet Preschool Class: between 1947-53.
http://russianhistoryblog.org/2012/03/the-stalin-cult-theory-practice-the-holy-grail-of-reception/

One of the most obvious means by which modern states influence the ideological persuasions of their populations is by careful manipulation of their educational systems. In the Soviet Union, education was a primary focus of the state as it sought to both entrench its own legitimacy and modernize its culture. Raising a generation of children within a strictly Soviet educational paradigm meant that the state could have tight control over what its younger population learned and believed. Party officials did not mince words; in June of 1943 a director for a fine arts program in Moscow province, Comrade Kasterina, announced that a teacher's main responsibility was "to take charge of Soviet students' patriotic mobilization."[117] V. P. Potemkin,

[117] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 133.

the commissar of education, argued that "the inculcation of a sophisticated and articulate sense of patriotic identity was the public schools' main responsibility, insofar as 'an instinctive and emotional love of the motherland is not enough."[118] Whereas in the 1930s, National Bolshevism was balanced with Marxism-Leninism and internationalism in the classroom, after the outbreak of war in 1941, Soviet pedagogy shifted decisively to focusing on the National Bolshevik paradigm. Cultivating patriotic sentiment through historical and literary study was the primary objective.

One article on the educational system from 1942 elaborates on this reorientation: "Brought up as a citizen and patriot, our schoolchild will be prepared to become the deserving heir of his forefathers, who created this national culture, and an inheritor of the glorious martial traditions of the warriors of old, who defended their Motherland from invaders."[119] As is quite clear, the rhetoric employed by educational officials and teachers in their planning of curricula and articulating general educational trends strongly reflects the broader cultural and historiographical campaign by the Soviet authorities to create a sense of shared national identity around Russian culture.

Although much care was taken to emphasize that this was a broader "Soviet" identity being articulated to students, examples from the classroom demonstrate that what was being taught was decidedly Russian in nature. One example comes from a 1944 transcript of a dialogue between a male teacher and his female student:

> *Teacher:* The theme of the last lesson was "Novgorod's and Pskov's struggle with the Swedish and German feudal lords" …
> *Student:* The Germans and Swedes long wished to seize the Finnish lands. But no sooner had the Swedes landed at the mouth of the river Neva than Aleksandr, Prince of Novgorod, fell upon them. The Novgorodians fought bravely …

[118] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 134.

[119] S. G. Bobrov, "Rabota literaturnogo kruzhka v VIII-X klassakh shkoly," *Sovetskaia pedagogika* 3-4 (1942): 71.

> Aleksandr came to be known as "Nevskii" after this battle. But the prince didn't get along with the boyars. The boyars had extensive power and didn't want to share it with anyone. Aleksandr wanted to concentrate it in his hands because the Swedes and Germans were threatening Russia. Soon, the Germans attacked Rus'. Novgorod summoned Aleksandr Nevskii. Then the battle on Lake Chud' took place. The Germans were forced to conclude a peace.
> *Teacher:* What does the Soviet government appreciate Aleksandr Nevskii for?
> *Student:* Because he defended Rus' from seizure by the Germans.
> *Teacher:* How are soldiers distinguished?
> *Student:* Soldiers and officers are distinguished by the Order of Aleksandr Nevksii.
> *Teacher:* And what do the German knights, who lived 700 years ago, have in common with today's fascists?
> *Student:* They too were engaged in the physical destruction of the Slavic population.
> *Teacher:* What great person referred to them as "mongrel-knights?"
> *Student:* Karl Marx called them the "mongrel-knights."[120]

What makes this dialogue insightful is the teacher's repeated emphasis on connecting events from a distant, semi-mythological history to contemporary geo-politics. The conflict between Germans and Slavs was taught as an ancient and inevitable one and the importance of a centralized state was reinforced. Such an approach to education was hailed as exemplary in the public schools.

Although National Bolshevism was front and center in the school system and much emphasis was placed on the importance of education, Soviet schools still suffered from a number of problems that had not been resolved since the pre-war years. First, although a seven-year educational track had become the standard model, data suggests that only one in six students made it into the higher grades in the early 1940s. An influx of refugees from the front and the use of school buildings for wartime purposes, forced the system to work on a shift schedule which precipitated shorter class hours and dumbed down lessons. As a result, only historical

[120] TsAODM 3/82/9/177-178; also GARF 2306/70/2764/77-78.
TsAODM = the former Moscow party archive and present Central Archive of Social Movements of the City of Moscow; GARF = the former Central State Archive of the October Revolution, presently the State Archive of the Russian Federation. These documents were cited and translated by Brandenberger.

information that had a propagandistic value was taught to students. To compound all of this, many young teachers (both male and female) were sent to the front or went to work in factories and sixty percent of the people who became teachers to replace them lacked basic qualifications to teach. Standardized textbooks managed to keep many classes afloat, but the Soviet authorities were less concerned about the quality of the education students were receiving and more worried about its political value in wartime.[121] It seems that by 1945, a blurring of the chronological lines between the Russian past and the Soviet present became the norm.

After the war, it would appear to outside observers that the sudden lack of need to idealize and mythologize Russian history would have faded away, but the National Bolshevik paradigm proved to be highly adaptable to the postwar needs of the Soviet state. A paradox seemed to emerge, where the Soviet state would have likely wanted to promote the narrative of the Great Patriotic war and promote "Soviet" concerns, but at the same time kept Russo-centric etatism at the core of its propaganda and academic output. Brandenberger argues that beneath this paradox are three key conditions within Soviet ideological education. First, in promoting "Soviet" identity, the state relied on imagery and iconography that conflated Russian ethnic symbolism with a "Soviet" one. Second, the heavy handedness with which the postwar Soviet state policed the historical writings of non-Russian national organizations for their subversive nationalism, did not apply to expressions of Russian nationalism. Finally, teachers in these years, perhaps as a product of their own education, relied heavily on populist and Russo-centric rhetoric to convey what would have been overly-complex topics to audiences of young students.[122] Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialist theory were, after all, too complex and convoluted

[121] Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 139.

[122] Ibid., 212.

for the average child or young adult to grasp and needed a system of heuristics to make accessible, often at the expense of its own intended messaging. It would seem that the Soviet system stuck with what it felt worked best and what people were most comfortable with using in the educational framework.

Over the course of this somewhat shorter chapter, I have not explored the Soviet educational system from the perspective of mathematics or the natural sciences as ideological expression seems to have less of an outwardly perverse effect on its teaching. Mathematics, physics, and the like, in the contemporary world, are taught by way of universal principles and outside of possible contextual ideology being used to demonstrate examples, actual learning of Algebra or Geometry would not have been different than in any other modern country. Where the uniquely Soviet flavor in the educational domain comes through is in its history and literature curricula, where political expediency was prioritized. In the end, National Bolshevik ideology that had been formulated in the 1930s by party leadership, sustained as the model for such education until Stalin's death in 1953.

4.4: Mass Culture

The final section of this chapter on National Bolshevism will explore expressions of the party ideological line in Soviet popular culture such as films and art, by singling out examples to analyze how they fit into the overarching historiographical narrative being pushed by the Soviet state in the years preceding, during, and following the Second World War. Mass media and popular culture were (and still are) one of the most influential mechanisms with which to

influence the masses as media can implant ideas and rationales for any manner of ideological stances. I am not versed in media theory and won't delve into much beyond the historiographic themes expressed in the examples I have chosen to single out.

The Soviet authorities invested significant amounts of capital and effort into fostering a robust cinema industry in the Soviet Union. Film was seen as a powerful new medium through which to push propaganda and exert influence over the population. Though this medium was less effective at reaching people in the countryside, in cities, film was both seen as a cutting-edge industry through which to demonstrate the innovative capabilities of Soviet planning, and tow the party line. The Soviets really did see cinema as an industry like any other, couching rhetoric about film "workers" in the kind of proletarian Marxist-Leninist lingo that was applied to heavy industry. Of all the Soviet filmmakers in the Stalin period, no one was more influential than Sergei Eisenstein.

Figure 20. Photograph of Sergei Eisenstein: 1935
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Eisenstein#/media/File:Sergei_Eisenstein_02.jpg

Born in 1898 to an ethnically Jewish father from a family of Orthodox converts and an Orthodox mother in Latvia, Eisenstein was raised in the Orthodox faith but eventually became an atheist.[123] He went on to study architecture and engineering before joining the Red Army to go and fight in the Russian revolution while his father supported the Whites. After the revolution, his father ended up in Germany while Sergei went to Petrograd before being sent to a command post in Minsk where he became exposed to Japanese Kabuki theater and studied Japanese.[124] Eisenstein eventually returned to Moscow and took an interest in theater and film. His first film, *Battleship Potemkin*, was released in 1925 and was hailed as a technical masterpiece for its innovative use of camera angles, montage, and crowds, earning him renown across the global cinema community. Eisenstein then went on to spend a half decade abroad, before returning to the USSR in 1933. The Stalinist authorities were suspicious of him because of his time abroad, but he was nevertheless assigned to a prestigious teaching post at the State Institute of Cinematography.[125] He was eventually given a chance to "make good" with Stalin, by being assigned the production of *Alexander Nevsky*.

We've already mentioned the heroic figure and myth of Aleksandr Nevskii, the Slavic prince of Novgorod who successfully repulsed Teutonic invaders in the thirteenth century. Nevskii became one of the foundational myths of National Bolshevism and was helped along by the release of Eisenstein's film in 1938. Along with a brilliant musical score by Sergei Prokofiev, the film was hailed as a masterpiece worldwide, both for Eisenstein's innovative techniques and for its prescient political messaging that not so subtly warned Germany that invading the Soviet

[123] Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 17.

[124] Seton, Sergei M. Eisenstein, 38.

[125] Ibid., 249.

Union would be its own downfall. The film's plot begins with the conquest of Pskov by the Teutonic knights before depicting Nevskii at Novgorod, trying to rally his people to face the looming threat. Nevskii faces resistance from the boyars and merchants who follow a monk, before eventually overcoming their defeatism and defeating the Teutons in open combat on a frozen lake.

Figure 21. Original *Alexander Nevsky* Poster: 1938
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029850/mediaviewer/rm2236496384

Eisenstein's film greatly satisfied Stalin and the Soviet authorities who awarded him the Order of Lenin and the Stalin Prize for its creation. Eisenstein went so far as to link Nevskii, the film's protagonist, to Stalin directly by drawing a parallel in an article he wrote to hype the film's

release.[126] By April of 1939, Soviet sources claim that the film had already been seen by 23,000,000 people, making it the most popular film made at the time.[127] When the Nazis and Soviets signed the non-aggression pact in August of that year, it was removed from circulation before returning to theaters after the German invasion of the USSR.

Figure 22. Original *Ivan the Terrible Part I* Poster: 1944
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037824/mediaviewer/rm19222016

By the early 1940s, Eisenstein had been thinking about another more ambitious cinematic project; a trilogy of films about Ivan the Terrible. With the restoration of Ivan IV's image as a misunderstood historical hero of Russia, Eisenstein expected a movie about him to be a hit with Stalin and the general public. In fact, Stalin liked the idea enough to endorse the trilogy and the first film went into production in 1942 and was released in 1944. Thematically, Ivan was

[126] Ronald Bergan, *Eisenstein: a life in conflict* (New York: Overlook Press, 1999), 305.

[127] Kyril Anderson. *Kremlevskij Kinoteatr. 1928–1953: Dokumenty* (Rospen Press, 2005), 539.

portrayed as a man obsessed with rooting out the treachery of the Boyars who controlled Russia and he defeated Russia's enemies to centralize the state; a not so subtle nod to Stalin as the dictator. The movie lays out a melodramatic universe where Ivan plays the role of a tragic hero while the Boyars around him are disturbed by his ambitions upon his coronation. Even Ivan's own friends are eventually convinced to work against him by the Boyars, paralleling Stalin's own fears and worries about other high-ranking party officials. Ivan can only trust his wife, Anastasia. Part I received rave reviews from Stalin who awarded Eisenstein the Stalin Prize for his work, but Part II was not to have the same success. Eisenstein screened parts of the work-in-progress film for Stalin only to have Stalin disapprove of the project and the film ultimately be scrapped after its completion, not to be played to Soviet audiences until 1958, a decade after the death of Eisenstein. Part III, which was already in production, was destroyed, though some slides still remain.

The effect that Eisenstein's films had on Soviet culture are best understood in the context of the war and the state's propaganda efforts at the time. *Nevskii* and *Ivan* fit neatly into the National Bolshevik paradigm as they present mythologized heroes of a Russian history that the Soviets were trying desperately to tap into. In the 1930s and 40s, like today, film was a form of media where technical innovation and storytelling could be used to effectively sell romanticized notions about the past, present, and future; whether or not Soviet audiences could suspend their disbelief is another matter. For a generation of youth, raised in the Stalinist educational system and trained by adherents to National Bolshevism, such film would have built on an already existent conception of the past to great effect.

In the domain of the fine arts, the Stalin period (continuing policy from the Lenin years) saw the elevation of Socialist Realist art as the official state endorsed artistic movement. The

artistic works produced in this period straddle the line between art and propaganda, as nothing was produced without political purpose or state guidance. Socialist realism hinged on the notion that art had to be understandable and accessible to the masses, in reaction to the esoteric and obtuse impression given by the avant-garde art that had been popular in the early 1920s. As western artistic movements shifted into a period of heightened aesthetic experimentation, where form and color were derived to their base level in cubism and expressionism and artists like Picasso and Dali played with deconstructing traditionalist notions of aesthetics, the Soviets tried to simplify. Realism was brought back into vogue because it was understandable enough for the general public and elevated the aesthetic of reality, though often through an idealized lens. This artistic movement allowed the Soviets to superimpose idealized notions about Soviet society onto images that captured beauty in the banality of daily life. It was propaganda blended with a populist aesthetic ideal.

Figure 23. “Visiting My Grandmother” by Alexander Laktionov: 1930
https://www.widewalls.ch/socialist-realism-art/
Figure 24. “Reception in the Kremlin, May 24, 1945” by Dmitry Nalbandyan: 1947
https://www.wikiart.org/en/dmitry-nalbandyan/reception-in-the-kremlin-may-24-1945-1947

I’ve picked two examples of Socialist Realist art that I feel best encapsulate what the movement represented in its context. It was art that both monumentalized the mundane and personalized the monumental in its intent. In the work by Laktionov to the left, we see a scene that was as identifiable then as it is today; children at their grandmother’s apartment trying to pass the time. Laktionov takes this everyday scene and uses it to sell an image of idealized middle-class comfort and prosperity in Soviet society. In that sense this work seems to mirror the work of the American painter, Norman Rockwell, who also strove to idealize populism in the American context. The work to the right, by Nalbandyan, does the inverse and instead captures Stalin and his entourage in a manner meant to personalize them. We see smiles from the subjects and an adoring crowd overlooking the monumental staircase. Stalin is “walking the red carpet” flanked by other Soviet leaders and generals, but the work doesn’t depict exuberance. It is crafted to exude humility. The setting, though clearly monumental, is not decadent or lavish. The group is dressed well, but modestly and the crowd is not fawning in awe or amazement, but rather cheering in appreciation. Although these paintings don’t depict historical scenes, they are still a representation of National Bolshevism’s idealized notions of the contemporary; a populist world where comforts are met and no one is inaccessible. When taken in broader context, this genre suggests that the whole of Russian history has led the Soviet people to this utopia of the common folk; a national identity rooted in populism and humility.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ÉMIGRÉ PERSPECTIVES

This final chapter will attempt to come full circle by shedding light on the postwar experiences of some of our historians in the context of their eventual exile in the West. Becoming an émigré can be viewed as a transformative process as one renounces their citizenship, losing the rights and privileges associated with membership in the community of one nation-state for another. This process inherently involves changing identities as, in this case, one revises their national identity from, for example, "Soviet" to "Russian-American." The performativity of citizenship and membership in a national community in the context of the United States differs quite starkly from that of the Soviet Union; in the former, national membership is near indistinguishable from citizenship and a marker of cohesive unity, while in the latter, citizenship and nationality played a dichotomous role as nationality was used to categorize and to connote division and place of origin. Americans generally don't view place within their borders as being defined by ethnic group membership while Soviet citizens living in the ethno-federal system emphatically did. The origin of this difference in conceptualizing nationality can itself be the subject of an extensive historical study and for the purposes of this paper, I mention it simply to highlight a difference in mindset that makes Soviet émigrés who ended up in the United States a unique source and perspective on Stalinism and National Bolshevism. I will begin by introducing a new character, Anatole Mazour, before returning to two familiar names from our third chapter. Mazour is unique not because he had firsthand experience with the Soviet system, but because he was an early defector whose views provide a glimpse into the mentality of the émigré community from the former Russian Empire at the time.

5.1: Anatole Mazour: An Outsider, Looking In

Figure 25. Photograph of Anatole Mazour in the University of Nevada yearbook: 1941. Accessed via Ancestry.com

Anatole Mazurenko was born on the 24th of May, 1900 in a village near Kiev, Ukraine. When the Great War erupted in 1914, Anatole was still in school and entered military service in the Russian army in 1916. During the Russian civil war, he fought with an anti-Bolshevik volunteer army and at the war's end with the Red Army victory, had to flee the country.[128] He fled by ship from Odessa to Turkey before ending up in Berlin in 1922 and travelling to the United States aboard the S.S. Ryndam by way of Rotterdam on December 6th of that year.

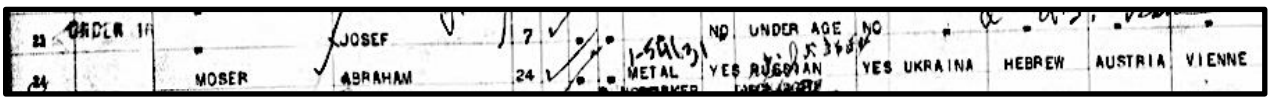


Figure 26. "Abraham Moser" listed in a manifest of alien passengers entering the US aboard the S.S. Ryndam: 1922. Accessed via Ancestry.com

[128] Wayne S. Vucinich, "Anatole Gregory Mazour (1900-1982)" *The Russian Review* 41, no. 3 (1982): 362.

I arrived at the port of New York in the State of New York, on or about the 17 day of December, anno Domini 1922; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein: So HELP ME GOD.

(Signed) ANATOLE ABRAHAM MUZER

Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of said Court this 13 day of August, anno Domini 1928.

[SEAL OF COURT]

(Signed) J. S. Baer

Clerk of the District Court.

(Signed) By W. C. Burcham, *Deputy Clerk.*

(Photograph and signature of declarant named herein)

Application No. --

Form 2602

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF NATURALIZATION

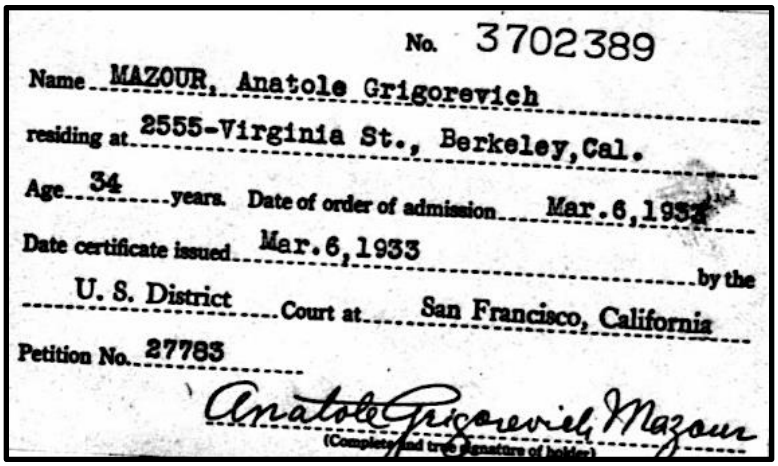
This is to certify that the foregoing is a true copy of declaration of intention made by Anatole Abraham Muzer (Anatole Grigorevich Mazour) as shown by the records of the Bureau of Naturalization. This copy is invalid for all purposes after August 13th, 1935, by reason of the expiration of seven years from the date the original declaration was made. This copy is issued under authority of Section 32 (d) of the act of June 29, 1906, as amended, and the seal of the Department of Labor hereunto affixed this 2nd day of November, anno Domini 1932.

[SEAL]

Commissioner of Naturalization.

14—2614 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1929

Figure 27. Anatole Abraham Moser's (Anatole Grigorovich Mazour) U.S. Citizenship Application: 1928. Accessed via Ancestry.com



No. 3702389

Name MAZOUR, Anatole Grigorevich

residing at 2555-Virginia St., Berkeley, Cal.

Age 34 years. Date of order of admission Mar. 6, 1933

Date certificate issued Mar. 6, 1933 by the

U. S. District Court at San Francisco, California

Petition No. 27783

Anatole Grigorevich Mazour

(Complete and true signature of holder)

Figure 28. Anatole Grigorovich Mazour's Naturalization Index: 1933. Accessed via Ancestry.com

Mazurenko entered the United States posing as "Abraham Moser," a Ukrainian Jewish metalworker from Vienna, intending to go to study history at Columbia University in New York

before being convinced to head out west by a professor. In 1928, Mazurenko, now hailing by the name Mazour, applied for United States citizenship and became a citizen in 1933. He studied at the University of Nebraska before going to pursue graduate studies in Russian history at Yale University and obtained his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley in 1934.[129] Shifting identities aside, Mazour would go on to publish a number of works on Russian history and in particular, a 1937 study of Russian and Soviet historiography titled *Modern Russian Historiography* that he would revise a number of times. The second edition of his work, published in 1958, will be the basis for my analysis of his views on Soviet historical academia.

Mazour begins by framing the purpose of his study; to give students of Russian historiography a rough outline of notable names and their contributions to the body of historical writings on Russian history. Though roughly three-fourths of his writing is devoted to pre-Revolutionary historians, Mazour sets aside an entire chapter for the Marxist historians. He traces the origin of Marxist historiography in Russia to the nineteenth century thinker G. V. Plekhanov, who attempted to synthesize the first major study of Russian social thought while in exile abroad. Plekhanov was more of a philosopher by nature than a professional historian and so it took individuals like N. A. Rozhkov and our oft-cited M. N. Pokrovsky to really apply Marxist historical principles to rigorous archival research and analysis.[130] Mazour frames Pokrovsky as an idealist Marxist who was committed to the internationalist proletarian project. He points out that Pokrovsky attempted to eschew nationalism as a bourgeois expression and claimed to avoid national glorification altogether in his writings. Interestingly, he notes, while Pokrovsky disregarded national groups, he unavoidably ascribed to the Russian people a more central role in

[129] Vucinich, "Anatole Gregory Mazour (1900-1982)", 362.

[130] Anatole Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1958), 184.

his histories, mirroring the works of the "bourgeois" historians he so vehemently tried to challenge.[131] Mazour also points out that Pokrovsky took a political approach to his writing: "Marxism was a means, not a dogma; an omnipotent instrument, not an inflexible pattern; while he used the field of history as a battleground on which to meet his political foes. Scarcely any other writer has ever equaled Pokrovsky's skill in subordinating history to politics."[132] Mazour harbors some hostility towards Pokrovsky and the Marxists, this much is evident in how he criticizes their work and its outcomes, but he seems to have measured respect for their tact in molding historical writing to suit their desired ideological ambitions. Mazour identifies this as the predominant theme of Soviet historical writing both during and after the Pokrovsky period.[133]

As he moves into his analysis of the 1930s in Soviet historical writing, Mazour notes the tremendous influence that the Party and political leaders began to exert on the historical profession. He briefly addresses the shift towards Russo-centric historical writing and points to Tarle's works as exemplary of the type of writing that became commonplace in wartime.[134] Where Mazour begins to reveal new insights is in what he knows of the postwar conditions for historians. After the war, in 1946, Colonel-General Zhdanov reoriented the cultural line of the Soviet government; now, focus was to be shifted onto the lingering western, bourgeois cultural influences in the Soviet Union and an anti-foreign message would need to be coherently presented by the cultural and academic fronts.[135]

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[131] Mazour, Modern Russian Historiography, 188.

[132] Ibid., 190.

[133] Ibid., 198.

[134] Ibid., 209.

[135] Ibid., 213.

> Zhadanov's attack upon the West may have been in some measure the reaction to an official desire to eradicate the fairly friendly attitude toward the countries of the West which had risen under the necessity of war. The attack was intensified, and Marxist scholars were notified that "academic" and "objective" research was unworthy of them. All "subservience" to Western culture was to be terminated. Real objectivity was to be found in the class interests of the proletariat, which are identical with the objective course of historical development.[136]

Mazour appears to follow the line of thinking of the totalitarian theorists in his arguing that Soviet leadership exerted top-down control on the historians, but then points out that some of the initiative for shifting in this direction was, in-fact, taken by historians themselves. As an example, he uses N. L. Rubinstein, who wrote a work on Russian historiography in the late 1930s. In 1948, he anticipated the oncoming changes and denounced his own prior writings, labelling them "formal, objective, and academic" as if such descriptors were derogatory.[137] By 1949, Rubinstein was periodically chastised, but another historian, I. I. Mints, came under fire as an "advocate of cosmopolitanism." Mazour attributes this to Mints' claim that he was the originator of modern Russian historical approaches; an honor claimed by Stalin. Mints also failed to place the Russian people as the superior nation within the Soviet Union.[138] In this part of his work, we can see some of Mazour's feelings towards the Soviet system bleed through. Mazour, as a Ukrainian who fought against the Bolsheviks, clearly harbors some hostility to the notion that Russian people are superior and pokes fun at Stalin's self-professed role in building the Soviet historical front.

Writing in 1958, without the benefit of hindsight into current geopolitics, Mazour begins to outline the views of other émigré historians who got out of the Soviet Union. In particular, he

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[136] Mazour, Modern Russian Historiography, 214.

[137] Ibid., 215.

[138] Ibid., 219.

fixates on the Eurasian school. The Eurasianists noted that Russian history was being limited by the debate over whether Russian history and culture could be placed in Europe or Asia. Instead, they argued that Russia's eastern frontier constituted an influential force in the development of Russia and as such should be understood as an integral part of it. They threw off the dichotomy and posited that Russian history should be interpreted through a Eurasian lens; that the eastern regions were not a void frontier for conquest, but were an integral part of shaping the life and identity of the Russian, and present Soviet nation. Mazour seems to implicitly advocate for this position, noting the views of thinkers like Dragomanov, Antonovich, and Schapov treated the peoples of the former Russian empire as "Russian" in a civic sense divorced from their ethnic origins and, by extension, as equally important players in the development of the empire and future nation.[139] Perhaps his take would be different given current associations of Eurasianism with the stances of the modern government of Russia.

In 1971, Mazour added to his past work by publishing an in-depth study of Soviet historiography titled *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union*. In it, he attempted to provide clarity to the narratives that had been constructed by the Soviet state, and dispel myths of a continuum in historical writing stretching back to imperial period. Soviet historiography was something entirely novel and had to be viewed as such in the context of the broader cultural goals of the state. Mazour continued to espouse the view that Stalin's involvement in dictating the tenor of historical research in the Soviet Union, irreparably damaged the study of history. His approach to the causal relationship for why Soviet historical writing became Russo-centric and displayed the characteristics associated with Stalinist ideology is firmly rooted in a top-down worldview in which the Soviet state could control the environment and atmosphere in which

[139] Mazour, Modern Russian Historiography, 241.

work was produced. Mazour's approach would fit closely with the totalitarian approach to studying the Stalin period that was outlined earlier in this thesis and, to some degree, excludes the role that individuals and their motives, whether idealistic or pragmatic, played in the production of such historiographies.

5.2: Aleksandr Nekrich: The Patriot Goes Rogue

Figure 29. Photograph of Aleksandr Nekrich: n.d. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/ru/a/a2/Nekrich.jpg

When we last left Aleksandr Nekrich, he had been grappling with the realities of life in Soviet academia during the "War on Cosmopolitans." This was a period of great turmoil within the Soviet Union and put the livelihoods of many party members in a precarious position. Among them were two historians; Mints and Sidorov, whose feud was witnessed by the young Nekrich. In 1949, Mints delivered a presentation on a paper he had been working on entitled "Lenin and the Development of Soviet Historical Scholarship." In it, he praised Stalin's *Short Course* and the defeat of the non-Marxist historians, while criticizing those who held social-democratic

ideals.[140] Oddly, the paper drew negative attention from other academics and the Central Committee. Nekrich describes the buildup to the eventual outburst of hostilities between I. I. Mints and A. L. Sidorov: a meeting on the campaign against cosmopolitanism in historical scholarship was called (ironically chaired by an academic named Sergei Utchenko, who was himself partly of Jewish descent and had a Jewish wife). Sidorov was the most vigorous anti-cosmopolitan among the scholars at this meeting and chose Mints to be his target. Nekrich describes how bizarre this scene was, as Mints was himself a rabid Stalinist who would flaunt his war stories whenever a new Party ideological crusade was announced.[141] Sidorov, who had apparently compiled a dossier on Mints, launched into an accusatory tirade against him, on par with those of the prosecution in the show trials of the 1930s. Sidorov accused Mints of having admiration for German historiographies and expressing anti-party views on party history. Nekrich describes these accusations as akin to accusations of witchcraft.[142]

The meeting continued from this outburst with groups of historians within each subgenre of historical study stepping up to denounce cosmopolitanism in each of their areas of study. Nekrich's reaction towards this, in hindsight, was one of dismay; the incident left a lasting impact on his perception of the conditions within which Soviet academics had to operate and likely begun to sow the seeds of rejection towards the system. Nekrich goes on to describe his dissertation defense, a number of arrests of academics, further Russo-centrism in historical study, another purge, and increasing public anti-Semitism. In late 1952, Sidorov turned his guns on

[140] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 27.

[141] Ibid., 28.

[142] Ibid., 29.

Nekrich, accusing him of "bourgeois objectivism."[143] Nekrich went above Sidorov to Anna Pankratova (herself a historian and now the editor of *Voprosy istorii* and a representative at the 19th Party Congress) to voice his concerns about what was happening to him and the academy. He was surprised by her questions:

> "Tell me, Comrade Nekrich, are you a Yugoslav?" I must confess that this was unexpected. Could the dispute with Tito have affected me by coincidence?... Upon learning that I was Jewish, she said, with some embarrassment, "And we thought that you were being persecuted for being a Yugoslav." This was a statement fraught with significance, for in 1952 we did not know which was worse for someone living in the Soviet Union: being taken for a Yugoslav or being Jewish![144]

In the context of Tito's frayed relationship with Stalin influencing geopolitics, being a Yugoslav would have made Nekrich an outcast. Nekrich describes Pankratova as having been a kind and conscientious person who took the opportunity to help him and redeemed herself in her commitment to truth in historical scholarship: "In the final years of her life, at the head of the journal *Voprosy istorii,* she did much to restore at least partial historical truth, thereby earning the hatred of the Stalinists and dogmatists. Pankratova's intercession in my fate slowed the course of events some-what, but not for long."[145] Nekrich feared for the worst as 1953 rolled along.

Then, in March, Stalin died. For Nekrich, the removal of what appeared to be the snake's head atop the system gave him newfound courage in the face of his imminent fall from grace. At thirty-three years old, Nekrich had dodged a bullet. He described what he felt in that moment as if he had narrowly escaped his own crucifixion. Nekrich's father, a former journalist, rejoiced and described his own knowledge of Stalin's crimes in "expropriation raids" in the Caucasus as a

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[143] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 65.

[144] Ibid., 66.

[145] Ibid.

young man. Rumors had also been circulating that the Jewish population was ripe for deportation as well; Stalin's death put an end to the rumors. Others had also dodged bullets; Deborin, Nekrich's administrative superior, had been asked by the party to sign a letter denouncing and condemning the accused in the Doctors' Plot. Deborin was torn up about the dilemma and so Nekrich had advised him to stall for time by requesting to see the list of names. He received no reply, but then Stalin died and Deborin lived on.

In the 1950s, Nekrich was able to pursue his studies mostly unperturbed. Nikita Khrushchev rose to power and promised de-Stalinization, many political prisoners who had vanished years before remerged from the labor camps, and the historical academy was given a somewhat looser mandate. In 1961 Nekrich was even chosen as part of a Soviet tour group to the United Kingdom.[146] Life had become more "normal" in the sense that the politics and drama that had dominated Nekrich's life since the Second World War had begun to fade to the background. This loosening gave him enough of a feeling of security to write a manuscript in 1965 that he had been meaning to write since the mid 1940s: *June 22, 1941; Soviet Historians and the German Invasion*, a work about the role of historians in crafting wartime narratives and a sharp critique of Stalin and his lack of preparedness for war with Nazi Germany. Needless to say, Nekrich wildly misread the political situation at the time of its writing.

In 1964, the party forced Khrushchev into retirement. Leonid Brezhnev became his successor. Although neo-Stalinism had not yet returned in full force, anti-Stalinist policies were once again frowned upon. Upon submission to his editor, Nekrich began to realize the mistake he had made in trying to publish such a charged work in a time of re-emerging Stalinist sympathies. A number of censors combed through the manuscript including officials from the Ministry of

[146] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 124.

Defense, the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the GRU. Nekrich had included the text of interviews with a Marshall of the Soviet Union, F. I. Golikov, the former head of the GRU. This tipped off alarm bells for the censors.[147] In this interview, the Marshall explained that warning signs and intelligence about an imminent German attack had been coming through earlier than March of 1941 and had been presented to Stalin. This stood in direct contradiction to the official narrative put forth by the Soviet authorities; that the German attack was a sudden act of treachery that could not have been predicted.[148] Knowledge that intelligence had been presented to Stalin and that he had rejected it as a provocation from the British would have heaped blame for the unpreparedness of the Soviet military machine right at Stalin's feet. In an age of rehabilitated Stalinism, such implications were unacceptable.

Nekrich was presented with a number of redactions and removals and ultimately succeeded in getting the book published. In October 1965, *June 22, 1941* appeared in the stores and sold fifty thousand copies in three days. Letters requesting more copies came in from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and even from remote outposts in the Arctic Circle.[149] Initially, enthusiasm from the public was high and the book even received some support from Nekrich's wartime friends in high places in the military. Nekrich's book was to be discussed at a Party meeting, but here was where the criticism began to unfurl. On February 16, 1966, at the Central Committee Institute of Marxism-Leninism, a discussion of *June 22, 1941* took place. Nekrich had heard rumors that Stalinist historians, with the support of the Soviet Army's political office,

[147] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 146.

[148] Ibid., 147.

[149] Ibid., 153.

the publications committee of the Council of Ministers, and the propaganda department of the Central Committee were planning to denounce the book, so he invited as many people as possible to create a public shield.[150] Deborin was the first to lash out, followed by a number of military men including one Colonel Sverdlov, a former associate of the disgraced head of the secret police, Lavrentiy Beria, and son of Lenin's close associate Yakov Sverdlov. Nekrich's responding statement struck a conciliatory tone:

> First of all, I believe it my duty to say that the discussion organized by the department of the history of the Great Fatherland War of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism has been a truly scholarly one, whereby each and every one of us has been able to express his point of view. And the heated exchange which we saw at the end of the meeting, I believe, was not inevitable. Far be it from me to think G. A. Deborin, who spoke on behalf of the editorial board of volume 1, has tried to repudiate my book. I hope that he had purely scholarly objectives. This is how the issue has been dealt with during the discussion.[151]

It seems that opinion was divided within the military and what ultimately saved Nekrich from political repercussions at this point was the public support for his work. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* managed to obtain and publish a transcript and photograph of Nekrich from the meeting in its March 20th, 1967 magazine.[152]

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[150] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 157.

[151] Ibid., 160.

[152] "MIT LAGERN MACHST DU UNS NICHT BANGE." *Der Spiegel*, March 20, 1967.

Figure 30. "Stalin-Critic Nekrich" obtained from *Der Spiegel*, March 20, 1967.
Figure 31. Cover of *June 22, 1941* by Aleksandr Nekrich: n.d. https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/41sw%2B3s8aLL._SX340_BO1,204,203,200_.jpg

Behind the scenes, an article for *Pravda* was being prepared by Deborin against Nekrich. Soon, investigators called him in for questioning. Nekrich faced a number of probing questions including a particularly memorable one from an investigator named Sdobnov, who asked him "which, in your view is more important – political expediency or historical truth?"[153] Nekrich's first response skirted the question by conflating expediency with truth, before he was pressured into giving his honest opinion: "historical truth."[154] Eventually, Nekrich would be the target of a show trial that included all manner of accusations levied against him by former colleagues and high ranking party members. On June 28th 1967, Nekrich was expelled from the Communist party. He appealed directly to Brezhnev, but could not shake the label "Bourgeois falsificator of history" that had been thrown at him in an article in *Voprosy istorii KPSS*.[155] In 1976, after nine years of living in the Soviet Union as an expelled party member, Nekrich was granted permission

[153] Nekrich, *Forsake Fear*, 185.

[154] Ibid., 186.

[155] Ibid., 206.

to leave the country. He would settle in Boston and lecture at Harvard University until his death in 1993.

Nekrich's story is unique in that he witnessed a number of profound transitions on the Soviet historical front and in Soviet society at-large. His life saw him fight in the Second World War, return to academia in the Stalin years, participate in the destruction of Stalin's legacy, and eventually become a dissident in a system he had grown disillusioned with. His memoirs document rampant anti-Semitism, endless political intrigue, and a historical academia rife with conflict and stuck in a never-ending ideological purity spiral. But what stands out about Nekrich is that his views ultimately didn't waver; he became the target of political retribution because conditions around him changed. This was reality for historians working in the Soviet academic system and I hope that Nekrich's story has illuminated some of what life was like in the Soviet Union during the tumult of the postwar years.

5.3: Konstantin Shteppa: From Collaboration to Self-Exile

Figure 32. Photograph of Konstantin Shteppa: 1958. http://univ.kiev.ua/ua/geninf/history-rectors/shteppa/

The final émigré historian we will address is Konstantin Shteppa, whose wartime experiences were addressed in the third chapter. Shteppa had made many enemies in his youth having served in the Tsar's army and against the Bolsheviks in the Russian civil war. He spent the next decade collaborating with the Soviet authorities to provide information on Ukrainian nationalist cells in academia before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. When war broke out and Ukraine was overrun, Shteppa collaborated with the Nazis by putting out propaganda against the Soviets. The motivations for his collaboration remain unclear, though self-preservation seems to have been at least part of his reasoning. We last left Shteppa at the end of the war, a man with a target on his head in Soviet-controlled territory because of his Nazi collaboration.

During the war, Shteppa's son had been conscripted into the Wehrmacht and at the war's end, was put into a Soviet camp where he would spend the next twenty years. In 1943, Shteppa

ran into an old cellmate of his, a renowned physicist named Fritz Houtermans, who convinced him to emigrate to West Germany and helped him get German travel papers. While in Germany, Shteppa ran a Russian language magazine for émigrés and in 1950 accepted a job teaching Russian language at the United States Army school in Oberammergau while serving on the council of the Institute for the Study of the USSR in Munich. In 1952, Shteppa left West Germany for the United States as a tourist by way of Genoa.[156] In the United States, Shteppa worked for the Research Program on the USSR before eventually ending up finding work as a research analyst for the American Committee for Liberation.[157] He spent the next few years working on a book entitled *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* and wrote a number of essays on totalitarianism before his death in New York City on November 19, 1958. The rest of this section will focus on the opinions and analyses expressed by Shteppa in his book.

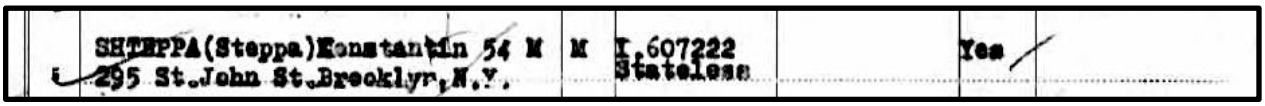

Figure 33. Konstantin Shteppa listed as "stateless" in a manifest of tourists entering the US aboard the Saturnia: September 27, 1952. Accessed via Ancestry.com

Right away, Shteppa makes clear that he believes in a totalitarian view of the Soviet system, positing that it subjects everything, including historical scholarship, to a standardized plan. He organizes his extensive book by the phases of Soviet historical development and bases these phases on the types of discussions that took place in the academy at each point in time. His chronology is as follows: (1) the October Revolution to the first purge of 1928, (2) 1928-1934 or the Pokrovsky period, (3) 1934-1941 or the period following the May 1934 decree on the teaching of history, and (4) the war and postwar period characterized by "great power centralism

[156] Alexander Dallin, foreword to *Russian Historians*.

[157] Ibid.

and universal statism."[158] This is significant because it demonstrates that such periodization was conceptualized not by outsiders, but by insiders who had seen the Soviet historical academic system and were intimately familiar with its development. Shteppa espouses a similar view to Mazour's, but has the added experience within the system to bolster his perspective. He goes as far as to argue that Soviet historiography has no value in and of itself and is simply a tool used to bolster political authority: "History was forced to take its place in that organized ideology, which, along with the apparatus of physical compulsion and terror – the Cheka, GPU, NKVD, MVD, and MGB – constitutes the main support of state authority."[159] Shteppa paints the Pokrovsky era as one in which ideological scores were settled and the apparatus of historical writing that had been built by Pokrovsky was subordinated to the state. Shteppa intersperses disparaging comments about Pokrovsky and views his legacy on the Soviet historical front as that of a rabid ideologue who facilitated the subordination of historians to the political ambitions of the state.[160] This view clashes with Enteen's portrayal of Pokrovsky as a traditional Marxist whose tragedy was his being forced to watch the historical apparatus that he built become a tool for Stalin in his final years. To Shteppa, Pokrovsky was the mastermind of this moral corruption, to Enteen, he was its victim. Shteppa also notes that Pokrovsky was an adherent to the theory of Norman conquest in Russia; that the eastern Slavs had been conquered by the Norman Vikings. This theory would become taboo in Soviet historiography through the 1930s as claims of Viking conquest were dismissed as fascist and German propaganda. Pokrovsky also espoused views favorable to the Tatars, the Mongol conquerors of Medieval Russia, claiming that they possessed

[158] Konstantin Shteppa, Introduction to *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

[159] Ibid.

[160] Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 99.

a more robust and developed material culture than that of the Slavs. Such views would have earned an historian a prison sentence in the 1930s and 1940s, but Shteppa argues that Pokrovsky was let off the hook because of his role in establishing the academic apparatus and because a formal Russo-centrism had not yet taken hold in the academy.[161]

In my periodization of Soviet historiographical trends, I chose to posit the publication of the *Short Course* in 1938 as a significant point of transition between the Pokrovsky era and the emergent National-Bolshevik line. Shteppa argues instead that the shift occurred earlier in the academy and in the Party schools. In 1934, courses like *the history of Russia* were renamed *the history of the peoples of the USSR,* followed by the rehabilitation of "tyrants" into "people's heroes." Here, "peoples" is not to be taken in a multicultural sense, but instead in a populist sense, as in the common "folk." Such trends were to continue well into the 1940s and ultimately outlived Stalin. Shteppa does not add much to the discussion of this period that differs starkly from any other accounts we have explored, but he does add an interesting wrinkle to the issue of historical journals. We had mentioned earlier that *Voprosy istorii* became the preeminent historical journal in 1945, but Shteppa adds that the journal was not only developed to be influential within the Soviet system, but was meant to have far reaching influence worldwide.[162] According to Shteppa, its editors were faced with a conundrum:

> In the definition of the concrete tasks that confronted historiography and its leading journal, a certain duality is apparent. On the one hand, the dictum that the "journal *Problems of History* must be a militant organ of Marxist-Leninist materialism" is apparent, for this was indispensable… On the other hand, much greater emphasis surrounds the assertion that the journal "will devote great attention to problems that have presented themselves to the historians of the Great Patriotic War. Among these problems

[161] Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 103.

[162] Ibid., 213.

> are the formation of the Slavic peoples and their struggle with German aggression and the history of Russian military arts."[163]

This is the same contradiction pointed out by scholars like Brandenberger, who argued that such incompatible ideological dualities were at the heart of National Bolshevism in the Stalin period. I would take Brandenberger and Shteppa's observation one step further by arguing that these inconsistencies, the fear associated with speaking out about them, and the fervor with which they were rhetorically adhered to by those seen as Stalinist exemplars created contradictions of thinking and practice that chipped away at the efficacy and appeal of Stalinist ideology to its adherents. Individuals either doubled down into the contradiction until it consumed them or began to lash out at it. One need only to look to experiences of such a high-ranking historian as Aleksandr Nekrich and his eventual disillusionment with the Soviet system to see an example of this playing out. Some historians, like A. I. Gukovsky had managed to contort their ideas so much that they argued that the October Revolution was not a proletarian revolution, but rather that it was a national-liberation of Russia from her "colonial enslavement by foreign capital" arguing harshly against I. I. Mints' more traditionalist view of the revolution and accusing him of deliberate subterfuge during the Sidorov-Mints feud.[164] According to Shteppa, this was the final outcome of Stalinist historical writing; that the very ideas that had founded the Soviet state became taboo as historians weaponized their increasingly radical theories in a sort of endless purity spiral.

When Shteppa died in 1958, he had yet to witness the rehabilitation of Stalinism in the Brezhnev years and had himself left a murky legacy of collaboration with two notorious states. The hostility to state power expressed in his final works suggests that he may have struggled

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[163] Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 213-214.

[164] Ibid., 221.

with his complicity in facilitating Soviet and Nazi terror. Ultimately, his thoughts remain unknown, but his legacy in Ukraine remains a disgraced one for his role in spying on nationalists. He was a man of many identities; German, Ukrainian, Russian, and Soviet, yet he could never find a home among any of these groups. He died in exile, a man of many moral ambiguities, who nevertheless left behind great insight into Soviet historiography.

CONCLUSION

The Stalin period saw radical transformations take place in Soviet society, which would have a profound effect on both the internal conditions for Soviet citizens and the Soviet state's relations with the external world. It was in this period that the state set out on a project to create a comprehensive national identity rooted in both Marxism-Leninism and a Russo-centric nationalism that had, to a large extent, eluded the Tsarist, Kerensky, and Lenin regimes in the century leading up to Stalin's rise to power. The task of forging that national identity fell to the state's historians and academics, operating within a strictly regulated academic system, who had a mandate to craft narratives that could be used to substantiate and legitimize Soviet power. This is not to say that state coercion was omnipotent in the Soviet Union; Stalin's state apparatus did exert significant pressure for conformity to the National Bolshevik party line, but in many ways, the ambitions and insecurities of the individuals who comprised the academic establishment played as important of a role in facilitating the conditions necessary for such ideological conformity.

In analyzing the theoretical aspects of nation-building and Marxist historiography, assessing the lives and works of historians within this system, and considering the perspectives of émigrés who left the system, I hope to have offered an interesting and new perspective to scholarship on the Stalin period and its impact on Soviet academic research. Soviet society was notable for its imposition of nationality on peoples that had either rejected national labels or had always existed at the peripheries of Russian civilization; this modernizing impulse to standardize and organize lies at the heart of the Soviet historian's narrative-constructing project. In many cases, the very people pushing such Russo-centric standardization were themselves,

paradoxically, not Russian. They were Jews, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and all other manner of ethnic minorities that were invested in the process of trying to construct new identities for themselves as Soviet citizens while simultaneously crafting a Soviet Russian identity. Some became disillusioned with this contradiction of self, while others stayed firmly committed to the communist project. I chose to highlight those who became disillusioned because their experiences often bridged the gap between the dominant liberal-democratic and communist paradigms of the twentieth century.

At risk of making sweeping generalizations, I believe that this subject is always of importance to those concerned with assessing the role that idea-generation and scholarly research play in propping up all manner of governments, from the supposedly liberal and democratic to the authoritarian and totalitarian. In the context of our liberal democracy, we tend to view members of the academy as researchers, educators, and thinkers committed to truth and isolated from the political and social consequences of their ideas. This view is flawed not because we fail to recognize the role that academia plays in the political space, but because we perilously forget that academics and intellectuals played a central role in facilitating egregious abuses of human rights and propping up all manner of ideological experiments that degraded the human condition for the peoples of the Soviet Union. The generation of ideas is not a neutral or harmless process; it is a veritable minefield of political, cultural, and social consequences that have as much potential to be destructive as they do to be constructive. It is only within an academy free of excessive external and internal constraints that those consequences can be properly considered and tested.

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