



# A Culture of Discontinuity?

Russian Cultural Debates in  
Historical Perspective

OLGA TABACHNIKOVA (ED.)

Peter Lang

# CULTURAL HISTORY AND LITERARY IMAGINATION

'Shifting back and forth across centuries, and covering a vast terrain of genres and forms, an expert ensemble of scholars in this rich collection looks incisively at the intricate dynamics of Russian cultural change. Such breadth of scope and multifaceted approach are most illuminating and should help the readers to navigate the complex universe of Russian cultural history.'

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'This collection addresses a central question in Russian history through multiple perspectives and a wealth of fascinating material. To borrow Vladimir Nabokov's imagery, it succeeds in folding the magic carpet of Russian civilization in such a way that even black holes and ruptures in its fabric become part of an intricate pattern.'

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Russian culture has often been referred to as a culture of discontinuity and abrupt rifts, and the country's past was frequently revised and rewritten, so much so that it is hardly possible to speak of Russian culture as a homogeneous, unified whole. Every turn of Russian history was accompanied by a great cultural upheaval and facilitated fierce cultural debates. The destiny of Russia in the context of its geopolitical position and its cultural role on both domestic and international fronts have been fundamental to these debates. At the same time, such discussions always went deeper, and invariably acquired an existential dimension, probing into the human condition, into the 'cursed questions of existence'.

This volume brings together diverse contributions from an international team of scholars, asking what has sustained Russian cultural development across the centuries and how Russian culture has evolved to this day. It treats the topic from a contemporary frame of reference, covering a broad range of Russian life, literature and arts, and sets the debates in historical perspective. In doing so, it links the particular with the general, exposing some unexpected connections and thus sheds new light on the Russian cultural trajectory.

Olga Tabachnikova is Reader in Russian and the founding Director of the Vladimir Vysotsky Centre for Russian Studies at the University of Central Lancashire (Preston, England). She has published widely on Russian cultural and literary history, with a special focus on Russian cultural continuity and history of ideas. She is the author of *Russian Irrationalism from Pushkin to Brodsky: Seven Essays in Literature and Thought* (2015), the editor of *Facets of Russian Irrationalism between Art and Life: Mystery inside Enigma* (2016) and *Anton Chekhov through the Eyes of Russian Thinkers: Vasilii Rozanov, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Lev Shestov* (2010), and co-editor of several scholarly volumes. Olga is also a poetry translator and an award-winning poet, with two books of poetry published in Russian.



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CULTURAL HISTORY AND LITERARY IMAGINATION

EDITED BY CHRISTIAN J. EMDEN & DAVID MIDGLEY

VOL. 34

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Lausanne - Berlin - Bruxelles - Chennai - New York - Oxford

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023912548

Cover image: Erik Boulatov «Russian XX century I» (1990), © Erik Boulatov / ADAGP/ UPRAVIS 2023.

Cover design by Peter Lang Group AG

ISSN 1660-6205

ISBN 978-1-78997-937-4 (print)

ISBN 978-1-78997-993-0 (ePDF)

ISBN 978-1-78997-994-7 (ePub)

DOI 10.3726/b17524

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Published by Peter Lang Ltd, Oxford, United Kingdom

[info@peterlang.com](mailto:info@peterlang.com) - [www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

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This publication has been peer reviewed.

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## A Note to Reader

This volume was written before 24 February 2022 and has not undergone any changes since. This is because a multifaceted evaluation of the questions of Russian cultural continuity presented herein should only increase in value in light of the tragic events that have unfolded since. We hope that the material presented in the book will help to elucidate many cultural underpinnings of the current geopolitical catastrophe.



## Acknowledgments

I hereby gratefully acknowledge the support for this project by the University of Central Lancashire Research Centre for Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MIDEX). I am also very grateful to all the contributors, translators and copyeditors of this volume for their hard work, patience and perseverance.



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OLGA TABACHNIKOVA

## Introduction: Continuity behind Rupture

В России нужно долго жить,  
А в ней всё больше умирают.  
Отечество не выбирают,  
Где вечно ворону кружить,  
Где после смерти воскресают  
И ткут связующую нить.

И оттого горит окно,  
И свет от Бога до порога,  
С того и дышится глубоко,  
Что здесь в предание одно  
Вплелись, кто умерли до срока,  
И ниткой стелется дорога  
Одна от Пушкина до Блока,  
И крутится веретено.

(2021)

In Russia, you need long life,  
But people die instead.  
You don't choose a homeland  
with a crow ever overhead,  
where after death you rise again  
and weave a binding thread.

That's why a window is lit,  
with a candle that always burns,  
and it beams all the way to God.  
Breathe deep, for the premature dead  
are woven into one myth.  
The same thread is the path  
stretching from Pushkin to Blok,  
and the spindle turns and turns.

(Translated by Peter Daniels)

## I Historical Background of Russian Literature

The distinctive character of Russian history is determined primarily by its geographical location between different poles of civilization and by the choice of its own ideological path, which is rightly recognized as ‘a constantly acting factor that determines the ways of its development, sometimes spontaneously and unconsciously even for culture, and sometimes openly and even emphatically.’<sup>1</sup> In the first centuries of its Christian history, which is covered in the ‘Tale of Bygone Years’ (about 1113) with the description of the so-called test of faith<sup>2</sup> and a great awareness of the geography of the lands of the Russian principalities, the country was in the zone of influence of the Byzantine civilization, which, according to Archpriest John Meyendorff, ‘always lacked the consistency and dynamism inherent in both Western scholasticism and the Western Renaissance.’<sup>3</sup> The main cultural achievement of this period, as is known, was the assimilation of the book tradition on the basis of Cyrillic writing, which resulted in the emergence of a culture of chronicling (see numerous works of Dmitry Likhachev and the school of his followers),<sup>4</sup> while a detached and, perhaps, quite a skeptical

- 1 Yuri Lotman, ‘Modern Times between the East and the West’, *Znamya*, Vol. 9 (1997).
- 2 ‘The Tale of Bygone Years’, in *Ipatiev Chronicle: Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles* (St. Petersburg, 1908), Vol. 2, col. 89–112.
- 3 John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Minsk: Luchi Sofii, 2007), p. 79.
- 4 For instance, D. A. Balovnev, ‘The Tale of “the Initial Spread of Christianity across Rus”. An Attempt at Critical Analysis’, in *The Church in the History of Russia* (Moscow, 2000), Vol. 4, pp. 5–46.

view of the borrowed heritage was already present at this stage of culture.<sup>5</sup>

After the gradual disintegration of Byzantium over many centuries in the confrontation with the Ottomans and the fall of Constantinople on 29 May 1453, which has been depicted almost minute by minute by historical scholarship,<sup>6</sup> Russia readily accepted the mantle of the Byzantine heritage, considering itself its spiritual successor, conceptually expressed by the well-known formula 'Moscow – the third Rome'. The main aesthetic principles of the Byzantine church tradition (long before the beginning of the Christianization of Rus in 988) were formulated by the fathers of the Eastern Church, first of all, St. Augustine, John of Damascus and the Greek psalmists;<sup>7</sup> for a long time its influence predetermined all the main directions of the future forms of Russian classical art – from the architecture of church buildings to literature as such, the beginning of which was laid by the spiritual associate of Yaroslav the Wise, the first Russian Metropolitan of Kievan Rus', Hilarion (second half of the eleventh century)<sup>8</sup> through his works, in particular 'the Sermon on Law and Grace' that exists in numerous copies. In the future, the ethnic traces of the Russian culture remained exclusively in the sphere of folklore, the influence of which on Russian culture became more active only at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century, most openly and programmatically visible in the culture of modernity, leaving a trace in the music of the early twentieth century under the name 'new folklore wave'.

- 5 G. V. Markelov, 'Humorous Postscripts in the Manuscripts of Pushkin House Archives', *Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature*, Vol. 41 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988), pp. 444–446; p. 446.
- 6 See Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); translated from English by L. B. Petrusheva (Moscow, 2008).
- 7 See John of Damascus, *An Exact Explanation of Orthodox Faith* (Moscow: Lodiya, 2002); Archbishop Filaret (Gumilevsky), *Historical Review of Psalmists and Chanting of Ancient Greece*, Reprinted edition (Sergiev Posad: Holy Trinity Sergius Monastery, 1995); P. A. Florensky, *Iconostasis* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1995).
- 8 Hilarion, 'Sermon on Law and Grace by Metropolitan Hilarion', ed. with commentaries by A. M. Moldovana, trans. Deacon Andrei Yurchenko, RAN Institute of Russian Literature, *Library of Ancient Rus Literature*, Vol. 1: *XI-XII Centuries* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), pp. 26–61.

Since the first centuries of its history, the country has experienced the sociocultural impact of Eastern civilizations and, over time, Western European cultures. This impact was not always unambiguous. It is generally believed that the so-called Tatar-Mongol period of the historical existence of the Russian people seriously and permanently slowed down its socio-economic and cultural development, although at one time Lev Gumilev proposed a different point of view, most fully expressed in his work 'Ancient Rus' and the Great Steppe'. In particular, Gumilev put forward a hypothesis about the formation of a military alliance between the Golden Horde and Russia, created by Aleksandr Nevsky and Batu. It should be noted that this version gained a lot of supporters, but most historians considered it untenable and subjected it to detailed and substantive criticism.<sup>9</sup>

However, abstracting from the discussions of historians, we can state that the obvious and terrible result of the Tatar-Mongol invasion was the death of a huge number of the population of Russia; according to various estimates, it decreased by 40–60 percent. Kiev, Vladimir, Suzdal, Ryazan, Tver, Chernigov and many other cities of Kievan Rus' were destroyed; according to archaeologists, out of the 74 cities of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, known by the results of excavations, 49 were completely destroyed by the Batu invasion, 14 of them never rose from the ashes and another 15 became ordinary villages. Many cities could not be reborn for a very long time. For example, archaeological excavations of Chernigov show that after the layer of the thirteenth century there is a layer of the seventeenth. For several decades of the sixteenth century, construction using stone in Russian cities practically stopped – that is, for the next 50 to 70 years, not a single stone building or church was built in Russia. The developed urban culture of ancient Russia suffered very significant damage. Complex crafts, such as the production of glass ornaments, cloisonné enamel, blackware, polychrome irrigation ceramics and so on disappeared. In total, only between 3 and 6 of the main 60 crafts were preserved.

The southern Russian lands lost almost all the settled population. And the surviving inhabitants went to the forest northeast, concentrating in

9 See, for instance, V. A. Kuchkin, *Rus' under the Yoke: What Was It Like?* (Moscow: Panorama, 1991).

the interfluvium of the Northern Volga and the Oka, located, moreover, far from the trade routes. Here the soil was poorer and the climate colder than in the completely devastated southern regions of Russia, and, therefore, the conditions for farming and cattle breeding were much less favorable. Analyzing that period, the historian A. Shestakov has summarized the opinion of many researchers that 'if there had been no Mongol yoke, our ancestors would not have been divided into Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>10</sup> Ancient Rus' by the time of the Tatar-Mongol invasion was divided into 18 large state entities, including a number of appanage principalities; correspondingly, their military forces were not united, which determined the outcome of the clash with the Horde. In fact, in just four years of the Tatar-Mongol campaigns against Rus' (from the end of 1237 to 1241), most of the Russian princes recognized the supremacy of the great Mongol Khan and his representative Batu, Khan of the Golden Horde (formed in 1243). The main reason for radical changes in the structure of government – the borders of the conquered principalities and their number – was that they were obliged to replenish the treasury of the Horde and received edicts for the reign from the Khan. The new situation forced people to settle in remote lands. Chronicles, handwritten documents, cartographic descriptions of the possessions and archaeological research allow us today to fully restore the historical picture of this tragic period.

The Tatar-Mongol invasion and more than two centuries of the Horde rule became a national and cultural disaster for the Russian lands, which is considered to be the main reason for their noticeable civilizational lag behind European countries. When Europe entered the era of the initial accumulation of capital and the formation of the foundations of a post-industrial society, Russia had to recover, that is, to repeat part of the historical path that it had already made before Batu.

The first attempts to overcome this lagging behind occurred in the early years of the reign of a very ambiguous historical figure Ivan IV the Terrible (1530–1584),<sup>11</sup> who overtly turned to the West, opened a transit

10 See Andrei Shestakov, *The Mongol Invasion of Russia and Europe* (Moscow: Veche Vsemirnaia Istoriia, 2017).

11 See E. M. Eliyanov, *Ivan the Terrible – Creator or Destroyer?: Research into the Subjectivity of Interpretations Problem in History* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2004).

route to profitable (duty-free) markets for Europeans, carefully studied European forms of statehood, entered into correspondence with European royal courts and personally communicated with their diplomatic missions, and even, according to researchers, attempted to woo the English Queen Elizabeth I (in 1567)<sup>12</sup> – the only woman with whom he corresponded until his death (the letters have been preserved). His activities also aroused no less attention in the West, causing wariness.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, in his era, Russia had a well-developed industry and crafts that were on par with Europe's (e.g., metalworking, the production of furniture, tableware, linseed oil, etc.); some of the products were even exported.<sup>14</sup> With regard to armaments, Russia was in the lead.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the regular army was formed and equipped with small arms produced in Russia<sup>16</sup> – it numbered about 12,000 people (at the end of the sixteenth century the *Streltsy* army numbered up to 25,000 people). However, all these achievements were later destroyed during the Times of Trouble.

The first Zemsky Sobor convened by Ivan the Terrible (1549) marked the beginning of a class-representative monarchy in Russia; a new collection of laws was compiled – the *Sudebnik* of 1550, a system of so-called *prikaz* (specialized central departments – the prototype of future ministries) was created; the governorate (*zemstvo*) reform was completed, which led to the emergence of deputies from nobility and *zemstvo* elders from wealthy peasants, in *volost* and *uyezd*. In 1553, by the tsar's order, a printing yard was founded, the first Russian paper factory was built,<sup>17</sup> and

12 See Yu. V. Tolstoy, *The First 40 Years of Relations between Russia and England, 1553–1593* (St. Petersburg: Tranzschel, 1875) and *English Travellers in the Muscovite State in the XVI Century* (Ryazan: Aleksandria, 2007).

13 See L. Yu. Taimasova, *A Potion for a King: English Espionage in Russia in the XVI Century* (Moscow: Veche, 2010).

14 N. Rozhkov, *Historical-Comparative Treatment of Russian History (Basics of Social Dynamics)* (Leningrad, 1928), Vol. 4, pp. 24–29.

15 R. Dupuy and T. Dupuy, with commentaries by N. Volkovsky and D. Volkovsky, 'All Wars in World History', in *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History* (St. Petersburg, 2004), Vol. 3, pp. 142–143.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 136.

17 M. Pokrovsky, with N. Nikolsky and V. Storozhev, *Russian History since Ancient Times* (Moscow, 1911), Vol. 3, p. 117.



many churches were erected – in five years (by 1561) the Cathedral of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos (St. Basil's Cathedral) was built. Ivan the Terrible's personality as an intellectual tsar is associated with the myth of the legendary Liberiya, the library of Sofia Palaiologos<sup>18</sup> that he inherited, and there is also a register of rare publications that actually belonged to him (154 units), compiled by N. Zarubin in the last century.<sup>19</sup> A very revealing analogy to the bibliophilism of Ivan the Terrible is the interest in the enlightenment of Peter I by whose order the first state library was created and opened in 1714 with free access for all.

The initially progressive nature of the reign of Ivan the Terrible and the modernization process that began on his initiative were interrupted by two circumstances: the unsuccessful Livonian War (1558–1583), which cost the country many lives and resources, but ended in the status quo ante bellum, as well as the collapse into the bloody *Oprichnina* (the state policy of mass repressions by the first political police in Russia, special administrative elite). Various opinions have been expressed regarding the historical meaning of the latter. For example, the historian D. N. Alshits believed that the *Oprichnina*, as a 'precisely calculated and completely successful political action', had a pragmatic purpose and was quite deliberately introduced by the tsar in order to consolidate autocracy.<sup>20</sup> But, on the other hand, its costs and dire consequences were quite obvious and played a role in the sociopolitical crisis that Russia plunged into at the beginning of the seventeenth century, known as the Time of Troubles (1598–1613). In addition to the three-year heptarchy (which recognized the Polish king Vladislav as the Russian tsar and led to the power of the False Dmitry),

18 A. I. Sobolevsky, 'The Library and Archives of Ivan the Terrible,' *Knigovedenie*, No. 4 (1894), pp. 17–20. Public commission session on inquiry of the library of Ivan the Terrible, April 1963; Stenograph. Typewriting. Archives from USSR AS, Holding 693, List 3, No. 85.

19 N. I. Zarubin, *The Library of Ivan the Terrible: Renovations and Bibliographic Description* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982).

20 Daniil N. Alshits, *The Beginning of Absolutism in Russia* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988), p. 111. See also Daniil Al', *Ivan the Terrible: Known and Unknown Facts* (St. Petersburg: Neva, 2005), p. 155.

the tragic situation was aggravated by the great famine of 1601–1603<sup>21</sup> under the rule of Boris Godunov, which pushed the starving not only to riots but also to the rapid resettlement to the southern and eastern lands of the country and even to Siberia. The consequences of this time in the Russian mentality have never been completely outlived: in particular, the famous Russian historian E. F. Shmurlo also saw the sad consequences of the *Oprichnina* in the steady practice of bribery, denunciations and lobbying established at the state level.<sup>22</sup>

From the second half of the seventeenth century, the ruling elite again tried to embark on the path of transforming the country in the European spirit, trying, first of all, to adopt from the West (and especially from Holland, the most advanced in this regard) new forms of organizing economic life, including military-technical support for the defense of the state. This explains the appearance of the first manufactories (however, by their nature very far from European ones), the establishment of the so-called regiments of the foreign system, the transition to a policy of mercantilism and the like.

The trend toward the West began with a change in educational guidelines. Traditionally, Russia followed the Byzantine models of the Constantinople Pandidakterion (a higher school founded in the ninth century on the basis of an older Hellenic tradition), in which the initial training was given by psalm teachers at the temple. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the organization of Orthodox education in the eastern lands of Europe became more active in the polemical confrontation with the non-Orthodox. The first Orthodox university, the Ostrog Slavonic Greek and Latin Academy, was founded in 1576;<sup>23</sup> this was followed by the Lvov Brotherhood School (1585), arising at the Assumption Cathedral, which

- 21 S. O. Kozlovsky, 'The Great Famine and Times of Trouble: On the Issue of the Influence of Climate and Nature Factors on the Sociopolitical Crisis in Russia in Second Half of the Sixteenth – First Half of the Seventeenth Centuries,' *Proceedings of the History Department of St Petersburg University*, Vol. 10 (2012).
- 22 E. F. Shmurlo, *Russian History: Controversial and Unexplained Issues of Russian History*, Vol. 4, Second edition (St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2000).
- 23 *Ostrog Academy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Encyclopedia* (Ostrog: National University of Ostrog Academy, 2011).

finally began its activities and gave rise to a number of similar brotherhoods in other places; the Kiev-Mohyla Academy (1632), which commenced its activities; and later the Slavonic-Greco-Latin Academy in Moscow (1687), which was established on the initiative of the poet Simeon of Polotsk.

This period coincides with an important event that helps to understand Russian culture, and the consequences of this event up to the twentieth century were largely determined in a hidden form by internal contradictions among Russian writers and artists. This is about the activities of Patriarch Nikon and his reforms of 1653–1654 that were aimed at unifying the Russian church tradition with the Greek one (making the sign of the cross with three fingers, checking service books against Greek publications – the so-called *knizhnaya sprava* [amendments of church books], checking icons against the Greek canon, etc.) and the subsequent schism in Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>24</sup> Again persecution pushed a huge number of dissenters (called Old Orthodox/Old Believers) to relocate. This page was stained with a lot of blood: it was effectively a civil war on religious grounds, especially tragic in its consequences was the resistance of cultural strongholds – monasteries. First of all, in 1674, the Solovetsky Monastery, which withstood a six-year siege, was brutally suppressed by the *Streletsy* and ended with executions. This was also associated with the uprising of the Old Believers in Moscow in 1681 with the pogrom in the Kremlin churches and subsequent executions; followed by the *Streletsy* riot of 1682 and the execution by burning on Good Friday in 1682. Four people were named in history as Pustozersky sufferers together with the famous Protopope Avvakum (see ‘The Life of Protopope Avvakum’),<sup>25</sup> and the list of these historical atrocities can be continued. Knowing about them is indispensable, in particular, for understanding some works of Russian literature (the

24 Nikon (Patriarch), *The Tragedy of Russian Schism: Collected Essays* (Moscow: Dar, 2006); V. S. Rummyantseva, *Patriarch Nikon and Spiritual Culture in Seventeenth Century Russia: From the Manuscript Legacy of Patriarch Nikon’s ‘Commandments of Christian Life’ (‘Monumental Commandments’)* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Russian History, 2010).

25 ‘Materials from the Archives of Pustozorsky Martyrs’, in *Significant Sites of Old Believers’ Literature* (St. Petersburg, 1998).

characters of F. Dostoevsky, P. Melnik-Pechersky, N. Leskov, V. Nabokov and a number of others), which otherwise can remain incomprehensible.

Against the background of such an acute situation, the dispute with Catholicism paradoxically contributed to attracting more of attention to its culture, developed according to non-Orthodox principles, which perhaps explains the process of secularization of public consciousness in Russia. New (private) schools, in which teaching was focused on Western European education and cultural values, were organized. Works of European scientists were translated and published (e.g., Copernicus). Also, in Russian painting, for example, such a genre as *parsuna*, an intermediate form of portrait painting between icon painting and a realistic portrait not previously recognized by the church, was approved.<sup>26</sup> Against the background of the schism in 1672, the first court theatre appeared – showing evidence of the complete misunderstanding and alienation of the aristocratic elite from the traditional culture of the popular environment. In everyday life, European customs and living conditions were now more and more noticeable. The political system of Russia itself had evolved toward the establishment of an absolute monarchy, following the example of the countries of Europe.

However, any attempt to focus on internal transformations was thwarted by the constant military threats from outside and the difficult geopolitical situation of the country. These circumstances hindered the process of necessary transformations, undoubtedly affecting the nature of modern culture and the themes of art. So, in the sixteenth century, Muscovy fought against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Livonian Order and Sweden for a total of 43 years, and, without a single year of interruption, the struggle with the Tatars on their southern and eastern borders continued. The seventeenth century was even more ridden with military conflicts, which continued for 48 years; in fact, every second year the country lived in a state of war or even several wars, which led to large human losses, complicated daily life and undermined the economy and treasury. In the centuries that followed, this trend continued and even intensified. Russia

26 N. I. Komashko, 'The Artist Bogdan Saltanov in the Art Life of Moscow in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century', *Ancient Rus*, Vol. 2, No. 12 (2003), pp. 44–54.

in the eighteenth century fought for almost 60 years, and in the nineteenth century, for 67 years.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the permanent need to ensure its security (and eventually to conduct external expansion, including the return of the once-lost Russian lands) becomes the dominant and, in a certain sense, the driving force of state development, defining the specifics of the political evolution of the country toward increased internal centralization, the excessive influence of state power on the life of society.

These circumstances led to such a feature of the civilizational path of Russia as its mobilizational (catching up) type of development – in contrast to the evolutionary-type characteristic of Western civilization (the theory of N. Morozov).<sup>28</sup> This type is characterized by the acceleration of evolutionary processes due to the deliberate intervention of the state (mainly due to external circumstances) in the economic and social development of society. In the context of Russian history, the state has repeatedly used its monopoly on coercive violence and non-economic coercion to gradually destroy the traditional society that existed for centuries.

The first of the overt and significant examples of such a role of state power should be considered the necessary and quite overdue modernization of Russia during the reign of Peter the Great. This took place against the background of the 20 years of the Northern War for the Baltic against the Swedish Kingdom by the European coalition with the participation of Russia, ending in 1721 with the victory and the return of the lands lost a hundred years before, and the transformation of the Russian Kingdom into the Russian Empire.<sup>29</sup> Thus, modernization was carried out in extreme conditions that required the exertion of all national resources.

However, a consequence of Peter's transformative activity, carried out as is well known by very radical methods, was the deep cultural split, previously

27 V. A. Volkov, V. E. Voronin and V. V. Gorsky, *Military History of Russia from Ancient Times up to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Moscow: Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, 2012); *War, Conflicts, Campaigns and Combat Actions of the Russian Army, 860–1914: A Handbook*, 2 vols (Moscow: Runivers, 2018).

28 N. M. Morozov, 'The Mobilization Development of Russian Civilization', *Tomsk State University Journal of History*, No. 2 (2011), pp. 175–184.

29 See *History of the Great Northern War 1700–1721*, ed. I. I. Rostunov (Moscow: Nauka, 1987).

outlined and now finally realized, of the previously unified Russian society, as evidenced by the presence of two capitals: patriarchal Moscow and the 'construction of the century', European-oriented St. Petersburg. Thus, the tsar, in accordance with the European calendar tradition, issued a decree in 1699 to introduce a new chronology 'from the Birth of Christ', and not 'from the creation of the world'. The difference between these events in the church tradition was calculated as 5,508 years, and the year henceforth began with 1 January, instead of 1 September.

Perfectly reflecting the reformist spirit of the era, the well-known 'Peter's stories', printed and handwritten, were most typical and popular – 'The Story of Aleksandr the Russian Nobleman', 'The Story of the Russian Sailor Vasily' and 'The Story of the Russian Merchant John'. 'The first two of them reflect elements of the life and customs of the Russian nobility at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the third – that of the merchants.'<sup>30</sup> Reading of that era, according to the research of V. Kuzmina, was rather succinct: it consisted of the many times rewritten lives of saints (e.g., the life of Alexei, the man of God, the life of Peter and Fevronia of Murom), Old Russian military stories (the story of the Mamaev massacre, the Story of the Kazan Kingdom) and stories of didactic character (the story of Akir the Wise, about Basarga, about Barlaam and Joasaph), from translated texts – mainly chivalrous stories (about Brunzvik, Peter of the Golden Keys, Vasily Goldilocks, Bove Korolevich).<sup>31</sup>

The so-called cultural landscape of the eighteenth century was ably reproduced by the active representative of the literary environment of the post-revolutionary emigration P. Muratov<sup>32</sup> in the historical novel *Igeria* (1922), where the love story, resurrected in the memories of an artist, not understanding the background of the events, develops against the

30 V. D. Kuzmina, 'Tales of Petrine Times', in *History of Russian Literature*, Vol. 3: *Literature of the 18th Century* (Moscow: Academy of Sciences USSR, 1941–1956), ch. 1, pp. 119.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

32 I. G. Ivanova, 'Muratov P. P. and His Contribution to Development of Ideas about cultural Landscape', *Heritage and Modern Times*, Vol. 1 (1998).

background of a real political intrigue involving the Swedish King Gustav III and the Rosicrucians.<sup>33</sup>

Yuri Lotman conceptually commented on this turn to the West: ‘The attitude to the Western world was one of the main issues of Russian culture throughout the post-Petrine era. We can say that the alien civilization acts as a kind of mirror and reference point for Russian culture, and the main meaning of interest in the “alien” in Russia is traditionally a method of self-cognition.’<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, European education and culture, in reality, became the property of only a narrow stratum of privileged classes, primarily the nobility, while the peasantry, the middle urban strata and the merchants for the most part remained adherents of Old Russian cultural values and moral norms, and this split only deepened over time, putting forward its ideologists. So, in the nineteenth century, it was embodied in a powerful confrontation between Slavophiles<sup>35</sup> and diverse Westerners (among them were adherents of religious, liberal and socialist ideas); the traces of their struggle are clearly visible in the works of all the literary masters of this century. However, according to Lotman, ‘The “East” and “West” in the cultural geography of Russia invariably appear as saturated symbols, based on geographical reality, but in fact imperatively dominating it.’<sup>36</sup>

The complex and contradictory historical path of Russia could not but affect the development of its culture. The Russian thinker and commentator Vadim Kozhinov noted: ‘In the movement through socio-cultural catastrophes, the decisive denial of the previous stages of its development is the peculiarity of the historical path of Russia and its culture.’<sup>37</sup> A. S.

33 P. P. Muratov, *Egeria: A Novel; and Short Stories from Various Books* (Moscow: Terra, 1997).

34 Lotman, ‘Modern Times between East and West’.

35 V. A. Kupriyanov, ‘Russia and Europe in Early and Late Slavophilism’ (A. S. Khomyakov and V. I. Lamansky), *Solovyov Research*, No. 2 (2018), pp. 21–33; A. Valitsky, ‘Encircled by Conservative Utopia: Structure and Metamorphoses of Russian Slavophilism’, *New Literary Review* (2019); S. O. Shidlovsky ‘From Projects by I.S. Aksakov on Socio-cultural Development of the North-West Region of the Russian Empire’, *Slavic Studies* No. 5 (2013), pp. 78–85.

36 Lotman, ‘Modern Times between East and West’.

37 V. Kozhinov, *Sins and Sacredness of Russian History* (Moscow: Exmo: Yauza, 2010).

Akhiezer, the author of the concept of sociocultural evolution, has fully justified the idea that a characteristic feature of the historical development of Russia is a constant split of culture, directly affecting social relations.<sup>38</sup> The era of Peter the Great once again confirmed the obvious significance of systematic and almost unpredictable situations, a kind of iconic ‘rift’ in the development of Russian history and culture, which, together with the denial of previous experience, can cause a dramatic turn of the country’s path – such as the time of the baptism of Russia, the Mongol period, the policy of individual rulers, 1917 and 1991. Such splits or, more precisely, breaks in culture occurred, as a rule, in those periods of history when natural disasters, the political situation or the ‘innovations’ that came from outside led to a radical rejection of the established foundations of being and consciousness.

How such cataclysms affected the fate of culture, destroying it or, on the contrary, stimulating the search for new forms and meanings, and whether this is good or bad, is in fact one of the most difficult questions, to which two opposite answers are possible and both will represent someone’s subjective position. This is a question to which Lev Gumilev tried to give a scientifically based answer with his theory of the ‘*passionarnost*’ (passionarity) of ethnogenesis,<sup>39</sup> which at one time caused a violent polemic criticism in the Soviet scientific community, the rejection by foreign experts on Russian history<sup>40</sup> and which is still ambiguously perceived. However, the rational grain of this theory germinates: it is associated with continuity, which can be interpreted as the ‘excessive’ previous experience that survived the destruction of the old, and remained intact, or, as Lotman aphoristically described it, ‘what defines itself as “having never existed until today” very often turns out to be as “having always existed” – a constantly active model.’<sup>41</sup>

Thus, after the October Revolution, one way of life was replaced not just by another, but by a radically different system. The new way of life

38 A. S. Akhiezer, *Russia: Criticism of Historical Experience (Sociocultural Dynamics of Russia)*, Vol. 1: *From Past to Future* (Novosibirsk: Sibirsky Chronograph, 1998).

39 L. N. Gumilev, *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of Earth* (St. Petersburg: Kristall, 2001).

40 L. Graham, *Natural Science, Philosophy, and the Sciences of Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (translated) (Moscow: Publishing House of Political Literature, 1991).

41 Lotman, ‘Modern Times between East and West’.



carried the idea of uniting people on the basis of common goals and meanings. At the same time, the old things (including culture) were destroyed very decisively, often crudely and cruelly. Entire scientific fields of a humanitarian nature were curtailed.<sup>42</sup> The pre-revolutionary past (the noble and bourgeois cultures) was declared alien to the people, and historians were required to justify its 'harmfulness' – its hopeless isolation from the interests of the working people. A major role in the approval of this approach was played by the position of Lenin's colleague, the historian M. Pokrovsky, the author of a new concept of historical science, according to which the function of history should be seen in the 'correct change of human society'. It is significant that almost immediately after his death in 1932, the 'red academician' was accused of being mistaken, of having scientific beliefs that did not correspond to genuine Marxism, and, in addition to his followers, even his opponents were attributed to his 'school' and then repressed.<sup>43</sup> At the ideological level, the historical and cultural past was filtered in terms of its usefulness as a cementing element in the construction of a new building – according to the famous aphorism of the same M. Pokrovsky: 'history is politics, capsized into the past'.

Along with the formation of a new culture, the country lost many outstanding philosophers, writers, artists, musicians and actors. This historical precedent of the twentieth century gave a rich variety of directions to Russian émigré culture, which continued to exist in its own way for several generations. They were the creators of the phenomenon of Russian culture in emigration, which had existed in a different sociocultural environment for several generations in an original and fruitful way. At the same time, the so-called internal emigration remained in the USSR and held an invisible defense of the classical heritage (the Acmeists; the first landmark in a series of subsequent dystopias – the novel *We* by E. Zamyatin; *The White Guard* by M. Bulgakov, historically true and in some ways coinciding with

42 I. P. Medvedev, *Byzantine Studies of Saint-Petersburg: Chapters of History* (St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2006).

43 A. N. Artizov, 'M.N. Pokrovsky: Career Finale – Success or Defeat?', *Russian History*, Nos 1 and 2 (1998), pp. 77–96 and pp. 124–143; A. N. Artizov, 'The Fate of the Historians of the School of M. N. Pokrovsky (Mid-1930s)', *Questions of History*, No. 7 (1994), pp. 34–48.

Bunin's *Cursed Days*; and the body of repressed literature, still far from being fully restored).

All this indicates that the fundamental condition for preserving the historical integrity of culture was the allotropy factor, which is a situation of coexistence in a single contour of different, sometimes even contrasting, forms. In each new time frame, along with various innovations, there remain persistent (obvious or latent) compositional factors: awareness of these requires the localized remainder of the Other/Different. The special cultural situation in the post-colonial and post-Soviet world today allows us to constitute this important, though unidentified, component of the historical movement in all the significance of its general historical meaning (although, possibly, such incidents have always taken place). The conversion of allotropic forms is carried out under the influence of the deformation of the usual context, due to its polyfunctional specificity, and plays a primary role in the regeneration of cultural tradition. With regards to the culturological aspect, any of the conditionally homogeneous cultures – or, taking up P. Sorokin's expression, 'sociocultural bodies' – in the context of their development inevitably have faced, face or will face in the future, a situation where this homogeneity ceases to be obvious.<sup>44</sup>

Destruction in the name of creating a new society made a gaping hole in the culture, but at the same time, the Soviet government began to intensively fill it with an alternative system of values, its own moral imperatives and an entirely original art, united by the ambiguous marker 'Social Realism', which absorbed and melted down, in essence, the most heterogeneous forms. The so-called proletarian, and then the Soviet culture was created, and millions of people protected by the Iron Curtain from the rest of the world – and most effectively, young people – were introduced to it in a new, well-thought-out educational and repressive format. The concept of 'Nation' (national character, national ethos), brought to outright vulgarism, was cultivated (the author of this paradigm, I.-G. Herder, once put a completely different meaning into it). Popular songs, poems, revolutionary prints, posters (to which in the post-revolutionary years such

44 See O. Chervinska, 'The Scientific Term "Allotropy" in Modern Literary Use', *Mirgorod* (Lausanne, Siedlce), Vol. 2, No. 8 (2016), pp. 90–99.

giants as Mayakovsky also got involved), films and festive parades formed a pantheon of selfless heroes of a new type – both real contemporaries (Chapaev, Shchors, Kotovsky, etc.) and fictional ones (Pavka Korchagin of N. Ostrovsky, children's characters of A. Gaidar, A. Barto and S. Marshak). In the early years, there was even sharp satire (the famous 'Bathhouse' and 'Bedbug' by V. Mayakovsky), but in the 1930s, it was already concerned exclusively with remnants of the past ('The Twelve Chairs' and 'The Golden Calf' by the partnership of I. Ilf and E. Petrov) or enemies. At the same time, according to the remark of the modern theologian A. Osipov, the official guidelines in the field of culture could be reduced to one denominator: namely to make a person better, more humane and kinder, which echoed with and was, in fact, borrowed from the commandments of early Christianity.

The spirit of the Soviet era, at once ascetic and triumphant, was embodied visibly in the architecture of Soviet Constructivism, in the music of I. Dunaevsky and, almost painfully, in D. Shostakovich. A special theme is the breakthrough in cinema (expressive film language from Eisenstein, A. Dovzhenko, Vs. Pudovkin, Dz. Vertov). M. Sholokhov writes *And Quiet Flows the Don*, M. Bulgakov – *The Master and Margarita*, A. Platonov – *Chevangur* and A. Akhmatova – *Poem without a Hero*. As we can see, even in the era of Socialist Realism, there is a diversity of literary techniques in different genres.

The rehabilitation of the idea of continuity began with the revival of the cult of Pushkin – in 1937, the country mourned the centenary of the poet's death, the blame for which was laid on tsarism. Thus, the poet's patriotism changed its inner meaning and was interpreted as belonging to the people and defending national interests, and thus turned into an ideological weapon. Pushkin's love for Russia no longer had the right to be Lermontov's 'strange love', as it was for the emigrants. And, of course, in the Great Patriotic War, the newly formed understanding of patriotism played an extremely important, key role. In the Soviet country, this feeling was brought up according to an authoritarian ideological scheme on the example of Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*, the heroic and cheerful paintings of A. Deineka, M. Grekov, I. Grabar, A. Laktionov and many others; and of such films as *Aleksandr Nevsky*, *Minin and Pozharsky*, *Kutuzov*,

*Suvorov, Nakhimov and Admiral Ushakov*. The art of the word remained the most vulnerable.

The classical heritage of Russian culture was again in demand and organically incorporated into the cultural policy of the Soviet state, whose official ideological attitudes became very close to or even repeated – of course, in the style of modern terms and concepts – many components of the Russian cultural code and values (patriotism, statehood, respect for historical traditions, loyalty to traditional family values, etc.).

After the death of Stalin, interest in classics acquired a new political meaning, and therefore publishing activity in this regard, although with great caution, was also intensified in relation to writers ‘forgotten’ by the Soviet government (e.g., Blok, Yesenin, Dostoevsky). Theatrical life revived, although great playwrights of the standard of Chekhov did not appear. Russian classics began to be actively adapted (*The Idiot*, *The Lady with the Dog*, *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, etc.).

Thus, a restoration of historical continuity in the development of Russian culture was gradually carried out, and conversation about its value orientations, moral traditions and universal meanings began again. And, once again, opinions radically diverged: in defiance of the apologists of conservative Socialist Realism, the young generation of the ‘nineteen sixties’ (*shestidesiatniki*) came out, offering a completely new poetry (Bella Akhmadulina, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Andrei Voznesensky); a new prose appeared – ‘urban’ (Yu. Kuznetsov, Yu. Trifonov, V. Makanin) and ‘rural’ (V. Belov, V. Shukshin, V. Rasputin) – while cheerful short-story writers matured (F. Iskander). Some went abroad, successfully joining the ranks of the Russian emigration, and giving it a new coloring, or preserving their personal space like Joseph Brodsky did, not joining any groups. It was at this time that Venedikt Yerofeev wrote his brilliant postmodern text *Moscow-Petushki* (an inverted remake of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* by Radishchev), a sign of a radical twist and reincarnation of the entire style of the Soviet era, which ended with the collapse of the USSR only 20 years later.

Another break in Russian culture occurred at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with the country’s transition to the Western model of social development. The market, private property, predatory

privatization, the emergence of a greedy oligarchy, unprecedented corruption, spiritual degradation, colossal social stratification, impoverishment of the majority of the population against a background of democratic slogans and ideological pluralism – for Russia all this was, in essence, a ‘well forgotten past’. Under these conditions, the commercialization of culture took place, when the measure of creative achievements was primarily the commercial success of the created work or, as they began to say, of the ‘cultural product’, as well as the orientation toward the mass consumer and the fascination with Western – or rather, American – Hollywood ‘aesthetic’ standards. This period is not yet complete, although forecasts can be made. However, such a state of culture has already been analyzed in other historical material by José Ortega y Gasset back in 1930 in the treatise *Revolt of the Masses*, which has not lost its relevance.

Periods of Russian cultural break were expressed in a radical rejection of the cultural canons and achievements of the previous stage, through tough confrontation with opposite trends (their own traditions and other people’s experience). D. Granin, describing in an interview in 1994 the state of culture as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of liberal reforms, aphoristically defined the situation as barbarism turned against itself: ‘The chain of time has been broken, and culture has turned out to be defenseless. A new utterance is expected from it, but the new word does not appear in the cemetery, it is carried in the womb of the departing one [...] History does not tolerate breaks.’<sup>45</sup> Neither does culture.

The complex Russian historical experience shows that all the previous cultural breaks, which led to almost catastrophic spiritual losses and mental deformations, and the subsequent difficult and sometimes painful experiences, ended with a subsequent submersion in their own historical landscape. Following the misunderstood and unconditionally denied achievements of the previous era, after a certain time at a new turn in history, when rejected values are understood in a new way, they can turn out to be claimed back. Thus, V. Rasputin, an outstanding representative of ‘rural prose’, a connoisseur of the Russian boondocks, who was suffering from the virtually agonizing state of the country as a result of the hard times

45 Cited in Kozhinov, *Sins and Sacredness of Russian History*, p. 340.

of the 1990s, nevertheless did not have doubts about the future: 'I believe in recovery. Such spiritual resources, such cultural wealth, such national power, as we have, cannot be buried.' So far, Russian society continues to stand at a crossroads – reformatting of (already digital) public consciousness is a reality. In fact, the question arose of changing the civilizational vector of development of the Russian orthodox ethnos, but the path to the optimal form of social life will always remain a topical issue on the agenda.

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