

CHAPTER ONE

Russian Historiography after the Fall

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These essays are being written and published at a significant moment in Russia's long and difficult history: almost twenty years after the end of the Soviet Union, at the end of the successive presidential terms of the man who has sometimes been called "Tsar Putin." This not very clever moniker nevertheless forms part of the thematic of this period: Russia's attempted recovery of its connection to the imperial past. Another aspect of this historical moment is the Russian leadership's aspiration to recover some portion of the geopolitical (if not ideological) power and influence achieved by the Soviet Union, as we see in the adventure involving Russia and Georgia now (autumn, 2008) unfolding in the Caucasus.

A discussion of the plausibility of the American policy of pushing NATO right up to the Russian border would take us too far afield, but it seems clear that Russia has probably suffered the worst of the inevitable pangs stemming from loss of empire, not to speak of the difficult transition between the decadence of Communism and its replacement by an authoritarian and rather predatory capitalism.¹ Inequality has increased dramatically, but economic productivity is beginning to do the same. Much, but not all, of the old elite managed to hang on to some power during the transition to the new system through a kind of Russian-style insider trading. Remarkably enough, the extremely difficult, indeed chaotic transition was accomplished with an absolute minimum of bloodshed, for which the world will remain grateful to Mikhail Gorbachev far into the future.² But, as the late Lieutenant General William Odom (The Hudson Institute and Yale University) points out in the concluding chapter of this volume, Russia today remains – despite the defeat of Communism – very much under the spell of its own deep past.³

The end of the cold war and the difficulties that Russia has faced in its post-Soviet incarnation have had a powerful impact on how the course of Russian history is coming to be understood. What is the current status of history writing about Russia, inside and outside the country, and what will it look like going forward? On the one hand, the old and complex sense of Russia's differences from "the West" is likely to remain, if somewhat softened with respect to how central to Russia's identity these differences are judged to be by outsiders. Many insiders will continue to speak of

Russia's special kind of democracy and non-Western identity. But commentators operating in today's global world – politicians, journalists, and academics – are even more likely to treat Russia's differences as failures (as they often have before), as well as to make Russia and Russian history a slightly more provincial and unedifying part of humanity's story, now that the mega-states of the twentieth century are history.

The global world into which the new Russia is now moving is quite different from what it was like during the cold war.⁴ Russia's limited economic revival takes place between two economic powerhouses: the European Union and China. Russia, still relatively poor and now bereft of empire, is surely far less of a threat to the neighbors than it was in Soviet times. The Soviet experience will never lose its significance, but for a time now it is likely to be seen more as a gigantic cautionary tale than as a danger to the world. It will be a long time before the possibility of massive violence in the service of *class* (as opposed to religious, confessional or national) conflict re-emerges as a possible instrument of policy in a major state.

The history of the failure of "the Soviet experiment" is surely one of the major themes of the history of the past century, along with the rise and fall of German National Socialism and the emergence – for how long one cannot say – of the global hegemony of the United States.⁵ The demise of the Soviet Union diminishes our sense of the possible forms of modernity that can exist in the world today, in a way that is generally welcome. Hypertrophic statism is for now at least not viable in our global world; if anything, the reverse is true. Weak and failed states are almost certainly a greater danger to the world, and Russia in the 1990s changed almost overnight from an apparently extremely strong state into a weak one, a possibility foreseen long ago by George Kennan.⁶ But Russia is now engaged in a protracted effort to recover as much as possible of its former authoritarian centralization, only this time around taking account of the market and economic globalization. Does Vladimir Putin dream of donning the mantle of Peter the Great? Whatever he and his successors may accomplish, the change from Soviet to post-Soviet will remain central. Nevertheless, much of Russia's burdensome past still looms large; democracy is still far away and corruption and criminal behavior are apparent to any serious observer.

To take up the stated purpose of this book, the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union have made and are continuing to make a very significant difference in the writing of Russian history. This is true in the obvious ways. Imperial Russian history will not in the future be read to anything like the same degree as a run-up to the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union.⁷ There is now an "after" as well as a "before." The Soviet period has less of the quality of the culmination of Russian history and slightly more of the quality of an interruption to it. Although neither description is really apposite, both suggest something about the paradigm shift brought by the end of "the Soviet experiment." The approximately seventy-five-year period of the Soviet Union – if one counts from the actual establishment of the USSR the period is a half a dozen years shorter – may now be cautiously compared with other periods in Russia's history that began with the exhaustion and repudiation of an old world and the creation of new institutions and culture, continuing through a period of expansion, followed by a downturn into decadence and collapse until the cycle recommences. One must, of course, not overstate these similarities.⁸ But in this connection we might think of the time between the end of the Rurikovich dynasty

and the accession of Boris Godunov in the late seventeenth century, triggering the descent into the “Time of Troubles” (1605–13). This crisis, similar in some ways to the period of war and revolution between 1914 and 1921, was followed by a slow recovery and the movement of state, society, and culture toward the apogee of autocratic centralization (1649). But physical overextension and xenophobic conservatism produced the stagnation ultimately ended by the “revolution” of Peter the Great.

Transition into the post-Soviet cycle upon which Russia is now launched has provided students of that perennially secretive society with considerable information from newly opened (and perhaps now closing) archives dealing with Russia’s past. Understandably, the focus of the efforts of non-native historians in particular has been on the Soviet period, especially the period when Stalin was in power, in which arguments about the nature of what the Left sometimes called “Soviet civilization” were most intense. New information from the archives has not essentially changed the larger outlines of Soviet history, but new details abound and the Soviet borderlands have been more dramatically affected than the heartland. The differences between the personality, values, and policies of the Soviet leaders remain, as they have long been, in dispute. The nature of Lenin’s and Stalin’s policies and, even more, the relationship between them, as argued even today, depends as much on the political values and opinions of the analyst as on any new evidence.⁹ Several significant new publications argue passionately, however, that the continuity between Lenin and Stalin has been more closely and deeply established by the opening of the archives.¹⁰ They position themselves in this venerable argument by asserting that Stalin did not so much “betray” as fulfill Lenin’s revolution. New information has enabled other significant changes. The British historian and biographer Robert Service has produced new information on Lenin’s family and on his medical situation, suggesting that his constitution was a good deal more fragile and his health more precarious than had previously been understood.¹¹

To examine another dispute that raged for a long generation, Stalin’s personal role in the Soviet terror and purging has been resoundingly affirmed; the attitude of scholars who sought to diminish Stalin’s role by revisioning the purges of the 1930s as centrally conditioned by struggles over the makeup of the Communist Party seems misguided.¹² Stalin, however, also appears to be rather more of an intellectual Marxist than earlier scholars believed. On a different but related matter, the number of fatalities from the purges appears to be considerably lower than scholars of an earlier generation like Robert Conquest believed them to be. Nothing that has so far come out of the archives has cast any decisive light on Stalin’s responsibility for the murder of the Leningrad Party boss, Sergei Kirov. Unsurprisingly, Lenin and Stalin seem both more complex and a good deal less Olympian than a generation ago, if fully as ruthless and bloodthirsty. Neither the more liberal and Marxisant scholars active in the United States and Europe, nor their conservative opponents, who believed that the Soviet Union was above all a centralized autocracy, have been wholly vindicated by archival disclosures.

Although no truly major surprises have yet emerged, much more of the connective tissue of Soviet history has been made visible by new archive availability.¹³ In addition, the accessibility of archives, particularly regional archives, means that Russian history will never again be written so exclusively from the perspective(s) of Moscow and St Petersburg, although the unfettered flow of material from Soviet repositories

for which historians hoped for a few years ago was never realized and is unlikely to be any time soon.¹⁴ The end of the Soviet phase of Russian history has improved archival access only up to a point, as the Russian government's ancient suspicion of foreigners has not been banished.

Greater scholarly attention has already begun to be focused on what came before and after the Soviet Union. The sharpness of the divide provided by 1917 is blurring slightly and losing some of its ideological significance. At one and the same time, modern Russian traditions and ties with the longer past are re-emerging in new ways and in some different shapes, while Russia's future in a global age remains baffling. Is real democracy possible there? Can Russia be a successful nation, rather than a failed empire? Can Russia find a place in the current market-driven world? What sort of a place? More than a supplier of raw materials, a "colonial" economy? At the beginning of the 1990s, when the future seemed completely veiled, Russians used to joke about going to the airport and getting on a plane, without knowing where the plane was going to land. Most people hoped for Paris, Berlin, or Washington, but no one was confident. Might the plane be landing in Buenos Aires or Asuncion? Or even Islamabad? The most drastic alternatives seem to have been ruled out at this stage, but the plane's destination is still uncertain.

These dramatic changes, however, have surely changed our sense of pre-Soviet Russia as well as our more speculative sense of Russia's future. Older accounts of Soviet history and society, to take two examples, say relatively little about Soviet crime, save for the submerged "free market" known in the USSR as the "second economy." Crime was scarcely recognized as a problem until near the end of the Soviet period, when it exploded its way into post-Soviet Russia. Its sudden and dramatic emergence into the light of day has clarified some lines of continuity with the criminal world of the late Imperial and early Soviet periods that might with profit be more deeply investigated.¹⁵ It may not be fantastic at least to note that before the eighteenth century Russian merchants were regarded by Europeans as spectacularly corrupt. But the relationship between the end of the Soviet Union, the rise of the Russian Mafia and the expansion of global crime is an important subject.¹⁶

In earlier discussions, "Russian religion" generally meant the history of the varieties of Orthodox Christianity. But the dissolution of the Soviet Union into a variety of national religious communities, plus the contemporary turmoil in the Middle East, has elevated the importance of Russia's non-Orthodox and borderland populations, especially its Muslim ones, into a much more important subject than in the past. How these populations were acquired and administered must now be adequately accounted for in any new synthesis of Russian history. The chapter by Robert Geraci of the University of Virginia in this volume helps us understand the vital question of minorities and empire.¹⁷ Greater archival access for non-Russian scholars has thus far enabled greater understanding of the specific problems of Russia's extraordinarily diverse religious cultures and politics and the solutions found for them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Russian authorities.

Our *longue durée* sense of Russian imperial expansion has also altered. The obstacles, dangers, and difficulties of it are clearer to us than they used to be; the dangers for other nations less catastrophically threatening. "Imperial overstretch" helped bring the Soviet Union down, and we may now be disposed to read it back as a chronic problem even further (and more deeply) into Russian history.¹⁸ The recent

generation is not the first that has seen the lowering Russian threat suddenly diminish. Something comparable took place a century and a half ago, when Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853–6) made Castlereagh's dire warnings at the Congress of Vienna (1815) about the Russian hordes overrunning Europe seem overblown. The "undergovernment" of provincial Tsarist Russia and the extraordinary difficulties attendant upon the government's efforts to colonize Siberia – currently rather understudied – are likely to receive greater emphasis in the wake of Soviet collapse.¹⁹

The opening (and then partial closing) of Soviet archives is far from the only factor making for synthetic changes in the large canvas of Russian history. Methodologies and viewpoints change over time for many reasons. Some historical problems are strikingly affected by what historians call – with perhaps unintentional condescension – "auxiliary disciplines." For example, the question of how to differentiate the very first manifestations of Slavic from non-Slavic cultures in the early days of the Eurasian world entails an increasingly complex discussion between practitioners of different disciplines and techniques, as Paul Barford's chapter in this volume on "the origins of the Slavs" clearly demonstrates. Philologists, students of material culture, anthropologists, naturalists, and geneticists have different takes as to what we mean when we investigate the question. Should our primary enquiry focus on the language of ancient peoples, their pottery, their place names, and their geographical references, or on what genetics may reveal of them?

The essay of Janet Martin (University of Miami) suggests that the major issues focused upon by recent students of the first East Slavic state, Kiev Rus', do not greatly differ from what they have been for a generation or two. Disagreements on certain of these traditional problems have narrowed, however, thanks to further development of rather traditional tools of enquiry, such as archaeology and the study of coin hoards. The hoary disagreements between Normanists and anti-Normanists over the role of non-Slavs in the creation of the first East Slavic state have become less dramatic and somewhat less tied to the investigator's national point of view than previously. No one now seriously disputes the central role of Scandinavian dynasts in the founding of the Kiev Rus' state.

The significance of Russia's artistic culture, globally and particularly within the Western world, has not been diminished, even if the importance of its political culture has. Both the chapter of George Majeska (University of Maryland) on Kiev's relations with the Byzantine Empire and that of Ilia Dorontchenkov (The European University of St Petersburg) on Russian art suggest the attractive power that East Roman culture exerted on Russian elites, extending from the earliest days of East Slavic contact with Byzantium in the ninth and tenth centuries until well beyond the termination of the Byzantine Empire itself in 1453. Indeed it can be argued, as Dorontchenkov does, that Byzantine culture was the greatest treasure house of Europe at the time when the Eastern Slavs fell under its irresistible influence. Russian visual culture remained "medieval" much longer than the more dynamic culture of Central and Western Europe.

With the notable exception of icons, however, Russian painting over the succeeding centuries has unaccountably failed to impress European and American critics until very recently. The emergence of a group of wealthy "new Russians" since the late 1990s, however, has bid up the price of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian painting and increased awareness around the world of the major contribution to both

nineteenth- and twentieth-century European culture made by Russia's long undervalued artists.

Donald Ostrowski of Harvard University takes an exceptionally broad view of one of the very most significant problems of early Russian history: the fateful and highly diverse political and cultural interaction of the Eastern Slavs with the Mongols (generally known to the Russians as "Tatars"). His clear and comprehensive account focuses on the period between the early thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries.²⁰ Mongol influences were particularly important in shaping the political culture and administrative practices of the Eastern Slavs, including taxation, political institutions, and military methods. Mongol influence played a vital role in helping Rus' become a dynastic state. But the dominant Russian historiographical tradition – and here the rise and fall of the Soviet Union has been much less of a factor than Russian nationalism – is to minimize, or altogether deny, this Mongol influence. Mongol culture scarcely existed, Russian scholars insisted for generations, and could not have had any significant influence on the "higher" culture of the East Slavs.²¹ Scrutinizing and clarifying this fascinating problem of cultural influence means employing both analytic skills and imagination in order to penetrate the layers of religious exclusivism and Russian nationalism in which the historiography is swathed. Precisely who created the early Slavic sources, and what they left out, may be as important as what their authors intended to say. Long and painstaking language-learning continues to be a *sine qua non* of understanding the culture and politics of the Eurasian steppe between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Ostrowski takes advantage less of dramatic new discoveries than of the globalization of historical study, leading slowly but inexorably to the gradual separation of chauvinistic passion from this particular cultural problem. He looks to the development of a more mature and independent-minded historiography among "Tatarists, Bulgarists and Mongolian historians" for further progress in the years ahead.

The predominant methodology of recent investigators of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Muscovy has centered on political culture, and their achievements have been largely the work of non-Russians. Nancy Shields Kollmann (Stanford University), herself an important contributor, provides us with a brilliant generational narrative of this scholarly innovation, demonstrating how these scholars forged ideology, political institutions, history, climate, and the way ordinary people lived into a coherent synthesis that goes far to explain the world of Ivan the Terrible. The work of Harvard University's Edward Keenan was a crucial catalyst in these collective achievements.

Richard Hellie of the University of Chicago has been the great interpreter of Russian slavery and serfdom in our generation of historians. He has concluded that Russian history must treat extensively not only the history of the autocratic institutions that sharply limited the freedom of Russians but equally what he calls "the history of unfreedom," in which serfdom played a central role. As Nancy Kollmann observes, the Muscovite state "offered no legal protections or rights to subjects, nor representative institutions that might share sovereignty." But, in addition, slavery played a significant role in the social arrangements of early Russia, until it was squeezed out by later developing and more varied forms of bondage in the seventeenth century. According to Hellie, some 85 percent of the population from the 1590s – when full serfdom may be considered to have come into effect – until the early twentieth century ought to be considered as unfree. After forced collectivization

began in 1929, Hellie considers that “more than a majority” of Russians were unfree until the Khrushchev-era reforms were under way in 1956. The roller coaster of Russian unfreedom, then, runs from the Mongol–Muscovite period, through the Imperial and the Soviet eras, and, in attenuated form, out the other side. Hellie stresses that the collectivized agriculture of the Soviet Union was experienced by many rural Russians as a “second serfdom.”

The remarkable changes wrought upon the body and soul of Russia by Peter the Great are properly understood to constitute a revolution, however anachronistically the term is used here. The late Lindsey Hughes of University College, London, among the great scholars of early modern Russia in our time, suggests that Peter in effect adopted the German philosopher Leibniz’s view that Russia was a *tabula rasa* – a blank sheet of paper – upon which a new civilization could be traced by an energetic ruler. But before Peter’s unparalleled effort to set Russia on a new course, the power and influence of the Russian Church was badly damaged by a long-lasting church schism that opened the final third of the seventeenth century. It not only divided the Orthodox population of Russia into two irreconcilable flocks, but weakened the Patriarch and made the abolition of his office much easier for Peter to achieve.

However, the eclipse of the work of those Soviet “Westernizers,” the Bolsheviks, may subtly diminish the achievement of Peter the Great in the eyes of future historians of Russia, who will surely be less attracted to revolutionary heroics, including the Petrine variety. Nadieszda Kizenko of the State University at Albany integrates the most recent scholarship on the church schism into the groundbreaking work of previous generations.

Gary Marker (State University of New York at Stony Brook) takes up one of the principal legacies of Peter the Great: the now problematized “Westernization” of the Russian elite. He suggests convincingly that the end of the Soviet Union has cast doubt on what he calls “the long-accepted affinities between Westernization, progress and secularization.” The existence of an automatic, virtually unilinear opposition between “state and society” in Russia from the Enlightenment until the Russian Revolution, long criticized for over-simplification, received its *coup de grâce* as the official support of the Soviet historical tradition was swept away. The most recent historiography investigates, to take one important example, the degree to which the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century nobility actually shared most of the government’s assumptions about how Russia should be ruled, a rather stark contrast to the work of Soviet historians in particular, who stressed a straightforward development of oppositional forces among the Russian elite, already under way at the accession of Catherine the Great in 1763.

Nor, despite the importance of the Westernization of the upper class, should its extent or numbers of participants be exaggerated. The late Daniel Field (Syracuse University) stressed the small size of the educated elite at the time of the so-called Great Reforms, which, following the Crimean War, sprawled their way across the second half of the nineteenth century. Field, and a variety of Russian, German, and especially American historians, played a central role in rewriting the history of this important period, the centerpiece of which was the emancipation of the serfs. Virtually all of these scholars – Russians and non-Russians alike – were taken under the wing of the greatest student of the reforms, Petr Andreevich Zaionchkovsky, whose

politically tactful but inexorably honest influence undermined Soviet orthodoxy on imperial reform long before that orthodoxy was even tacitly opposed on most matters of historical interpretation.

The Russians, of course, invented the idea of an “intelligentsia,” a creative minority who embodied the intelligence of the nation in a quasi-Hegelian sense, which also suggested its progressive mission of reform. Conservatives and many liberals had long criticized the enormous influence of the “intelligentsia” in late Imperial Russia. Naturally the Soviet experience made the glorification of the “progressive” intelligentsia more controversial than ever. The closed nature of both politics and culture – and the apparent destruction of the intelligentsia itself – in the Soviet Union seemed to reinforce the conclusion that this gallant, occasionally quixotic, tradition was nevertheless too vulnerable to extreme ideologies. Gary Saul Morson (Northwestern University) invokes the work of the critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in elucidating the latest stage in the long argument over the extent of the influence of the Russian intelligentsia and the complex blend of positive and negative that its two centuries of existence brought to Russia. Steeped in the work of Tolstoy and especially Dostoevsky, Bakhtin proclaimed that life can never be grasped by any theory. As Morson paraphrases Bakhtin, “there cannot be a social science because . . . contingency reigns” – a modern restatement of what one might say was an age-old point.

The rise and fall of cultural modernism in the Soviet Union are closely linked to the trajectory of the intelligentsia. Most critics have seen Russian modernism as a major phenomenon in the Westernization of the intelligentsia, exploding on to the stage in the first decade of the twentieth century. Russian modernism – in literature, music, art, and film – may have originally been a French import, but the Russians were famously apt pupils. Russian modernism was the only European variant to rival that of the school of Paris in painting and arguably to surpass France in music and certainly dance. Andrew Wachtel of Northwestern University stresses the intolerance of Stalin’s Russia for modernism, but he also addresses more recent scholarship that also regards internal cultural evolution as having played at least a subsidiary role in limiting modernist evolution in Russia.

Also linked to the Russian intelligentsia, but in a rather different way, is the so-called “woman question.” One of the many paradoxes of Russia’s culture of extremes is that within a nation so heavily marked by violence toward women progressive intellectuals should at the same time have put women’s emancipation on the front burner in advance of so many other less “backward” societies. Elizabeth A. Wood of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology takes a contemporary look at this fascinating problem, noting that the woman question was also about masculinity and its place in such an autocratic society. Despite its emancipatory valence, the activities of the predominantly male intelligentsia also “perpetuated deeply misogynist notions of women’s backwardness.” As so often in the Russian story, “les extrêmes se touchent.”

The Russian tradition of a critical intelligentsia is today deeply imperiled. But if it cannot be reconstituted in the market-driven Russia of today, there are those who will miss its fierce moralism and humanitarianism.²² Perhaps the authoritarian rule of Vladimir Putin and his successors will – somewhere down the road – revive the radical alienation of an intelligentsia minority disgusted by the formlessness of Russian

culture today and its inability to resist the government's encroachment on free expression.

The crisis of late Soviet society coincided with the increasing use of the concept of "civil society," to suggest developments anterior to and more or less closely related to democratization in Europe. A series of important discussions about Russia ensued. What exactly characterized this kind of society? The rise of "voluntary organizations"? Urbanization? New forms of "sociability"? Aristocratic decline? How closely related to the rise of democracy was the appearance of a civil society? Was the appearance of aspects of a "civil society" after Stalin's death connected to developments under Mikhail Gorbachev that ultimately meant the end of Soviet authoritarianism?

The possibility of understanding the demise of the Soviet Union partially in terms of the belated rise of "civil society" prompted recent investigators to look back to the last phase of Imperial Russia. Was the development of a healthy civil society foreclosed by the vast spaces and overwhelmingly rural character of Russia? Or by hostility of the intelligentsia tradition to market culture? Or by the catastrophe of the First World War? Or by all of the above? By raising such questions, the "civil-society" debate in Russia gradually absorbed and superseded the older discussion of whether Imperial Russia suffered from a "missing bourgeoisie," and, if so, why it was missing. Christopher Ely (Wilkes Honors College, Florida Atlantic University) gives us a searching account of these vital discussions, which bear so centrally on Russia's relationship to the forms of modern life characteristic of Europe.

Whether late Imperial Russia had a civil society or not, it certainly had capitalism – of some kind. But of what kind, exactly? Was it in the end merely a variation on the capitalism of Europe, or something different?²³ Thomas Owen of Harvard University's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies provides a magisterial survey of the development of Russian capitalism, concluding that early twentieth-century Russia's industrial system – heavily dependent on the state as it was – became strong enough "to generate popular antipathy but remained too weak to defend itself in the political realm . . . and in culture."

Save for political behavior itself, in no area did ideological orthodoxy lay a heavier hand on Soviet life than in popular culture, which the regime was determined to co-opt, shape, and control. As Louise McReynolds of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, brilliantly demonstrates, the end of the Soviet Union freed up scholars to investigate "the personal experiences of lives lived" in twentieth-century Russia and made theoretical and anthropological investigation central. Anthropologists in particular "accepted the relativism inherent in culture" and "endowed quotidian Soviet life with a significance that politics had refused it."

Until recently, the First World War had been dramatically understudied in Russia, overshadowed as it was by the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union. Now the "unknown war," as Melissa Stockdale of Oklahoma University calls it, is receiving the full-dress investigation it merits. A crop of distinguished scholars, inside Russia and abroad, are devoting their talents to investigating the dreadful conflagration that was the seedbed of so much that went wrong in the twentieth century and – as Stockdale puts it – was both catalyst and crucible of the revolution.

As the Russian Revolution assumes a slightly more episodic significance for Russian history (its ideological significance for the world of the twentieth century remains

undiminished), the importance of the Civil War occasioned by the collapse of Imperial Russia and the Bolshevik seizure of power has also grown greater. As Mark von Hagen of Arizona State University puts the matter, contemporaries did not see 1917 as so definable a “caesura” in the almost decade-long trauma of war and revolution that convulsed Russia between the summer of 1914 and the end of the Civil War. That decade resembles, von Hagen notes perspicaciously, the “time of troubles” that “recalled an earlier period of foreign invasion and internecine violence after the death of Ivan the Terrible.”²⁴

The great scholar of two generations ago, Barrington Moore, characterized the developments in the Soviet 1930s as constituting “terror and progress.”²⁵ With the decline and fall of the Soviet Union, the progress has become harder to discern, but not the terror. Historians are still bitterly divided over how to understand the “forced modernization” policies of the late 1920s and 1930s in particular. Ought the radical policies of Lenin and Stalin to be understood as essentially the work of the leaders themselves and hence necessitating the coining of “isms” (Leninism, Stalinism)? Or did the roots of the behavior of the Soviet leaders lie in the depths of Russian history? Or in the utopianism of the French Revolution? In the cauldron of the international system between the wars? Lynne Viola of the University of Toronto persuasively argues that what we call Stalinism was “first and foremost a recipe for a non-capitalist modernization (with some decidedly non-modern characteristics).” According to Viola, it was the Russian peasantry that “supported the infrastructure of modernization [and] turned the Stalinist state into an extraction state based on the use of force.” She shares Moshe Lewin’s view that Stalinism is best described as an “agrarian despotism” but concedes to more traditional scholarship the importance of “certain features of Russian historical development based on a continuation of similar patterns, structures and problems.” What we call Stalinism, she concludes, was by and large rooted in a “particular time and country,” despite the numerous comparisons that have been made with other mega-states of the twentieth century, often under the rubric of “totalitarianism.”

Nothing could dramatize more vividly the historiographical changes of the early twenty-first century than the virtual convergence of Russian and non-Russian scholars on major points of interpretation respecting the Second World War. Western historians have recognized more fully that the war against Nazi Germany was really won on the eastern front and described in more comprehensive ways the enormous devastation that Russia underwent at the hands of National Socialist Germany. Russian scholars are stripping away the mythologizing of the war by their Soviet predecessors, as well as revealing the blunders of the military and political leadership and the desperate straits in which the Soviet Union found itself, as it began its “age of empire” after 1945. Nikita Lomagin of St Petersburg University provides a fluent narrative that takes full account of both Russian and Western historiography.

Do we “now know” all that we can about what drove the cold-war conflict between the West, led by the United States, and the Soviet “East”? There may be some hubris in this coinage, but, with the opening of some Soviet archives, our source base has certainly increased.²⁶ Along with the interpretation of the Russian Revolution, the cold war was the historical problem that saw the widest divergence between Russian and non-Russian historiography. With the end of the Soviet Union, that abyss too has shrunk dramatically, but it may never be entirely overcome. American

triumphalism, even as it diminishes over time, will always be difficult for Russian scholars to accept and for American scholarship to shed entirely. Russians may never wholly eliminate a certain residue of shame at “losing” not only the cold war but also their superpower status and the empire over which its leaders ruled for almost half a century. David Engerman (Brandeis University), a leading member of a new generation of American scholars studying this consuming conflict, has written an account as devoid of triumphalism and as fair-minded as our present historical positioning may allow.

The era of Mikhail Gorbachev and the chaotic sequence of reforms that he initiated inaugurated the last days of the Soviet Union. Scholars defining themselves as “realists” pointed to the growing difficulties of the Soviet economy, “imperial overstretch,” and loss of ideological élan as major factors in the reform movement undertaken by Gorbachev and his colleagues. But Robert English of the University of Southern California made a major contribution by analyzing in depth the connection between the reform efforts of intellectuals under Nikita Khrushchev and those that Gorbachev gathered around him. This effort entailed a major commitment to interviewing the living, as well as scrutinizing the careers of the deceased. He summarizes and contextualizes his painstaking work for us here, demonstrating the roots and significance of what, under Gorbachev, came to be described as “new thinking.”

No scholar has worked harder or more purposefully to understand the demise of the Soviet Union than Robert V. Daniels of the University of Vermont. He plausibly understands this momentous event as involving “four distinct transformations,” all of them quite profound. Not only was the Communist Party and its ideology decisively rejected, but the socialist command economy went with it. The end of the Soviet Empire entailed both surrender of rule over the non-Russian union republics and the release of the nominally independent states of Eastern and Central Europe. As regards the extraordinary complexity of this process, Daniels invokes the philosophy of Leo Tolstoy in observing that “the longer-term movements affecting the country, particularly in economics and in the relationships of international power, will probably [over time] draw greater attention, while the personal ambitions and conflicts among individual leaders fade from prominence.” This remarkable development constituted was one of the most important historical moments of the past century.

Since the Soviet Union came to an end, Russia has experienced enormous political and economic turmoil: both the introduction of a peculiar form of capitalism – some would demonize it – and at the same time efforts to restore connections with earlier strands of Russian historical development – some of them pre-capitalist. At the same time, an effort has been made not to lose entirely the centralized institutions and great power influence of the Soviet period, particularly after 1945.

But the cultural chaos is almost certainly even deeper. Who are the Russians? What aspects of the Russian cultural past are available to them? To what can they aspire? Given their dire demographic prospects, what will Russia look like in a quarter century? Our final two contributors, Bruce Parrott of the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, and the late William Odom, have the difficult privilege of bringing us up to Russia’s present and trying to discern, through the mists, what Russia’s future may be – an old and oft-played game for previous generations of Russia specialists.

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The Blackwell *Companion to Russian History* is intended not as a stand-alone account of Russia's past, but as a stimulating supplement to college course offerings either based on monographs or drawn primarily from a textbook. It can be selectively used for seniors in high school studying Russia in the context of European or even world history. But its primary use will be for professors teaching Russian or European History at the college level. Graduate students too may find it useful as a way of reviewing the shape of the field before their preliminary examinations. And we hope that many of these essays may find favor with that significant, if vaguely defined, entity: the general reader.

Notes

- 1 Peter Reddaway and Dmitrii Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, 2001.
- 2 The episodically bloody war in Chechnya constitutes a major exception, which is sometimes overlooked by scholars concerned with post-Soviet Russia's relations with the West. See Anatol Lieven's fundamental *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998. More recent developments are discussed in A. V. Malashenko, Dmitrii Trenin, and Anatol Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Foreign Policy*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2004. See also Alexander Motyl, Blair A. Ruble, and Lilia Shevtsova, eds., *Russia's Engagement with the West: Transformation and Integration in the Twenty-First Century*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, and London, 2005, and Anna Politkovskaia, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- 3 For an interesting effort to put a fairly positive spin on this idea, see Marshall Poe, *The Russian Moment in World History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003. To look at Russia's sense of its trajectory comparatively, see Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- 4 See Parag Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*, Random House, New York, 2008.
- 5 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998; id., *Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2003.
- 6 If "anything were to occur to disrupt the unity and efficacy of the party as a political instrument," wrote Kennan toward the end of Part III of "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," "Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies." "X", *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (July 1947), 566–82.
- 7 Jane Burbank and David Ransel, *Imperial Russia: New Histories of the Empire*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1998. See also Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, *Reinterpreting Russia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. Recently founded journals such as *Kritika* and *Ab Imperio* are also partly based on this premiss. See also Thomas Sanders, *Historiography of Imperial Russia*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1999, and Peter Holquist, Michael David Fox, and Marshall Poe, eds., *After the Fall: Essays on Russian and Soviet Historiography after Communism*, Slavica, Bloomington, IN, 2004.
- 8 The reasons why Russian history has this peculiar shape to it are provocatively set forth in Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea*, Princeton University Press, Princeton,

1996. John LeDonne's *The Russian Empire and the World: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, is stimulating.
- 9 The Harvard historian Terry Martin, however, has argued effectively that both Lenin and Stalin intended to encourage national development within the Soviet republics and did so. See *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1929*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001.
 - 10 Stéphane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999; Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography*, Free Press, New York and London, 1994; Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003.
 - 11 Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000.
 - 12 See Marc Jansen and Nikita Peters, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1896–1940*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, CA, 2002. The early work of J. Arch Getty on Stalin and the terror (*The Origin of the Great Purges*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985) now seems unconvincing. But see also his more nuanced (with Oleg Naumov) *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939*, Yale University Press, New Haven, and London, 1999; as well as (edited, with Roberta Manning) *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.
 - 13 See, e.g., Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.
 - 14 For a brief and knowledgeable discussion of what the newly available archives have produced for us, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of European Studies*, 37/1 (2007), 51–70. For greater detail, see Soviet Archive Project, www.dac.neu.edu/history/archive/index.html. Two useful collections of assessments by well-regarded scholars may be found in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 51/1 (2003), 36–98; and "Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 40/1–2 (Jan.–June 1999).
 - 15 Stephen Handelman's *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995) is aging, but still valuable.
 - 16 See in particular Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: the use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2002 and Frederico Varèse, *The Russian Mafia: Private Protection in the New Market Economy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005.
 - 17 See also Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001.
 - 18 Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, esp. p. 332. See also Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 1998.
 - 19 S. Frederick Starr, *Decentralization and Self-Government in Russia, 1830–1870*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972; Andrew Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590–1822*, Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.
 - 20 Properly speaking, "Tatars" refers not only to the Mongols but to their nomadic neighbors on the steppe: as Ostrowski puts it, to "the amalgamation of Turkic peoples that the Mongols created when took over control of the Western steppe."
 - 21 This tendency is still visible in Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2008.
 - 22 Katerina Clark (Yale University), "The King Is Dead: Long Live the King," Stanford University conference paper, 1998.

- 23 Lenin himself was a major player in this discussion. See his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. A recent printing is available from the University Press of the Pacific, n.p., 2004.
- 24 For a journalistic early adumbration of this conception, see Abbott Gleason, "The Meaning of 1917," *Atlantic Monthly*, 270/5 (Nov. 1992), 30–4.
- 25 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Terror and Progress*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1954.
- 26 John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997. Despite the author's authoritative title, he does concede that knowledge is cumulative. Yet it is striking, as Melvyn Leffler has pointed out ("What Do We Now Know?", *American Historical Review*, 104/2 (Apr. 1999), 501–24), how traditional disputes about what motivated Soviet leaders have continued even after the opening of archives.