ABSTRACT


by Jackson David Little

This thesis offers a new perspective on the debates about Russian nationhood through an analysis of the complex historiographical legacy of the Petrine era. Specifically it develops an Ethno-Symbolist interpretation of Russian nationhood by examining the historiography of the Petrine era from Nikolai Karamzin’s Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia, published in 1811, to the release of Vladimir Petrov’s film Peter the First in 1939 and 1941. The thesis challenges the idea that pre-Stalinist Russian conceptions of national identity were at best fragmentary if not absent. I theorize that prior to the rise of the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin historians working in the late Russian Empire did develop an elastic conception of imperial nationhood which coalesced around certain key historical periods such as the Petrine era. Following the failure of internationalist Soviet policies, Stalin readapted imperial conceptions of identity to construct a Russo-Soviet form of national identity.

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of History
by
Jackson David Little
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2013

Advisor _________________
Dr. Stephen Norris

Reader _________________
Dr. Scott Kenworthy

Reader _________________
Dr. Daniel Prior
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE .............................................................................................................. 19

CHAPTER TWO ......................................................................................................... 42

CHAPTER THREE ..................................................................................................... 54

CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................... 78
For Karla, Anne and Jeff-

I could not have done this without you
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the following people and organizations: First I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Stephen Norris for his tireless efforts to assist and mentor me on this long project. I am grateful to my readers Dr. Daniel Prior and Dr. Scott Kenworthy for their insight and guidance as this work came to fruition. I am particularly grateful to the staff and services of the Illinois Slavic Reference Service whose information made this thesis possible. Finally a special thanks to the staff of Miami University Libraries with honorable mentions for Masha Stepanova for her many years of personal assistance.
--Introduction--

On October 22 1721, Chancellor Gavril Golovkin solemnly addressed tsar Peter I as he celebrated the signing of the Treaty of Nystad and the end of the Great Northern War between Russia and Sweden: “Only through thy tireless labours and direction have we been brought from the darkness of ignorance, and set upon a glorious stage before the world, and led from non-existence to existence, and added unto the company of political nations.”¹ Since the end of his reign, historians, scholars and statesmen have debated Peter’s role in Russian history. At his funeral in 1725 Feofan Prokopovich commemorated Peter’s role in shaping the new imperial Russia: “All Russia is your statue…transformed by you with skillful craftsmanship.”² If Prokopovich’s funerary oration is to be believed, then into what form did Peter carve ‘Russia;’ a nation, an empire, a powerful state apparatus or a hybrid of all three? The first Russian Emperor’s reign constituted one of the most dynamic periods in Russian history and has been the subject of considerable controversy. Did Peter’s imperial policies give birth to a form of national consciousness or did his reign merely mark a major moment in the formation of said consciousness? The controversy surrounding the Petrine era (1689-1725) is part of a larger debate concerning Russian nationhood and national identity that has raged for roughly 200 years. James Cracraft sums up Peter’s enormous cultural impact: “The manifold changes in building, visualizing, and verbalizing that were introduced…under Peter in connection with his many reforms… [constituted] a cultural revolution. The essence of that revolution was a rapid and sweeping Europeanization of Russian ways.”³ Peter’s “Europeanization” of Russia constituted a broader identity crisis for the Russian Empire, a crisis that became the underpinning for the Russian nationhood discourse. Since the empire’s primordial beginnings in the sixteenth century to its formal inception in the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire, followed by the Soviet Union and Russian Federation have been labeled multi-ethnic states or empires, whose senses of identity and national kinship have been warped and shaped by a variety of causal factors. The debate over national identity in the Russian community has occupied the attention of scholars focused on the constituent components of Russian national identity, its origins and its cultural evolution over time.

² Lindsay Hughes, Peter the Great: A Biography (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 210-211.
The first goal of the thesis is my argument that scholarship concerning Peter the Great’s legacy played a major role in the discourse about Russian nationhood due to Peter’s contentious place within the Russian historical narrative. Peter’s reign is a particularly potent topic within this area of debate as his decision to rapidly Europeanize the Russian state and society is considered by scholars such as Lindsay Hughes, James Cracraft and Nicholas Riasanovsky to be the genesis of Russia’s identity crisis. Nicolas Riasanovsky emphasizes Peter’s controversial legacy pertaining to Russian identity: “Most students of Peter the Great...emphasize that he turned against the Muscovite past, toward...the West; but... Peter I’s ‘Westernism’ is all the more noteworthy because he...remained a dedicated Russian patriot.” If Peter was a patriot then what do his “Westernizing” or “Europeanizing” reforms say about Russian identity? The juxtaposition between Peter’s patriotism and his Western inclinations affirms his importance within the debates over Russian nationhood as the aforementioned juxtaposition is a key point of discourse for historians concerned with the significance of Peter’s reign for Russia.

The second goal of the thesis is to offer a new perspective on the development of Russian national identity and the discourse concerning nationhood. I aver that: nationhood is an evolutionary discourse drawn out over centuries. I base my support for this definition of nationhood on Anthony D. Smith’s theory of ethno-symbolic nationalism, which assigns agency to dynamic cultural forums within politico-cultural communities. I argue that the dynamic discourse concerning Russian nationhood is one in which historians play a defining role. Anthony D. Smith defines a “nation” as “a named and self-defining human community whose members cultivate shared memories, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture and observe shared customs.” The processes of “defining,” “cultivating” and “disseminating” the constituent components of a nation are congruous with the dynamic qualities of historiographical debates.

Due to the conceptual complexity of scholarship concerning nationalism, nations and national identity, I feel that it is necessary for me to clarify my use of certain terms. For the purposes of my thesis, I will be focusing on the term “nationhood” which I argue is a complex and ongoing discourse in which scholarly, cultural and political actors interact and develop a

---

sense of belonging to a specific politico-cultural community over an extended period of time. My depiction of the “nationhood” discourse is similar to Alon Confino’s definition of nationhood as “a culture of remembrance… a product of collective negotiation and exchange between the many memories that exist in the nation.”  

My use of the term “nation” follows Anthony D. Smith’s aforementioned definition of a nation as well as his later assessment of nations as “dynamic, purposive communities of action.” I have established a terminological hierarchy that outlines the basic structure of argument as well as the relationship between these various terms. “Nations” should be considered the focus of “national identity.” The latter is a dynamic byproduct of larger politico-cultural conversations, negotiations and discourses which in turn fall within a specific community’s “nationhood.”

The first emperor’s reign marked Russia’s transition from a somewhat isolated regional power to a rapidly developing European geopolitical entity with considerable cultural, economic and political import in the affairs of Europe. He enacted a series of reforms and decrees that modernized Russia’s military forces, developed the foundations for an industrial economy, expanded trade links with European nations and reshaped many social traditions within Russia itself. Peter’s reign was considered highly controversial while he was on the throne and the tension has not diminished in the centuries since his death. Certain historians have lionized the tsar as a reformer who turned Russia into a great power worthy of recognition by the European powers. Others demonize Peter as a tsar who subverted traditional Russian values and morals in favor of Western ideas and philosophies. The disparity between these perceptions of Peter and his reign has led to a considerable amount of variance in the historiography of his reign in both the tsarist and Soviet periods. Regardless of their perceptions, both extremes view his reign as a moment of great significance for Russia. Although the historiography of the Petrine era is not representative of the whole of Russian history, scholarship concerning it frequently discusses

---

6 Alon Confino, Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.
8 Mikhail Pogodin was one such historian who greatly admired Peter for his reforms. Pogodin’s alliance with the “Official Nationality” program of Nicholas I caused him to view Peter as vital to the creation of Russian nationalism. (Mazour, Modern Russian Historiography, 90-96)
9 Two other major figures within the Slavophile movement who demonized Peter were Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov who followed immediately after Karamzin and utilized a similar method of scholarly interpretation. (For further information on the Slavophiles see Andrzej Walicki’s A History of Russian Thought which provides a detailed analysis of their movement.)
Peter’s role as a major obstacle or developer of Russian national identity. I am not concerning myself with the minutia of Peter’s reign or with precise events but rather the overall significance attributed to his reign, both beneficial and corrosive to Russia’s fortunes. By examining his historiographical development within the tsarist and Soviet eras, it is possible to establish a definitive connection between Imperial Russian and Russo-Soviet nationhood.

The nature of Russian national identity has been the subject of numerous theories concerning Russian nationhood’s composition and origin. A specific facet of the debate circulates around the viability of national identity within the Russian Empire and its rise to prominence. Geoffrey Hosking argues that “Russian national identity was subsumed under that of the empire,” thereby qualifying the prominence of Russian national identity within empire. Hosking’s conclusion is directly reinforced by David Brandenberger’s later scholarship concerning Stalinist national identity. Brandenberger asserts that Russian national identity did not fully develop until the Stalinist era (1924-1953) due to the lack of “a sense of a common heritage and an awareness of a glorious history.” Both scholars place limitations on the chronological origin and viability of Russian national identity within the empire. Opposing scholars such as Olga Maiorova argue that Russian national identity was not subsumed beneath imperial identity. Maiorova qualifies the former theories by acknowledging the philosophical debate between imperial and national identities within the Russian Empire but argues that “the empire was a stage where the Russian people’s historical drama unfolded, and as such, it served to reinforce rather than to obliterate Russian national identity.” She acknowledges that “the problem of distinguishing the Russian nation from the Russian Empire was…on the minds of historians, poets, [and] journalists.” Although in line with my theories, Maiorova’s work is limited to the mid-nineteenth century and the “Age of Nationalism.” My thesis builds on her work by examining the debate over a broader chronology while engaging directly with Brandenberger’s assertion of Stalinist originality. By extending the chronological time frame for

13 Ibid., 6.
Russian nationhood before 1917, I hope to develop a new perspective that recognizes it as a drawn out conversation with its roots firmly planted in the imperial past.

Although Russians undoubtedly debated their identity prior to the nineteenth century, the era in question was witness to the “Age of Nationalism” where political individuals including Russia attempted to develop a sense of national identity for the sake of their states’ political and cultural stability. Most scholars of nationalism emphasize the importance of a developed “historical heritage,” “usable past” or “cultural mythology” for the development of national identity. George Schöpflin develops the role of myth in nationhood: “Myth can…be seen as having a variety of roles…and purposes. It is an instrument of self-definition, in that those who accept the beliefs encoded in myth accept…membership and the rules that go with membership. Myth attributes special qualities to the group…and creates a boundary.” Various politico-cultural communities sought to legitimize and strengthen their nationalist efforts by reworking the community’s historical legacy to bolster their nation building efforts. The scholars and statesmen were not exempt from this nationhood discourse.

The Russian Empire entered a phase of cultural and academic development where academics and cultural figures strove to create a workable historical heritage for their empire. For historians this task centered on synthesizing a usable past that could be developed into a linear historical narrative specific to a particular ethnicity or political faction. Following the February and October Revolutions in 1917, the Bolsheviks began the process of countering the work of Russia’s tsarist historians with an anti-nationalist approach to history. This brief, ineffective hiatus lasted roughly until 1924 when the death of Vladimir Lenin and the succession of Josef Stalin initiated a period known as the “Great Retreat” when the Soviet leadership renounced the orthodox Marxist censure of nationalism and began creating a Russo-Centric Soviet national identity that utilized many of the same scholarly works and ethno-cultural symbols used in the preceding century by tsarist academics. Soviet scholars returned to their imperial predecessors’ debates over dynamic periods in Russian history including the Petrine era. Stalinist efforts yielded a union of imperial and Soviet cultural elements that was at heart a

resurrection of many of the tsarist nationalist motifs with certain Soviet ideological accoutrements, combining the “usable past” of the empire with the narrative of the October Revolution. The resulting form of Russo-Soviet national identity encouraged a similar degree of Russian national ethnocentrism combined with Marxist ideology.

The quest to define Russian national identity is complex, controversial and covers a vast swath of political and cultural themes. I have chosen to base the entirety of my argument’s support on the historiography of Peter the Great from 1811 to 1941. The former date is the year when Nikolai Karamzin, the founding father of the modern Russian historical discipline, presented his *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* to Tsar Alexander I. The memoir begged the Emperor not to engage in liberal reforms within the empire. Karamzin characterizes Peter as a cultural usurper and provocateur who compromised Russia’s cultural heritage in favor of rapidly Europeanizing Russia thus compromising Russian nationhood. Karamzin argues that pre-Petrine Russia possessed a timeless cultural heritage that was suppressed by Peter’s westernizing reforms. He invented or as Pushkin would later state, “discovered ancient Rus,” establishing a pre-Petrine past that buttressed his version of national identity. His criticism of Peter’s reforms was an early nineteenth-century attempt at synthesizing a “usable past” based around the cultural foundations of pre-Petrine Russia. The latter date commemorates the moment when Alexei Tolstoi, descendant of his literary ancestor, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoi received the Stalin Prize for his novel and the resulting film, *Peter I*. The successful publication of the book and the release of the film were definitive moments within the debate concerning the Russian nation.

Russia’s status as a multi-ethnic empire complicates the constantly developing debate as its cultural figures and political leaders must contend with a series of ethnicities, their traditions and their values when shaping an identity meant to clarify what it means to be truly “Russian.” Like Olga Maiorova I believe that is possible for nationhood to exist within an imperial space despite the conflict between imperial and national conceptions of identity. I do not suggest that my explanation is the absolute solution to this complex cultural enigma but rather I offer it as evidence of a nationalist imperial debate prior to 1917.
In order to analyze the historical accounts of Peter the Great and their contributions to the development of Russian national identity it is essential to understand the scholarly perspectives concerning the origin of nations and nationhood. These perspectives can be divided into a number of philosophical classifications including the Modernists and Ethno-Symbolists.\textsuperscript{17} My premise rests on the Ethno-Symbolist perspective of national identity formulated by Anthony D. Smith.\textsuperscript{18} Smith argues that nations are “dynamic, purposive communities of action,” thus they consciously develop an evolving sense of identity designed for a larger community.\textsuperscript{19} Modernists rely on major cultural-industrial factors to identify and categorize nations. Specifically they argue that the nationhood debate can only occur within highly industrialized, literate and bureaucratized communities. Hosking and Brandenberger adopt these requirements to their studies in Russian history by arguing that the preindustrial status of the Russian Empire and the semiliterate state of much of its population combined with the conflict between imperial and national forms of identity inhibited if not wholly prevented the development of the nationhood. Smith’s approach to nations and national identity requires no such institutions to initiate the discourse. He assigns utility to certain cultural focal points and their ability to develop a sense of identity: “The images and traditions that go into the making of nations are not the artificial

\textsuperscript{17} Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm were the progenitors of the Modernist school of nationalism whose theories included the idea that nationalism was both a product of modernity as well as a unique form of social and cultural structure. They considered modern societies to be highly industrialized states with extensive bureaucratic structures; the structures served as “the kinship of modern man.” The process of industrialization and bureaucratization developed the modern states and nations by increasing communication between citizens, thus facilitating a greater sense of bureaucratic kinship. Nineteenth century Russia industrialized later than the rest of Europe, thus rendering it a non-modern polity according to Gellner. (Ernest Gellner, \textit{Nations and Nationalism} (Ithaca: Blackwell, 2006), xx.)

He saw a rupture between the modern and pre-modern social structures which established the novelty of nationalism and attributed nationalism to the latter era by arguing that industrialization and modernization demand “homogeneity within political units...sufficient to permit fairly smooth mobility, and precluding the ‘ethnic’ identification.” (Ernest Gellner, \textit{Nations and Nationalism}, 105.) They argue that nations are recent historical developments but they are often developed as a perpetual institution. Benedict Anderson is a recent Modernist champion and his work \textit{Imagined Communities} is a Modernist interpretation of nationalism but is much more closely attuned to cultural influences. He posits the idea that invisible ties exist between similar groups of people who have never met and develop a sense of community “to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” He acknowledges the existence of a national community, but like Modernists he supports their chronology of nationalism by declaring it a product of the Enlightenment. (Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, 6-7.

\textsuperscript{18} Three of Anthony Smith’s texts make considerable contributions to the theory: \textit{Myths and Memories of the Nation}, \textit{Myths and Memories of the Nation} as well as his work \textit{National Identity}.

creations of intelligentsias, cultural chefs or engineers, but the product of a complex interplay between these creators, their social conditions and the ethnic heritages of their chosen populations.”

He describes the nation as a “deposit of the ages, a stratified or layered structure of social, political and cultural experiences and traditions laid down by successive generations of an identifiable community.”

Smith’s assertions support my argument in favor of an Ethno-Symbolic debate within Russia. Despite the lack of a highly industrialized society and large literate populace, Russia’s historians vociferously debated Russian national identity and its composition. Through their lectures, notes, publications as well as their interactions with prominent cultural figures such as Alexander Pushkin, Russian historians established an evolving national conversation that evolved throughout the final years of the empire and extended into the Soviet period.

I hope to demonstrate that despite Modernist assertions to the contrary, nationhood is a dynamic forum of debate that seldom achieves total consensus. The dynamism of this forum permits its existence outside of heavily industrialized or literate societies. Although the forum is restricted to a smaller group of intellectuals, the popularization of their theories does not guarantee assent from the populace at large. This not only applies to Russia but to other national communities as well.

The aforementioned scholars represent the major conceptual discourses concerning nationhood but other scholars have developed additional points of dissension within the nationalist dialog specifically concerning Russian nationhood. David Brandenberger’s work relates to Hosking’s conclusions that “Russian national identity tended to be subsumed in that of the empire, whose values were in principle multi-national.”

Like Maiorova Hosking engages with the relationship between Russian national identity and imperial identity but argues that the latter was weaker than the imperial sense of identity. He argues that Russian national development could only develop around either “the imperial court” or the “peasant community.”

He utilizes Anderson’s emphasis on “the creation of vernacular print-languages… centered around a monarchical court or capital city [as] a vital stage in the creation of

---

20 Anthony D. Smith, Myths and Memories of the Nation (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 171.
21 Ibid., 171.
23 Ibid., XXV.
nationhood,” 24 to apply Modernist theory to Russian history in order to support his assertions concerning imperial identity. Brandenberger’s argument and the source of my contention is his assertion that pre-Stalinist Russians lacked “a sense of common heritage and an awareness of a glorious history, boasting a pantheon of semimythical patriot heroes.” 25 He places importance on the hegemony of awareness and identity in Russia which is not a prerequisite for Ethno-Symbolic nationhood. Considering the contentious nature of nationalist scholarship it is highly impractical for him to place such emphasis on national hegemony. Brandenberger relies on Modernists to differentiate Russocentrism from Russian nationalism, utilizing Gellner’s scholarship to define the former as “an expression of ethnic pride…derived from a strong, articulate sense of Russian national identity, [and] the latter—according to Gellner’s definition—[as] a much more politicized concept referring to group aspirations for political and sovereignty along national lines.” 26 In his opinion, only Stalin’s politico-cultural programs could form a lasting sense of identity. The subjective and dynamic nature of nationhood as well as its imperial point of origin makes the previous assertion untenable.

My reliance on Smith’s Ethno-Symbolist theories is bolstered by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis’ approach to Russian national identity, which devotes considerable attention to cultural themes in their book, National Identity in Russian Culture. Both scholars examine Russia from a cultural perspective and arrive at the conclusion that Russia cannot develop a hegemonic sense of identity. Rather Russia is a “multiplicity of imagined and often competing Russias.” 27 Effectively they declare that Russian identity is an amalgamation of congruous and in some cases contradictory imaginings and images, essentially describing a complex conversation or discourse with a variety of opinions and perspectives, each contributing to a larger debate. They indirectly reinforce the legitimacy of an Ethno-Symbolist analysis of Russian national identity by demonstrating that cultural or civic hegemony is not necessary for a nationhood discourse to function, establishing an open dialog for the creation of national identities. Furthermore they push for a dynamic interpretation of nationhood rather than the recent and

24 Ibid., 288-289.
26 Ibid., 6.
semi-static nature of the Modernist interpretation of nationhood and national identity. Franklin and Widdis’ theory of “competing Russias” captures the essence of the discourse concerning the nature of the Russian nation with various parties attempting to uncover, recover or create conceptions of kinship with the Russian nation. They emphasize the constructive nature of national debates by focusing on the multiplicity of perceived identities and their placement within a broader forum of national debate.

In addition to Franklin and Widdis’ theories regarding the constructive interplay between varying conceptions of Russian cultural identity, Serhii Plokhi’s work Origin of the Slavic Nations focuses on the “primordialist…development of premodern identities [to establish a historical lineage for the modern nation.]” He directly references Anthony Smith and develops his own claim that “the origins of modern nations are to be found in premodern national communities, or ethnicities.” Combined with Franklin, Widdis, and Maiorova’s scholarship these texts revise and reevaluate preceding scholarship concerning Russian nationalism. They construct a new perspective on Russian nationhood and reinforce the idea of a dynamic nationhood debate.

In order to establish the dynamic nature of the Ethno-Symbolic nationhood discourse, my thesis will link with studies into the development of major historical figures in political and cultural forums. Kevin Platt’s work Terror and Greatness focuses on the representations of Ivan IV (the Terrible) and Peter I (the Great) in Russian historical and cultural circles from the rise of Nikolai Karamzin in the early nineteenth century to the present day Russian Federation. He does not address the issue of nationhood but rather focuses on the counterbalancing elements of “Terror” and “Greatness” within Russian historical memory. His work analyzes the evolutionary nature of Russian historical legacies, thus establishing theoretical grounds for my broader focus on debate concerning Russian nationhood. Both tsars’ reigns were times of considerable upheaval and transformation for their respective realms, but they were also times of incredible bloodshed and brutality exercised against the Russian people. Referencing works created by Russia’s great academics such as Nikolai Karamzin, arguably the father of modern history in Russia, as well as cultural works such as Alexander Pushkin’s poems and Alexei Tolstoi’s novel,

---

29 Ibid., 3.
Peter I, he portrays “the extraordinary variability of interpretations of Ivan and Peter… [and how] they have served as crucial sites in Russian articulations of the relationships between coercion and social progress and between trauma and collective identity.” Although my work closely parallels his, my focus is primarily geared towards the academic spheres of the Russian intelligentsia, their exclusive historiographical treatment of Peter I and its significance in Russian nationhood.

The bond between historians and nationhood is further reinforced by Ariel Roshwald’s *The Endurance of Nationalism* and Anatole Mazour’s *Modern Russian Historiography*. Roshwald focuses on the correlation between developments in modern historical scholarship and pre-modern/modern forms of nationalism, the latter being the product of the nineteenth century’s “Age of Nationalism.” He bridges the divide between Smith and Gellner by asserting that modern nationalism relied upon pre-modern developments and theories while remaining inextricably bonded with modern historical scholarship. Anatole Mazour’s *Modern Russian Historiography* specifically categorizes Russian historians from the medieval chronicles to the early twentieth century ending with the fall of the Pokrovskaian School in the 1930s. He highlights their major publications and the evolution of Russian historiography over the centuries. Mazour concisely analyzes Russia’s major historians and like Roshwald, he bolsters the link between nationalism and history by portraying the nationalistic influences of the nineteenth century such as “the outburst of Slav nationalism... [and the] reflection of the German romantic movement” within the works of Russia’s nineteenth century historians. His analysis remains unaligned with the Modernist or Ethno-Symbolist perspectives but nonetheless further

31 Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006), 11.
32 The Pokrovskaian school of Marxist historiography was an academic movement guided by Mikhail Pokrovskii, a Marxist acolyte of Vasily Kliuchevskii, who established the Marxist historical discipline within the early Soviet Union with the support of Vladimir Lenin. The Pokrovskaian School was limited to university academia but also altered the teaching and recording of Russian history in lower level education. Pokrovskii encouraged an orthodox Marxist interpretation of history which eliminated the historical agency of great figures while emphasizing the transformative force of capitalism and class warfare. In addition to the socio-economic interpretation of history, Pokrovskii encouraged an internationalist approach to history, giving little credence to national identity or its scholarship. Lenin’s death in 1924 and Pokrovskii’s death in 1932 seriously undermined the Marxist school of thought and the latter was soon censured by Stalin during his “Great Retreat” when Soviet leaders and academics retreated from Marxist orthodoxy in the interest of enhancing the state’s power.
reinforces the early connection between the nationalist movement in Russia and the historical profession.

Despite Mazour’s excellent historical catalogue and his development of the concept of a bond between nationhood and history, his analysis of the tsarist and Soviet historical discipline emphasizes a breach between the two historical disciplines. The theory of a clean severance between the two seemingly incongruous scholarly traditions has been widespread, but in recent years has been largely refuted. Recent scholarship including David Brandenberger and Kevin Platt’s co-edited scholarly book *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* examines the link between tsarist and Soviet historiography. The text is a collection of case studies on the treatment of certain historical figures such as Peter the Great in various forms of Soviet cultural media including books and films. They argue that “heroes and heroism would come to stand at the center of Soviet propaganda drives that were designed to promote a newly populist vision of the USSR’s ‘usable past’.”

This work provides an excellent series of examples for the importance of tsarist history in the new Soviet state. They discuss the Soviet interaction with the tsarist past and the implications of certain historical figures such as Peter the Great for the establishment of Soviet identity. Although Brandenberger’s conclusions regarding the creation of Russian national identity are a source of contention, his and Platt’s analysis make a strong case for the interconnectivity between the two forms of scholarship, providing indirect support for my theories regarding the Soviet reliance on imperial nationhood.

The aforementioned texts demonstrate the complexity of the mechanics of nationhood and more precisely, the lineage and composition of Russian nationhood. Brandenberger’s book is just one of several recent texts engaging the issue of Russian nationhood. I diverge from Brandenberger on two salient points, both of which are indicative of his Modernist interpretation of Russian nationhood and my Ethno-Symbolist approach to the quandary. First I contend that Russia was definitively engaged in a debate concerning the nature of the Russian nation prior to the October Revolution in 1917. This assertion is supported by the interconnectivity between tsarist and Soviet historiography and the latter’s reliance on the ethno-cultural scholarly interpretations of imperial nationhood. The academic debates concerning Peter’s legacy were a

---

crucial part of imperial nationhood as the controversy centered on the Slavophile/Westerner debate. Their arguments in favor or against Peter’s Europeanized reign were reflected in their broader discussions about Russian national identity. Russia’s status as a Slavic or European nation remained a key point of contention directly connected with Peter’s substantial historiographical legacy. The Soviets took up the debate by reevaluating Peter’s historical agency in relation to the influence of foreign and domestic economic movements in the Soviet historical narrative. The cultural agendas of the Slavophiles and Westernizers were coopted by Marxist debates concerning Russian national exclusivity versus Marxist internationalism. Despite the difference in scholarly terminology, Peter’s place within the debate over Russian nationhood remained largely unchanged due to the persistence of the Russian/Western or Domestic/Foreign paradox of identity.

The second major point revolves around Brandenberger’s emphasis on uniformity as the determining factor in the existence of national identity. He argues that no efforts at forming national identity had succeeded prior to Stalin because “national identity in Russian-speaking society remained inchoate and internally inconsistent…assuming a modern, systematic form only during the Stalin era.” I counter that the “inconsistent” nature of national identity within a vast realm such as Russia is to be expected as an endemic quality of nationhood within a multi-ethnic community. Like Franklin and Widdis, I contend that Russian national identity is a dynamic conglomeration of symbols, ethnies, beliefs and interpretations which when taken together form a greater whole. This conglomeration is achieved through the complex and often convoluted debate which involves a broad assembly of scholars, statesmen and cultural icons. I do not wholly discount the role of the state in the formation of national identity; indeed the Russification policy of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855), represented conscious state participation within nationhood. Thus I argue that the nationhood discourse did exist prior to Joseph Stalin in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where members of the historical community played a crucial role in the process of Russian nationhood by developing a national historical narrative which directly addressed what it meant to be a citizen of the Russian Empire. These scholarly efforts fell within the shadow of Peter’s legacy as they sought to establish exactly where Russia sat culturally between the East and West, a precarious position they attributed to Peter.

Chapter 1: 1811-1917

-Imperial Historiography and the Nationhood Discourse-

The end of the eighteenth century marked a tumultuous time for Europe and the Russian Empire. Beyond the geopolitical rumblings in the West brought on by the French Revolution, an academic revolution was occurring, one in which Russian historians would play a major role. One of the key developments was the interest in national histories and the development of historical narratives specific to an ethnic community. Interest in this particular form of scholarship soon spread to the Russian Empire. Although not the first Russian scholar to engage with this developing genre of scholarship, Nikolai Karamzin is credited with being the progenitor of Russia’s early experiments with national history and the modern historical discipline within the Empire. Karamzin traveled extensively in Western Europe near the end of the eighteenth century, exposing himself to many Enlightenment movements. Although he initially embraced the cosmopolitanism of the European intelligentsia, he grew disillusioned with the cultural philosophies of the West, viewing them as a threat to Russia’s heritage.

One of Karamzin’s most famous scholarly contributions was the first major effort at creating a complete work on Russian national history, *A History of the Russian State*. Begun in 1803, Karamzin worked on the multi-volume history up until his death in 1826 leaving the work incomplete with its final volume concluding in 1611. His analysis was strongly influenced by state-centered nationalism which furthered the development of the arguments made in his earlier work, *A Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*. Published in 1811, it discusses Peter at length and highlights his attitudes concerning Western culture and his near sacral treatment of Russia’s cultural heritage. Karamzin wrote the memoir in the hopes of dissuading Tsar Alexander I from engaging in a series of liberal reforms which Karamzin felt threatened Russia’s traditions and the autocracy. He acknowledged the breadth of Peter’s reforms in government, the military and industry but he also lambasted Peter’s reign as costly to Russia’s heritage: “But shall we Russians, keeping in mind our history, agree with ignorant foreigners who claim that Peter was

---

37 Ibid., 77.
38 Ibid., 80.
39 Following its initial release in 1811, Karamzin’s work was republished in 1914, 1959, 1988 and 1991. The work has endured well into the present day as one of his more inflammatory pieces. For more information see A.A. Liberman’s *Ukazatel Trudov, literatury o zhizni i tvorcheste: 1883-1993*. 
the founder of our political greatness?...Shall we forget the princes of Moscow, Ivan I, Ivan III, who may be said to have built a powerful state out of nothing.”

Karamzin espouses the importance of pre-Petrine historical figures and their contributions to Peter’s reforms. Karamzin disagreed with the amount of agency attributed to Peter I by figures such as Chancellor Golitsyn, who viewed Peter as the progenitor of the Russian nation. Unlike Chancellor Golitsyn’s obsequious laudatory address to the sovereign, Karamzin argues that if anything Peter jeopardized its supposedly “timeless” cultural antecedents. He attacks previous scholarship and perceptions of Peter as the product of “ignorant foreigners” thus emphasizing the apparently exclusive veracity of Russian historical scholarship.

Karamzin’s analysis of Peter the Great focuses heavily on the cultural implications of his reign and his detrimental impact on Russia’s heritage:

Peter was unable to realize that the national spirit (dukh narodni) constitutes the moral strength of states, which is as indispensable to their stability as is physical might. This national spirit, together with faith, had saved Russia in the days of the Pretenders. It is nothing else than respect for our national dignity (narodnomu dostoinstvu). By uprooting ancient customs, by exposing them to ridicule…the sovereign of the Russians (rossian) humbled Russian hearts.

The passage provides considerable insights into Karamzin’s attitude towards Peter the Great and his general opinion of Russian culture. Karamzin argues that Russia’s cultural heritage was necessary for the realm’s survival. He argues that the same “national spirit, together with faith” preserved Russia in previous crises such as the Time of Troubles. While he does not deride the secular reforms of Peter, he considers his cultural policies to be a great travesty as well as a breach of his bond with the Russian people as their sovereign.

Despite his initial tone, Karamzin does not completely reject the ideas of the Enlightenment but emphasizes that cultural exchange or penetration within Russia is unnecessary and should be avoided. He develops the idea of Russian cultural individuality and its utility for

---


41 Ibid., 121.

42 Roughly 1598-1613; The Time of Troubles was born out of a dynastic crisis following the death of Ivan IV and the end of the Rurikid Dynasty. The period was rife with numerous pretenders to the Russian throne, famines, plagues and foreign invasions during which time Russia was largely without a strong central government. The ascension of Mikhail Romanov to the throne in 1613 is considered to be the end of the Time of Troubles.
the state: “The love of the fatherland (otechestvo) is bolstered by those national peculiarities which the cosmopolite considers harmless, and thoughtful statesmen beneficial…One state may borrow from another useful knowledge without borrowing its manners.”

Essentially the exchange of certain philosophies and ideas between states is appropriate and perhaps even beneficial to one state as long as the state in question, in this case Russia, does not jeopardize its cultural roots. Karamzin reworks Russia’s historical material to create a set of timeless cultural roots that in turn bolster his criticisms of Peter. His efforts established the foundations for imperial nationhood by creating a version of national identity he deemed effective. Karamzin emphasizes one particularly potent engineered cultural precedent concerning the cultural bond between the tsar and the domestic sphere of his realm:

These manners may change naturally, but to prescribe statutes for them is an act of violence, which is illegal also for an autocratic monarch. The people, in their original covenant with the king…had not said: ‘Fight the innocent inclinations and tastes of our domestic life.’ In this realm, the sovereign may equitably act only by example, not by decree. Karamzin once again emphasizes the importance of the artificial cultural bond between the autocrat and his subjects, a bond which he personally develops as a timeless politico-cultural phenomenon. Karamzin sees Peter’s cultural statutes not only as an attack against the national heritage of Russia but also an act of transgression against his covenant with the Russian people. He holds the cultural bond between the tsar and the people as inviolate and any effort by the tsar (in this case Peter) to alter or adulterate Russia’s culture as an illegal act. Karamzin’s scholarship reflects a major trend within what would become the Slavophile movement as many Slavophiles portrayed Peter the Great in a decidedly negative light and symbolized him as the progenitor of many of Russia’s problems.

Karamzin’s status as an academic forerunner to Slavophiles is further developed by his comparison of the contemporary Russian Empire to a pre-Petrine historical entity: “Does the name of Russian carry for us today the same inscrutable force which it had in the past?...An Orthodox Russian was the most perfect citizen and Holy Rus, the foremost state in the world. Let this be called a delusion. Yet how much it did to strengthen the patriotism and the moral fibre of

\[43\] Ibid., 121-122.
\[44\] Ibid., 122.
Clearly Karamzin views the image of “Holy Rus” as a time of great cultural purity and moral character for the Russian people.

Karamzin’s diction is equally important to understanding the nature of his harsh treatment of Peter the Great and its role in developing an understanding of the Russian nationhood discourse. Throughout the aforementioned passages the author utilizes terminology such as national spirit and fatherland, both of which shared considerable commonality with nationalism and national identity. Karamzin’s use of certain key terms is indicative of his divergence with previous Russian scholarship as well as the influx of certain proto-nationalist philosophies into Russian academia.46 The term “national spirit”, translated from the original “dukh narodnyi” can also be interpreted as “the people’s spirit.” The term “narod” traditionally refers to the lower strata of Russian society thus Karamzin’s use of the term in conjunction with his patronage of the domestic culture of the lower classes is indicative of multifarious forms of identity.47 Karamzin develops this form of identity as part of his formation of a set of cultural myths for the Russian people. The term “fatherland,” translated from “otechestvo” can also be translated as “native land.” Both translations imply a cultural or ethnic link to the land and political boundaries that constitute his idealized description of “Holy Rus.” The use of the term “fatherland” implies a form of kinship with the land itself thus establishing an indelible bond with the land that is a developing cultural tradition and a component of Smith’s interpretation of nationhood.

One of the most important features of Karamzin’s diction involves his use of the term “rossiyan” or Russians. The use of this term in particular is significant as it breaks with the convention of using the term “russkie” to name Russians. The latter term is derived from the name “Rus” thus establishing a link with a previous incarnation of the Russian nation or empire.48 Although Karamzin espouses the cultural and religious virtues of the Rus, his use of the term “rossiyan” denotes a distinction from the Rus thus establishing a new form of

---

45 Ibid., 123.
46 Richard Pipes’ republished edition of Karamzin’s Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia is divided into one text in the original Russian and the other his translation. For the purposes of my thesis I have focused exclusively on the Russian language text and have only referred to the English text for historiographical context.
48 Rus or rather the Kievan Rus was a collection of Eastern European city states and principalities dominated primarily by the city of Kiev from the 9th century until the year 1240 when Kiev and much of the Rus was conquered by the Mongols of the Golden Horde.
historical-cultural identification. This term taken together with his other terminological choices is compelling evidence of nationhood within Russian historical community. Karamzin’s efforts established a foundation that would later be adapted as the basis for the Slavophile faction’s beliefs, such as his quixotic depiction of the Rus, his derision of Peter the Great’s cultural legacy and his focus on the cultural connection between the autocracy and the servitors. Karamzin’s philosophical stance is indicative of the delicate balancing act between culture and politics within Russian nationhood. Karamzin’s scholarly efforts were an early attempt at establishing Russian national identity, thus he should be considered an academic progenitor of Russian nationhood.

A number of key points may be drawn from Karamzin’s *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*. First, he establishes the philosophies and attitudes of the early Slavophile movement, establishing him as one of the key academic forebears. Like the Slavophiles that would later take up and adapt his message, he bemoans the Westernization of Russia’s upper class and estrangement from the morally superior cultural heritage of Russia, which was the domain of the peasantry and working class. Specifically Karamzin demonizes Peter the Great as a cultural usurper of Russia’s past and a symbol of all that the Slavophiles would come to despise: “Once upon a time we used to call all other Europeans *infidels*; now we call them brothers. For whom was it easier to conquer Russia—for *infidels* or for brothers... We became citizens of the world but ceased in certain respects to be the citizens of Russia. The fault is Peter’s.” 49 Finally Karamzin emphasizes the importance of Russia’s cultural heritage and identity to the preservation of the autocracy, an attitude which shares certain antecedents with what would become known much later as the State School. He sees any adulteration of this relationship as caustic to the autocracy and the welfare of the empire. He wrote the memoir to dissuade Alexander I from enacting liberal reforms, an action he clearly equated with the revolutionary reforms of Peter the Great, by inventing a sense of timeless and static national identity deeply rooted in Russia’s distant past. Alexander Pushkin best describes Karamzin’s role in establishing Imperial Russian nationhood: “Karamzin discovered ancient Russia as Columbus discovered

America.” His scholarly efforts established the foundations for the Slavophile faction within the future Westernizer/Slavophile debates.

The rise of modern historical scholarship in Russia during the nineteenth century coincided with a politico-cultural schism that would permeate much of Russian educated society, culminating in the dispute between the Westernizers and Slavophiles. The debate erupted after the release of Petr Chaadaev’s explosive 1836 letter which stated that Russia was a disjointed collection of individuals lacking a sense of unity, continuity and tradition, in essence identity and nationhood. He connected his assertion to Peter’s legacy by stating that “if [Russia] had been a historical nation…the Petrine reforms would have proved impossible, for ancient and deep-rooted traditions would have offered resistance to the emperor’s arbitrary will.” He argues that the success of Peter’s reforms was based on the lack of an effective set of traditions, or in essence, a sense of national identity. Westernizers viewed European philosophies and ideas as superior to those in Russia or at least on par with Russian developments whereas Slavophiles considered European developments inferior or threatening to Russian values and culture. Susanna Rabow-Edling’s book Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism describes the rise of the Slavophiles and their ideological rivals as the product of an identity crisis within the Russian Empire. The pith of their debate centered on the significance of tsar Peter I and the value of his legacy. Slavophiles demeaned Peter, denoting him as a traitor to the Russian people and one who subverted Russian values in favor of Western practices. Westernizers considered Peter’s reign a welcome period of reform and development across all realms of Russian life, establishing the foundations for a modern Russian state.

Although the Russian intellectual elite was zealously engaged in debating the composition of Russian national identity, the rulers of Russia were not idle in their own efforts, efforts which frequently involved or strongly affected the scholars who were debating the same issues concerning the empire’s identity. While each sovereign following Peter enacted a wide variety of political and cultural edicts with profound consequences for the Russian Empire, one

51 Ibid., 87-89.
53 Ibid., 98-103.
tsar in particular, Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) enacted a series of decrees that would define most of the nineteenth century for Imperial Russia. Nicholas’ doctrine of “Official Nationality” was based on three basic structures: “Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality.” Like Karamzin’s scholarly work, Nicholas’ doctrine was primarily meant to shore up the Autocracy and the Russian state in response to the chaotic events of the French Revolution.  

The rise of Nicholas’ doctrine of “Official Nationality” was based in part on Karamzin’s “defense and glorification of autocracy” as well as his push for the Russian monarch to “revert to tradition in the face of the…French Revolution.” Karamzin’s emphasis on the timeless historical and cultural heritage of “Holy Rus” was part of a “growing conservative movement within Russia.” The growing interest in Russia’s national past coupled with the overarching conservatism associated with scholarship leading up to the nineteenth century and the chaos born out of the French Revolution stimulated a powerful response from the Russian state. The trinity of Nicholas’s policy demonstrates the bond between politics and culture with regard to the stability of the autocracy and the structure of Russian nationhood. The purpose of Nicholas’ nationalist doctrine was to enforce a form of lateral cultural dogma across the length and breadth of the Russian Empire with the potent backing of the Russian state. Future Russian scholars responded to these policies in their works either in support or criticism of the state’s role in Russian national identity.

Although Karamzin laid the philosophical groundwork of the future Slavophile movement, cultural figures made equally profound contributions to the debate, bringing it to the forefront of Russian intellectual discussions. Alexander Pushkin directly addresses and popularizes Karamzin’s interpretation of Peter’s polemical legacy in his poem, The Bronze Horseman. The poem gives an account of a Petersburger named Yevgeny whose beloved Parasha drowns in the terrible Petersburg flood of 1824. Bereft of his beloved he wanders through the alien streets of Peter’s European Eden and chastises Falconet’s statue of a mounted Peter the Great. The statue promptly comes alive and pursues poor Yevgeny whose broken body is found the next day. Pushkin’s poem has been the subject of numerous reinterpretations since

---

54 Bruce W. Lincoln, Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1978), 239.
55 Ibid., 240.
56 Ibid., 240-241.
its posthumous publication in 1837 and a series of probable messages have been assigned to the piece of prose. Waclaw Lednicki’s book *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman* surveys the prominent interpretations:

‘In the first place there is the national tragedy in the exact sense of the word. Here is embodied the clash of Peter’s autocracy with the masses’ genuine love of freedom…The tragedy is seen in a special light when we recall that precisely Pushkin’s Peter regards Petersburg as a window to Europe; something is also disclosed of the accursed problem ‘Europe and Russia.’”

Pushkin’s poem casts Peter and the city that most strongly represents him in a controversial light. St. Petersburg is portrayed in the earlier passages of the poem as a Western paradise but the description of the flood and Yevgeny’s suffering cast a pall over the Venice of the North. The city is portrayed as a decadent but mercurial European Eden occasionally hostile and foreign to the Russians who inhabit it characterizing the crisis of Russian identity within the microcosm of St. Petersburg. Pushkin summarizes the crisis of identity within the Russian Empire and pinpoints the source within the city of St. Petersburg. Peter and the city which bears his name represent the proverbial break with Russia’s traditional heritage as Karamzin mentions within his memoirs. In fact Pushkin directly names Karamzin within the poem:

True, it may

Have been illustrious in past ages,

--Rung, through tradition, in the pages

Of Karamzin.  

Pushkin’s inclusion of Karamzin within his prose emphasizes his continuous importance to cultural figures as they engaged with the debate within their own works. Pushkin’s declaration of Karamzin as the man who discovered Ancient Rus firmly establishes Karamzin’s role in developing the mythmaking aspect of imperial nationhood. His inclusion of Karamzin is significant as he portrays the historian as a figure who requires no introduction. Karamzin is developed as a figure the reader should already know. The assumption of knowledge and proper interpretation develops Karamzin’s prominence in Russian society while strengthening the

---

58 Ibid., 5.
59 Ibid., 142-143.
historiographical lineage between Karamzin and Pushkin. Pushkin’s portrayal of St. Petersburg and its infamous founder contributed to Karamzin’s historical development of a timeless Russian cultural heritage by furthering the myth of Peter’s contentious legacy both in the form of his person and in the juxtaposition of his European capital in relation to the rest of the empire. Literary notables including but not limited to Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevsky and Andrei Bely\(^{60}\) have written several major works that emphasize St. Petersburg’s alien cultural nature and its relation to the larger crisis surrounding nationhood and Russian identity.\(^{61}\) Their works reflect the non-academic interest in Russian identity and thus their participation in the process of Russian nationhood. This process was set in motion by Nikolai Karamzin, whose scholarship developed Peter as the historical figure that split the Russian identity between Europe and Russia’s mythical heritage of “Ancient Rus.” His efforts at national mythmaking would later inspire “the ideologists of classical Slavophilism….although they tried to see it from the point of the ‘people’ rather than the ‘state.’”\(^{62}\) Although Karamzin cannot be declared a Slavophile himself, his theories played an important role in the growth of the movement following his death in 1826. Pushkin further emphasized Peter’s contentious status within nationhood by developing the identity crisis within St. Petersburg. The work of these two men cast Peter’s shadow over the Russian nationhood debate; a shadow that would only grow longer and darker with the rise of modern Russian historical scholarship in the mid nineteenth century.

--Sergei Solov’ev and the Rise of Professional Russian Scholarship--

Nikolai Karamzin’s scholarship bridges the divide between eighteenth and early nineteenth century historians due to his groundbreaking attempt at developing a national historical narrative for the Russian Empire. The practice of history had been growing steadily within Russia since the late eighteenth century and through Karamzin’s own period of academic fame as new Russian historians transformed “historical research and writing [into] tools for causal explanation of the past, for condemning and reforming contemporary abuses, and for

---

\(^{60}\) See Gogol’s short stories including *The Overcoat*, *Nevsky Prospect* and *The Nose* from the 1830s and 40s, Fedor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, 1866 and Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg*, 1916. Published over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these authors engaged with the contentious legacy of St. Petersburg and Peter the Great’s reforms.


discovering criteria and laws for charting future action.”\textsuperscript{63} The role of imperial historians gradually evolved to take on larger significance within the empire. Alexander Etkind develops this role further. He argues that the Russian Empire was engaged in the process of “internal colonization,” effectively establishing dominance and certain standards that were to be adopted by the Russian populace in the empire’s outer regions. Russia’s efforts to tame and reshape its vast territories stimulated the debate through the reactions of Russia’s nineteenth century historians. Sergei Solov’ev, Vasily Kliuchevskii and Pavel Miliukov identified Russian history as “the history of a country that colonizes itself.”\textsuperscript{64} Their efforts to explain the impact of this process on the course of Russian history strongly affected their interpretations of Peter’s legacy. Nicholas I’s statute of 1835 brought about the creation of departments in Russian history throughout the empire’s universities while stimulating discourses about cultural heritage and perhaps most importantly, a critical reexamination and in some cases open criticism of previous scholars including but not limited to Nikolai Karamzin and his efforts to document the history of the Russian state.\textsuperscript{65} His rejuvenation of the academic departments was just one form of internal colonization. While the 1830s and 1840s were a period of professional development within Russian academia, the period was also fraught with turmoil as the Westerner/Slavophile debate took shape and spilled over into university faculties.

Into this period of professional historical development stepped the singular figure of mid-nineteenth century Russian historical scholarship, Sergei Mikhailovych Solov’ev (1820-1879). Like Karamzin, Solov’ev studied the issue of a cohesive Russian historical narrative, but Solov’ev differed from Karamzin in his methodology and his professional development. Solov’ev entered Moscow University in 1838 where he studied under M.P. Pogodin and T.N. Granovsky.\textsuperscript{66} Pogodin was greatly inspired by Nikolai Karamzin’s work and he in turn trained Solov’ev thus establishing an easily defined lineage of philosophical development within the


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 162-163.

\textsuperscript{66} Mikhail Pogodin (1800-1875) was another mid-nineteenth century Russian historian and a member of the “Official School” of Russian history which strongly supported the “Official Nationality” program of Tsar Nicholas I. For more details see Anatole Mazour’s \textit{Modern Russian Historiography} (revised edition), page 90. Timofei Granovsky(1813-1855) was a staunch Westernizer and opponent of the “Official Nationality” movement. Whereas Pogodin represented the Romantic philosophies of the state oriented Slavophiles, Granovsky sat firmly with the Rationalist philosophy of the Westernizers. Their bifurcated academic rearing of Solov’ev would have profound implications for the academician’s development.
Russian historical profession. Following the completion of his studies, Solove’v joined the history faculty at Moscow State University where he trained future Russian historians such as Vasily Kliuchevskii while also tutoring the future Tsar Alexander III.67 Solove’v’s academic development occurred during the opening of the Westernizer/Slavophile debate and he gradually turned away from Slavophilism towards the attitudes of the Westernizers.68 His History of Russia from the Earliest Times, initiated in 1851 and unfinished at an impressive 29 volumes at his death in 1876 furthered the development of Russian national history.69 One of his defining contributions to Russian national history was his firm stance on the development of the national narrative. He averred that “all ‘epochs,’ ‘periods,’ and ‘eras’…were misleading, artificial and only obscured any view of the organic unity of historic events.”70 His interpretation of history as an “organic whole” developing over time is a clear example of what Anthony Smith has argued regarding the development of national identity through cultural interchanges. Solovev emphasized three primary factors which determined the course of development in a historical narrative: “the character of the natural environment in which the people settle; the character of the people…and the external pressures to which the people are subjected.”71 These three catalysts drove the development of the national historical narrative and impacted another key aspect of Solovev’s historical philosophy.

In a manner congruous with Karamzin’s scholarship, Solovev develops a strong dynamic link between the state and the nation that is indicative of the growth of nationalism in the nineteenth century when European historians were developing national histories with similar attitudes towards the state and nation.72 Although Solovev’s contributions to national history are well documented, his magnum opus, A History of Russia from Earliest Times is relatively devoid of new conclusions concerning Peter. Solovev’s analysis of Peter the Great was not limited to his multi-volume narrative of Russian history. His Public Readings on Peter the Great contain a great deal of information concerning his personal interpretations of Peter’s role in Russian

---

68 Mazour, Russian Historiography, 114.
70 Mazour, Russian Historiography, 115.
71 Ibid., 116.
72 Ibid., 117.
history and his opinion regarding preceding scholarship on the late tsar’s reign. Like Karamzin, Solov’ev established a definitive connection between Peter the Great’s reign and remote points in pre-Petrine Russian history such as the arrival of Rurik in Novgorod. His articulation of Russian history into a connected narrative established a cultural heritage akin to Karamzin’s academic endeavors.

In addition to developing connections between Petrine and pre-Petrine Russian history, Solov’ev synthesized a new “organic” interpretation of the Russian historical narrative that directly contributed to Russian nationhood. Solov’ev’s *Public Readings* were initially published in 1872 and were based on his own public lectures at Moscow University in 1852. Solov’ev was prolific in his analysis of Peter the Great throughout his career. The readings were published in 1872, and were critical of Peter’s laudatory treatment and his near godlike status in earlier historical accounts:

> Poets allowed themselves to chant ‘He is thy god, thy god to Russia.’ But in a calmer voice, not poetic, this view prevailed; bringing Peter’s Russia from nothingness into existence was a commonly used expression. I call this view unhistorical, because here the activity of one historical person [is] divorced from the historical activity of a whole people; a supernatural force was introduced into the life of the people…[and the] people were condemned to a completely passive attitude towards it; centuries of the life and activities of the people was declared unimportant; Russia and the Russian people did not exist until Peter.

The passage is indicative of Solov’ev’s treatment of history. He bemoans the nullification of the “centuries of life and activities of the people” in much the same way Karamzin mourned the loss of Russian cultural identity. Both scholars assert the primordial existence of the Russian nation and when viewed through the Ethno-Symbolist perspective, Solov’ev appears to establish the dynamic nature of the historical narrative by describing it as a developing “organic whole” constituted as the “life and work of the people.” Solov’ev’s “centuries of life and activities” can be interpreted as a primordial semblance of Smith’s “stratified or layered structure of social, political and cultural experiences and traditions laid down by successive generations of an

---

74 For more information on his various papers, reviews and publications see C.C. Dmitrieva’s analysis *S.M. Solov’ev: personalny ukazatel literatury (1838-1981).*
identifiable community.”  
He does not demean the activities and reforms of Peter’s reign but he argues against the singularity of Peter’s reign in the entire course of Russian history. He sees this “divorce” as an artistic invention borne out of archaic but impractical adoration within professional history and harmful to the greater history of the nation. Thus Solov’ev’s unique argument concerning Peter cannot be identified exclusively with the Slavophiles or Westernizers. Peter’s reign was not a rupture but rather a particularly active period of development that stood out from the pace of modernization in Europe. His account of Peter’s legacy is by no means developed along the vituperative lines of the Slavophiles but he does not advocate blind adoration of Peter.

Solov’ev addresses the Slavophilic nostalgia for Rus and its supposed superiority to the contemporary state of the Russian Empire: “Russia, according to a new perspective, not only was in nothingness before Peter, enjoyed being on the right and high, everything was good, morally pure and holy; but the appearance of Peter, who had violated the right for Russian life, and destroyed her people… [and] made discord.” Solov’ev counters both extremes against one another. He does not agree with the assertion that Russia was in “nothingness” or nonexistence, nor does he concur with the assertion that Russia was an idyllic paradise of moral and cultural purity. His tone is almost sarcastic and thus he stands roughly equidistant from both viewpoints of Peter. He acknowledges the dynamic nature of Peter’s reforms and his status a great historical figure but he does not discount the importance of the cultural precedents prior to Peter’s reign. It was these precedents that Peter broke with in the interest of reforming the nation. Ultimately Solov’ev views Peter as a great figure in Russian history contrary to the assertions of those whom he labeled “Romantic Nationalists” such as Karamzin and a major actor in Russia’s “chronicle of progress.” Sergei Solov’ev develops Peter as a flawed but progressive national figure who contributed to Russia’s historical development at a cost to certain elements of society. Solov’ev’s development of Russian history and heritage as a linear narrative of progress flies in the face of the Slavophiles. What he was doing, in essence, was building another national project within the debate that moderated Karamzin’s earlier approach.

---

76 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 171.
77 Ibid., 9.
78 Ibid., 3.
79 Siljak, “Sergei Solov’ev’s History of Russia,” *Historiography of Imperial Russia*, 220.
Solov’ev’s conclusions regarding the development of Russia’s historical narrative can be interpreted along the lines Anthony Smith has concluded about the cultural precedents in the formation of national identity. Smith’s analysis of national culture and ethnic identity as a “deposit of the ages” is congruent with Solov’ev’s opposition to the periodization of history and his own perception of Russian history as a progressive form of cultural and political development. Peter’s reign was an exceptionally dynamic period in the whole of Russian history thus explaining its controversial nature but the late tsar reformer was not the sole driving force of Russia’s historical maturation. Peter was just one part of a much larger chain of development including a number of political and cultural causal factors. Sergei Solov’ev’s Public Readings on Peter the Great is important as it marks the next stage of professionalization within the Russian academic community and diverges from Karamzin’s static analysis of Russian history. Solov’ev was the product of a new generation of professional, modern Russian historians and his analysis of the historical narrative as a progressive chain of development was revolutionary for his time. Moreover it was highly influential, becoming another part of the debate about the meanings of Peter and therefore another level in the ongoing process of Russian nationhood. Following initial publication in 1872, his work was cited or reviewed in 1878, 1882, 1901, and again in 1980. The consistent amount of scholarly attention dedicated to his collection of works is indicative of their continued importance within the Russian historical community.

80 Smith, Myths and Memories, 171.
82 Solov’ev’s theories regarding the organic development of Russian history were accompanied by the academic postulations of Alexander Gustavovich Brückner (1834-1896). Born in St. Petersburg to a Baltic-German family, Brückner was educated at the University of Dorpat and Heidelberg. He served as Professor of History at the Novorossiiskii Universit in Odessa and later at the University of Dorpat. Although he spent his career outside of Russia, Brückner indirectly contributed to Solov’ev’s analysis by positing that Russia had undergone the process of “Europeanization” for centuries instead of the process starting with Peter I. His primary work A History of Peter the Great discusses this theory at length. He argues: “Russia without Peter has turned to the European way, but owing to the genius and strength of will of Peter the Patriot (Petra-patriota), Russia particularly quickly and successfully moved forward in the previously specified direction.” (History of Peter the Great, 686) The text was originally published in German in 1879 but was translated and published in Russian in 1882. Brückner’s work was published during the twilight years of Solov’ev’s life but his theories are firm evidence that the idea of a dynamic historical narrative was spreading in European and Russian academic circles. Both scholars were contemporaries during the professionalization of the historical discipline; in fact both men had attended lectures by Leopold von Ranke, arguably the progenitor of modern historiography. They shared a similar academic upbringing and although Solov’ev achieved far greater prominence than Brückner, the latter’s theory of “Europeanization” is an important component to consider when examining the process of nationhood in Russia and its synchronicity with similar events in Europe. For more information on Brückner’s theory of Europeanization, see his work: History of Peter the
Solov’ev’s conclusions indicate that Russia’s politico-cultural identity was in flux from its earliest stages of development, thus contrasting with Karamzin’s assertion of cultural purity and stability during the Rus period. He bolsters the idea of a pre-modern sense of identity within the nationhood debate under the influence of disparate cultural elements. The conflict between Solov’ev and Karamzin’s versions of Russian identity was a crucial element of the nineteenth century nationhood discourse. At this stage of development, the debate revolved around the juxtaposition of Russian and European elements within early imperial conceptions of identity. Solov’ev’s conclusions demonstrate the dynamic nature of nationhood and reinforce the lack of hegemony or the domestic cultural purity sought by Karamzin. Contact had already occurred with Europe through Peter and thus like most ethnic or political communities throughout human history, foreign contact nearly always results in some form of transition or change within the society as it absorbs or is absorbed by an adjacent politico-cultural form of identity. This transfer had the effect of initiating the Westernizer/Slavophile debate whose ideological discrepancies propelled the debate onward while reinforcing the transitional nature of national identity.

--Vasily Kliuchevskii and the Twilight of Imperial Russian Historiography--

One of Sergei Solov’ev’s greatest contributions to Russian historiography cannot be found within his historical philosophies but rather within the academic products of his celebrated pupil Vasily Kliuchevskii (1841-1911). Kliuchevskii maintained a similar philosophical position between the Slavophile and Westernizer factions in Russian academia. Representing the next major stage of development in late Imperial Russian historiography, his scholarship is wedged firmly between Karamzin’s overly patriotic and romantic image of Russian history and Solov’ev’s dry catalogue of historical events in the Russian narrative. His work is a combination of professional historical scholarship and a sense of semi-poetic expression lacking in Solov’ev’s work. Like Solov’ev he formulated a linear historical narrative for Russia which stretched deep

Great, (St.Petersburg, 1882). For biographical information on Brückner see his entry in the online Russian Biographical Dictionary, http://www.rulex.ru/xPol/index.htm

83 It is important to note that Sergei Solov’ev and Vasily Kliuchevskii are both considered to be members of the “Juridical School” or “State School” of Russian historiography. The significance of the label is that they viewed the entire historical narrative through the philosophical lens of the formation of the Russian state. They differ from Karamzin in that the latter emphasizes the autocracy but only as a crucial element associated with Russia’s supposedly static cultural heritage. The duo make the state the center of their narratives but emphasize a dynamic narrative with an ancient historical heritage. The aforementioned labels are still considered controversial within the modern Russian historical discipline and are worthy of further evaluation concerning their link with Russia’s
into Russia’s convoluted past, creating the image of a clearly defined cultural heritage. Like his esteemed predecessors Karamzin and Solov’ev, Kliuchevskii developed his own multi-volume work, *A History of Russia*, which was largely published posthumously. Volume Four is devoted almost exclusively to Peter’s reign and Kliuchevskii’s interpretation of the tsar’s legacy. In keeping with preceding scholars’ work Kliuchevskii analyzes the politico-cultural implications and precedents for Peter’s reforms:

> The truth is that we must take care to distinguish between his fate-allotted tasks and his manner of accepting and fulfilling those tasks. The tasks in question lay in satisfying certain State and popular demands… in other words, Peter owed his programme neither to covenants nor to tradition, but to needs of State which could not be set aside when once they had made themselves manifest to all.

The passage highlights the bifurcated nature of Peter’s reforms, emphasizing that reforms based on the needs of the “State” preceded those focused on Russia’s “traditions” or cultural needs thus subsuming Peter’s desire for cultural synchronicity with the West beneath his overriding political pragmatism. The passage does not censure or laud Peter’s reforms; rather it explains the catalysts or the justification for Peter’s reforms. He goes on to identify Peter by the title, “the Reformer,” a title which is not inherently derogatory or laudatory but identifies Peter as a dynamic figure in the Russian historical narrative. Kliuchevskii’s initial characterization of Peter is congruous with the Westernizer interpretation of Peter as a necessary political reformer unconcerned with the cultural ramifications of his actions. His dissection of the driving forces behind Peter’s reforms and his use of the title, “the Reformer,” are relevant to his later analyses of the historiography of the Petrine Reforms.

---

84 Although his written historical works give considerable insights into his philosophical stance, Kliuchevskii’s lectures share many striking parallels with Anthony Smith’s work on Ethno-Symbolism. Kliuchevskii describes “the historical process [as] ‘an endless series of facts in an endless variety of combinations’ generated slow and gradual changes of society itself that was not logical, rational, moral, providential, or predetermined.” (Byrnes, 241) See Robert F. Byrne’s chapter “Kliuchevskii’s View of the Flow of Russian History” in Saunders’s *Historiography of Imperial Russia* for further information.

85 Mazour, *Russian Historiography*, 129-134.


87 Ibid., 46.

88 Kliuchevskii occupies a particular prominent but polemic space within late Imperial Russian historiography. His philosophical development of the teachings of Sergei Solov’ev as well as his training of an entire generation of future Russian historians have garnered him a considerable amount of attention in the modern period.
Chapter Ten focuses on Peter’s interaction with Russia’s traditions as well as the legacy of his reforms for the nation. Whereas the preceding passage was primarily political, the chapter in question delves into some of the cultural implications of Peter’s reign. Kliuchevskii summarizes the standing of the Petrine era within the Russian historical narrative and its corresponding historiography:

Writers…compressed the…philosophy of Russian history into an appreciation of those reforms, and so, through a sort of scientific foreshortening, caused that history’s whole significance to centre upon…Peter’s achievements…This has led to Peter’s reforms being taken as the one turning-point of Russian history, and at once a summary of our past and a presage of our future (which…[divides] Russian history into two periods…an ancient, a pre-Petrine, period, and into a modern, a post-Petrine one)…It was long before that diversity began to proceed from a proper study of…his record, since the 150 years between his death and the year 1864(the year when the fourteenth volume of Soloviev’s great work appeared.89

Like Solov’ev, Kliuchevskii is critical of preceding scholarship about Peter I. He does not support the adoration of Peter as a semi-divine figure who brought Russia out of darkness but treats him as a dynamic figure whose methodology attempted to rapidly modernize the country at a considerable cost to the Russian people. 90 Despite his criticism of the gilded legacy attributed to Peter and his overemphasized place in Russian history, Kliuchevskii is quick to label Karamzin as a “daring upholder of conservatism so effete as to denounce Peter’s sharp break with Russia’s past as a movement of an almost iconoclastic tendency.”91 His interaction with his predecessor’s scholarship not only signifies Karamzin’s continued significance to Russian nationhood but the debate’s evolution as Kliuchevskii and other future historians continuously challenged the work of their predecessors just as Solov’ev had done with Karamzin. Taken with his earlier use of the positive but vague term “Reformer,” the scholar clearly avoids the extremes of either the Westernizer or Slavophile factions and crafts a new image of Peter as both a positive and negative figure associated with progressive development. He engages with both his mentor, Solov’ev, and his distant predecessor Karamzin by formulating a larger historical narrative of the Russian state and avoiding the extremes of the Westernizer and Slavophile debates. Kliuchevskii’s scholarship is indicative of the moderation of the historiographical treatment of Peter as well as the development of a moderate perspective within the nationhood

89 Ibid., 208.
90 Ibid., 208.
debate as Russia entered the twentieth century. Russian historians were increasingly attempting to bridge the gap between the philosophical extremes of the historical profession in order to create a cohesive narrative of Russian history that in turn developed into a new stage of development for the nationhood discourse.

Kliuchevskii links the controversy regarding Peter’s reforms and his personal legacy directly to the rise of national scholarship. He addresses Russia’s quest for national identity as a response to European political catalysts:

“The general effect of Europe’s… rebound towards antiquity, a rebound born of hostility to the doings of the French Revolution and the French Empire, was everywhere to evoke a nationalist movement (natsionalnoe dvizhenie)…to attempt recovery of their political independence or their political solidarity…by the thirties and the forties of the nineteenth century the dispute over old and new Russia had developed into a regular European feud.”

The connection between the French Revolution and the rise of Nationalism within other European states highlights both the tone and the focus of his predecessor Karamzin. The passage summarizes Karamzin’s extreme reaction to Peter’s legacy and the developing rift between the interpretations of Old and New Russia throughout much of the nineteenth century. The debate over the two Russias was effectively a conflict between two competing perceptions of national identity. He argues that the split was a result of the quest for “political solidarity” within the Russian Empire’s political bonds, boundaries and the cultural duties of the Russian autocracy. Etkind highlights a critical aspect of this search for “political solidarity” as part of the larger imperial process of “internal colonization.” He includes Kliuchevskii’s assessment of Peter as “a guest in his own home,” setting Peter and his reforms apart from the broader narrative of the Russian people. Kliuchevskii argues that the growth of nationalism within the Russian Empire was born out of a response to revolutionary stimuli from the French Revolution and imperial stimuli such as “internal colonization.” From Kliuchevskii’s perspective the quest for stability within the autocracy became a search for a sense of cultural identity upon which a strong autocracy could rest, provoking the manifestation of cultural nationalism within the academic community.

---

92 Ibid., 210.
93 Etkind, Internal Colonization, 61.
Kliuchevskii’s analysis of Peter’s political and cultural legacy is not limited to the nineteenth century but also focuses on his legacy in the early eighteenth century immediately following his death in 1725. He argues that Peter’s reforms developed an ephemeral form of unity while he was alive: “The truth is that, until now, the sheer force of the Reformer’s iron will had kept people… united in at least a show of labour.” Kliuchevskii emphasizes the transitory nature of Peter’s secular form of unity and identity following his death. The focus on Peter’s will is important as it characterizes him as the binding instrument for the secular Russian state he was constructing but once he was gone, the bindings unraveled. He undermines the permanence of the social and political ties developed by Peter’s forceful reforms based on his strength. These political reforms on the behalf of the Russian state were meant to overlay and supersede previous forms of Russian politico-cultural unity by developing a new sense of identity wholly invested in the political apparatus of the Russian Empire. This effort was hamstrung by the widening cultural gap between Peter’s “Europeanized” political elites and the largely unchanged populace. He goes on to describe the contempt and scorn for Peter’s new elite due their taint of “‘Europeanism.’” This was not just cultural but political rejection as these new elites and their culture were tied into the new state apparatus, an apparatus that had been formed at great but necessary cost to the Russian people.

Kliuchevskii’s examination of Peter the Great expands upon Solov’ev’s scholarship and provides considerable insight into the advance of Russian nationhood through the spread of historical interpretations about Peter I. Like his predecessor he maintains the position of a scholarly moderate within the Russian historical discipline by balancing his work between the Slavophile and Westernizer factions. He has criticisms of Peter’s reign but he recognizes the driving force behind them and does not demonize Peter to the extent the Slavophiles would prefer. He takes considerable issue with Peter’s forceful methodology of reform and argues that the tsar’s failure to embrace a more gradual and organic process of development led to the almost immediate collapse of many of Peter’s reforms and the failure of his new state to provide a new sense of unity. The fact that Peter faced such considerable united resistance is testament to the Russian’s cultural willpower. The strength of this will is what Karamzin burnishes in his address to Alexander I but it does not mean that this sense of unity was static.

95 Ibid., 264
Robert Byrnes provides insight into some of Kliuchevskii’s greater contributions to the Russian historical profession. Kliuchevskii followed many of the teachings of his mentor Solov’ev, but he took them to another stage of development by emphasizing the connection between the development of Russian historiography and the nation. He asserted that “historiography was an essential part of the national past, one of the ‘bundles of realities’ that underwent constant modifications and transformed the country’s other elements.”\(^96\) These “bundles of realities” could be loosely interpreted as the sum of the diverse interpretations of national identity associated with nationhood.

Although Kliuchevskii’s personal scholarly contributions were significant, he established a far greater legacy by training an entire generation of future Imperial and Soviet historians including Pavel Miliukov, Mikhail Bogoslovskii and Mikhail Pokrovskii; the latter two will be discussed in the next chapter. Pavel Miliukov (1859-1943) was a Russian historian whose contributions to the historiography of Peter the Great and Russian nationhood would have profound implications for the early post-Revolutionary period when Marxist historiography began to establish academic dominance within the Soviet historical profession. Miliukov became deeply involved in the Russian revolutionary movement of the early twentieth century until his departure for France following the October Revolution. \(^97\) His career at the end of the nineteenth century was marked by a second academic rift within the scholarly community on par with the Westernizer/Slavophile debate: the Marxist/Populist debate. The latter feud was based on the role of seminal historical figures within the historical narrative. The Marxist factions subsumed historical personages beneath economic hierarchies and structures, rendering the former insignificant. Standing diametrically opposed to this perspective were the Populists, whose theories averred that “historical causality” was propelled by the impact of individuals’ idiosyncratic nature. Like Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii with the Westernizer/Slavophile debate, Miliukov stood poised over the narrow gap between the two factions. \(^98\) He criticized and lauded


\(^{97}\) Laurie Manchester, “’Contradictions at the Heart of Russian Liberalism:’ Pavel Miliukov’s Views of Peter the Great and the Role of Personality in History as an Academic, a Politician, and an Émigré,” *Russian History*, 37 (2010), 103.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 107.
aspects of both factions’ theories just as he also stood between the Slavophile/Westernizer factions’ conflict over domestic versus Western aspects of cultural identity.

A prolific scholar, Miliukov devoted several of his larger monographs to Peter the Great’s cultural, political and economic legacies, further demonstrating his juxtaposition between the quartet of feuding academic factions.\(^9\) Miliukov focused on numerous aspects of Peter’s reign including an intensive analysis of his economic reforms and their overall impact on the welfare of the Russian populace, a scholarly indicator of Miliukov’s allowances to the Marxists.\(^10\) In addition to his economic focus, Miliukov continued Kliuchevskii’s examination of the execution of Peter’s reforms in context to larger events within his reign: “‘That Peter’s reform was violent was as little doubted by those who were conducting it as by those who were opposing it. It was violent…in those [reforms] that were essential and necessary…To recognize the violent, personal character of the reform does not mean…to deny its historical necessity.’”\(^11\)

While Miliukov acknowledged the costly aspects of Peter’s legacy, he attributed them to Peter’s “desire to reform Russia along European lines…‘in his reformatory aims…Peter remained…a committed nationalist.’”\(^12\) The violence of Peter’s reforms was directly related to Peter’s political pragmatism and his desire to reform the embryonic Russian Empire into a new image. Miliukov directly connects the “forceful and extreme character of Peter’s reforms as a byproduct of “the conservative reaction following the achievements of [Regent] Sophia.”\(^13\) Etkind’s scholarship engages with Miliukov’s theories regarding Imperial Russian “internal colonization” by connecting “‘internal colonization” with Peter, stating that “‘Russia’s colonization by the Russian people has continued throughout the whole duration of Russian history and has constituted one of its most characteristic features.”\(^14\) Peter’s violent reforms were meant to reshape the constituent components of the nascent Russian Empire, thus serving as an early example of imperial “internal colonization.” The future scholarly developments within nationhood were

---

\(^9\) In addition to his *Outlines of the History of Russian Culture*, his other works included *Gosudarstvennoe khoziastvo Rossii v pervoi XVIII stolettiia i reforma Petra Velikogo* (The State Economy of Russia in the First Quarter of the Eighteenth Century and the Reforms of Peter the Great), *Petr I Alekseevich Velikii* (Peter I Alekseevich the Great), *Petr Velikii i evo reforma* (Peter the Great and his Reforms), *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul’tury* (Outlines of the History of Russian Culture), and *Peter I*.

\(^10\) Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, 176.

\(^11\) Ibid., 179.

\(^12\) Laurie Manchester, “Contradictions at the Heat of Russian Liberalism,” *Russian History*, 120-121.


\(^14\) Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 68.
linked with this imperial mandate, reinforcing Peter’s personal if unconscious connection to the process of Russian nationhood.

Miliukov’s academic career marks a turning point in the Russian historical profession and the ongoing discourse over defining Russianness. His scholarly training occurred in a time when Russia was entering a revolutionary age, both within the political sphere and the academic realm. The revolutionary events of the early twentieth century destroyed the Russian Empire and brought about the rise of the Marxist school of historiography. Miliukov and his Kliuchevskiiian peers bridged the gap between the imperial and early Soviet eras by implementing elements of imperial and Soviet scholarship into their analyses. Although Miliukov’s academic career continued until his death in 1943, long after the October Revolution, the Bolshevik takeover forced Miliukov to flee to France, detaching him from the transitional Russian scholarly community. Their interaction with imperial scholarship as well as Soviet sanctioned Marxist historiography would take the works of Karamzin, Solov’ev, Kliuchevskii and Miliukov to a new level of significance within the debate as future historians built upon their philosophical foundations in order to reform Russian national identity as they saw fit.

--Overview of Imperial Russian National Identity--

Karamzin, Solov’ev, Kliuchevskii and Miliukov each represented a stage in the development of the Russian historical profession and with it, Russian nationhood. Karamzin predated the rise of professional historical scholarship but his attempts to develop an idealized cultural heritage for Russia by demonizing Peter set the foundation for future professional Russian historians and cultural figures such as Alexander Pushkin. Solov’ev rose to prominence in tandem with professional historical scholarship during the mid-nineteenth century and established the idea of a dynamic historical narrative for Russia but like Karamzin he synthesized the image of a timeless cultural heritage deserving of memorialization but not along the romantic lines of Karamzin. Kliuchevskii took the ideas of Solov’ev to the next philosophical stage by asserting the strong connection between the seemingly disjointed cultural and political elements in Russian society and the greater Russian historical narrative. Kliuchevskii’s immediate impact was carried up to and past the October Revolution by his pupils such as Pavel Miliukov while Mikhail Bogoslovskii and Mikhail Pokrovskii dueled over the nature of their mentor’s analysis
of the Russian historical narrative, all the while confronting the rising school of Marxist Historiography with its own perspective on the national historical narrative.

The active nature of Russian nationhood within the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was due to a larger philosophical crisis gripping the Russian Empire. Susana Rabow-Edling argues that the Slavophiles and their philosophical rivals the Westernizers were the product of an identity crisis within Russia’s elite cultural ranks.\(^{105}\) The former’s Romantic philosophy idealized the Russian way of life to the exclusion of foreign cultural elements but cannot be considered synonymous with the “Official Nationality” of Emperor Nicholas I due to the latter’s focus on the concentrated power of the Autocrat rather than the more populist vision of the cultural unity of the people. The Westernizers countered the Slavophiles’ Romanticism with their extroverted attitude towards other European philosophies concerning cultural enlightenment and national identity. By 1917 the debate between the Westernizers and Slavophiles had evolved considerably and become firmly enmeshed within the debate as an endemic point of contention. The debate’s evolutionary nature within Russian academia reinforces the Ethno-Symbolist interpretation of the nationhood discourse as a process of accumulation and development. Historians such as Karamzin, Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii are important as they are the ones who laid the theoretical foundations of Russian nationhood discourse. The scholarly products of Russia’s imperial historians established strong foundations for the Russian nationhood discourse by establishing a large catalogue of scholarly works discussing the issue of nationhood and Peter’s role in affirming or denigrating its formation. Their analysis of Peter the Great as well as their varied interpretations of Russian nationhood stimulated a prominent debate that would be modified and built upon by later generations of historians in the Soviet Union.

The October Revolution in 1917 initiated a period of transition within the former Russian Empire where the Bolsheviks aimed to reorder the former imperial territories and redefine the Russian conception of history. The establishment of Soviet power created a brief hiatus within the debate as Marxist historians diverted their focus from nationhood towards their higher politico-cultural theory of Marxist internationalism. As the Bolsheviks extended their authority into the realm of academia they redeveloped the philosophical foundations governing Russian historical scholarship.

The newly installed Bolsheviks held considerable contempt towards tsarist academic institutions and their documentation of Russia’s historical development. Michael David-Fox’s article “Symbiosis to Synthesis: The Communist Academy and the Bolshevization of the Russian Academy of Sciences” analyzes the Bolshevik conflict with the Imperial Academy of Sciences. His analysis of the struggle between the “oldest Russian scholarly institution” and the Bolshevik authorities provides a description of the harsh realities facing the imperial academic institution: “The bolshevization of the Academy of Sciences … represented the forced marriage of two intellectual worlds…The curious bond between top Bolshevik intellectuals and eminent scientists was, in part, deliberately cultivated; in part, it was imposed by the course of the revolution.”

The situation facing the Imperial Academy applied to virtually all of Russia’s academic institutions as Bolshevik scholars began their struggle against the so-called “bourgeois academia” in order to achieve a form of “institutional hegemony” within the Soviet Union’s intellectual establishments. Professional historical scholarship was stymied by the rapid implementation of the Marxist interpretation of history through repression of contrary


107 David-Fox’s article focuses exclusively on the transformations of the Imperial Academy of Sciences but his works Revolution of the Mind and his co-edited work with György Pétéri, Academia in Upheaval focus on the wider Bolshevik efforts to achieve intellectual hegemony. These efforts included the creation of various Soviet academic institutions such as the Communist Academy, the Society of Red Professors and the Society of Marxist Historians. Some of these institutions were meant to usurp prerevolutionary institutions while others were meant to merge with and alter the structure of institutions such as the interaction between the Communist Academy and the Imperial Academy of Sciences.

methodologies and the merger of Bolshevik and prerevolutionary institutions. The Marxists viewed history as a dynamic, progressive narrative driven primarily by economic phenomenon and the forces of class warfare, to the exclusion of great historical figures such as Peter the Great. A significant philosophy that defined their historical approach involved their Internationalist attitude to history, which eschewed the scholarship of Imperial Russia’s nationalist historians. Despite the support of Lenin and the new Bolshevik elites, the chaos of the October Revolution and Civil War wracked the transition to Marxist historiography with frequent setbacks and numerous divisions within the academic community.

The supposed divide of 1917 may not have been as deep as often assumed. Following the October Revolution analysis of Peter the Great’s reign continued, albeit bifurcated into two opposing methodological schools of historiography. One trend extended the prerevolutionary methodology while Marxist scholars espoused a perspective that denigrated Peter’s seminal historical status. The latter trend lasted a very short time and was rapidly cast aside as Stalinist scholars returned to the solid academic foundations established by Karamzin in 1811. Amongst the suppressed tsarist scholars, one academic stands out as an example of the plight of non-Marxist historians during the Pokrovskiiian period. Mikhail Bogoslovskii was a pupil of Vasily Kliuchevskii and completed a large number of works concerning Peter the Great prior to and following the revolution. Bogoslovskii defied the Marxist internationalist anathema against personal histories of great historical figures by publishing Peter the Great and His Reforms (Petr Velikii i ego reforma) in 1920 when Marxist historians were establishing control over the Russian historical profession. The text offers few original insights into Peter’s reforms or his potential role in nationhood; rather its very existence and successful publication is indicative of the persistence of non-Marxist historical scholarship in the early Soviet Union as well as the limited punitive response from the Soviet state and academic community.

---

109 The Marxist interpretation of history is derived from the idea of dialectical materialism which argues that the human need to fulfill various material and physical needs is one of the key dynamic forces behind the path of human progress. The quest to fulfill these needs leads to diversification in the production of the required goods which in turn lead to the construction of stratified social hierarchy or a series of social classes. The endemic inequality between these classes promotes struggle between them which further propels the narrative of mankind forward. Individual human action and agenda is subsumed beneath that of broader economic processes and their impact on human society. For further information see: The House s of History by Anna Green and Kathleen Troup.

The text does not focus on Lenin or the major themes of class warfare and economic determinism. Peter is portrayed as the prime mover of Russian fortunes: “This entirely new and complex government machine would serve the broader goals that Peter the Great outlined for his state. His state had to be in-line with other European countries and... keep up with them.”

Bogoslovskii assigns considerable agency to Peter by examining the state as a possession of Peter and the sole product of his will. He emphasizes Peter’s unique physical qualities in a manner exemplifying his seminal place within the Russian historical narrative: “Above the entire crowd, however great it may have been, the tsar stood out noticeably, being nearly seven feet tall.” Although Peter’s physical stature was unique, Bogoslovskii develops this physical feature in such a way that Peter’s stature reflects the uniqueness of his personality and his place in history. The text is developed as a concise narrative of Peter’s life and reign from birth to death. Much of the work is devoted to summaries of the various reforms of his reign, but the final chapter, “Lichnost Petra Velikogo. —ego sotrudniki.—semeinye dela—prestolonasledie” (Personality of Peter the Great—His Staff—Family Affairs—Succession) focuses on the unique qualities of his personality. He focuses on Peter’s development of the state which assigns dynamic agency to a key historical figure, in defiance of Marxist historiography, while also establishing that role in a non-cultural medium. His tutelage under Kliuchevskii becomes transparent at this point as Bogoslovskii’s mentor primarily focused on the development of the Russian state while composing his grand narrative of Russian history; a feat Bogoslovskii never attempted.

Bogoslovskii continued to publish several smaller works throughout the 1920’s concerning the impact of Peter the Great’s reign in various sectors of Russian society. His 1926 essay, Russkoe obshchestvo nauka pri Petre Velikom (Russian Society and Learning under Peter

111 Mikhail Bogoslovskii, Petr Velikii i ego reforma (Trans: Peter the Great and His Reforms) (Moscow: Tsentralnovo Torvarishchestva, 1920), 105.
112 Ibid., 105.
113 One of Bogoslovskii’s earlier works, Oblastnaia reforma Petra Velikago (Provincial Reforms of Peter the Great) offers insights into his theories concerning the interaction between Russian and European ideas concerning statecraft; ideas that illustrate the contention surrounding the interpretation and the portrayal of Russian Absolutism: “If only Russian reformers were not persistent conservatives, scooping ideas from ancient structure with their dim ideas, or ideologies, able to create political structures only from stock.” (Bogoslovskii, Mikhail. Oblastnaia reforma Petra Velikago. Provintsia, 1719-27 gg. (Trans: Regional Reforms of Peter the Great: Provinces 1719-1727), (Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1902), 19.) Bogoslovskii’s analysis refutes the utility of previous politico-cultural constructs in the contemporary Russian Empire and intimates that the constant reliance on “stock” ideas from the distant past is inefficient and mitigates the impact of reformers.
the Great), analyzes the educational and philosophical impact of Peter the Great’s reign with
particular emphasis on his founding of the Academy of Science (akademii nauk) in St.
Petersburg. \textsuperscript{114} The essay details Peter’s travels abroad and his interaction with scholars in
Holland, England, Germany and France as well as his election to the French Academy of
Sciences. \textsuperscript{115} His conclusions qualify Russia’s intellectual status prior to Peter while emphasizing
his dynamic influence on the intellectual development of the Russian Empire’s populace:

Yes, Russian society at the beginning of the eighteenth century was dark and
unenlightened, but not hopelessly dark. Peter went to meet the needs and wishes of the
Russian people and in this case, as in others, was ahead of his time, created more than
was desired, and gave more than was asked like a good householder readying a reserve
for the future, creating the Academy of Sciences where there was only…the lower
schools. \textsuperscript{116}

His portrayal of Peter is interesting in that he reassigns agency to the Russian people rather than
the will of the autocrat. Bogoslovskii assigns Peter the role of a provider for the people’s needs,
thereby implying a need for his intellectual reforms. The commonly held motif of reform by
force is absent from his conclusion. Peter is not reduced to a passive role but his autocratic status
is buried beneath his service to the people. His dynamic personality remains etched in
Bogoslovskii’s analysis but Peter’s progressivism is not based solely the strength of his will but
rather focuses on his intellectual generosity to the people and his foresight to found the Academy
of Sciences at a time when Russia lacked a quality educational system. \textsuperscript{117}

Bogoslovskii’s continued academic interest in Peter the Great’s reign as well as his
consistent publication of Petrine focused texts throughout the 1920s is an example of the
perpetuation of imperial or populist scholarship during the Soviet Union’s early years. Although
Marxist historiography was state sanctioned and enjoyed greater prestige, the imperial
interpretation never fully vanished. He continued his academic research concerning Peter

\textsuperscript{114} Mikhail Bogoslovskii, \textit{Russkoe obschestvo nauka pri Petre Velikom} (Trans: Russian Society and Learning under
Peter the Great) (Leningrad/St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaya Akademicheskaya Tipographiya, 1926), 1.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 10-13.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 26-27.
\textsuperscript{117} Bogoslovskii published a later text, \textit{Administrativnye preobrazovaniya Petra Velikogo v 1699—1700}
(Administrative Transformations of Peter the Great) in 1929 detailing Peter’s administrative reforms during the
early years of his reign. Bogoslovskii does not assign greater significance to these reforms but analyzes the minutia
of Peter’s bureaucratic edicts in order to develop a concise narrative of Peter’s multifaceted approach to forming a
new Russian state apparatus. Like \textit{Russkoe obschestvo nauka pri Petre Velikom} Bogoslovskii analyzes another
individual component of the Petrine era.
throughout the 1920s up until his death in 1929 which preceded his erstwhile Marxist colleague Mikhail Pokrovskii’s death by three years. Their academic divergence was just one skirmish in a larger academic civil war that lasted from 1917 to 1932 when Old Guard tsarist historians and revolutionary Marxist historians formed a pronounced academic rift among the academic progeny of Vasily Kliuchevskii. Mikhail Pokrovskii arose as the champion of the Marxist historians while his former peers such as Mikhail Bogoslovskii continued to compose historical works following the populist interpretation of the late nineteenth century. Bogoslovskii continued to analyze Peter’s contentious role in the methodological manner of his mentor Kliuchevskii whereas Pokrovskiiian methodology rendered Peter’s person a historical non-entity and the economic events of his reign, the only phenomena worthy of significant study.

The militant internationalism of the Marxists was not to be taken lightly as the new Marxist academics were supported by the Soviet state. The prerevolutionary historians had lost the sponsorship of the tsarist state to find it replaced by a new and hostile government that viewed their work as counterproductive and seditious. Vera Tolz describes the severity of the threat facing tsarist academics in her analysis of the post-revolutionary treatment of the Imperial Academy of Sciences:

“When the first arrests among the academy’s staff began on November 24, 1929, those arrested were accused of setting up an underground organization…Around 150 people were implicated in what the OGPU called the Case of the Academy (akademichkoe delo). Those arrested included four academics (Slavist Nikolai Petrovich Likhachev and historians Liubavskii, Platonov, and Evgenii Viktorovich Tarle118).

118 Tolz, “The Formation of the Soviet Academy of Sciences: Bolsheviks and Academics in the 1920s and 1930s,” 61. Tarle’s existence is particularly tragic as Bogoslovskii was saved from repression by death in 1929. Tarle on the other hand outlasted Lenin and Stalin until his own death in 1955. Like many prerevolutionary historians, Tarle initially avoided repression by the Soviet authorities. Following the rise of the Pokrovskiiian School, Tarle came under increasing academic scrutiny from the Soviet authorities due to his incongruity with Pokrovskiiian interpretations. He was briefly imprisoned in Leningrad in 1930 and later exiled to Kazakhstan in 1931 but returned shortly thereafter to his teaching position at the University of Leningrad. Tarle partially converted to the Pokrovskiiian interpretation of Russian history and survived the fall of Pokrovskii and the rise of Stalinist historical scholarship. Although he did not specifically address the issue of Russian nationhood or the Petrine era, Tarle’s career is a perfect example of the treatment of prerevolutionary historians and their scholarship. Tarle was only able to retain his academic practice by converting to the regime’s new dogma and even then he would suffer additional scrutiny under Stalin. Ann Erickson’s April 1960 article “E.V. Tarle: The Career of a Historian under the Soviet Regime” offers a compelling view of Tarle’s career and fateful encounter with Pokrovskii. It can be found at the American Slavic and East European review, Vol. 19, No. 2.
Despite the hostile conditions and the overwhelming pressure of the Soviet state there was no clean break between tsarist and Marxist historiography. Bogoslovskii was not alone in his struggle against the rise of Marxist historiography but his professional emphasis on the significance of the Petrine era places him within a unique niche of post-revolutionary historical scholarship. Bogoslovskii’s continued focus on Peter’s personal role within the Russian historical narrative ran contrary to the scholarship of his fellow Kliuchevskiiian peer, Mikhail Pokrovskii. The former’s prerevolutionary scholarship can best be described as an academic foil to Pokrovskii’s Marxist materialist interpretation of Russian history. His prolific scholarship on the Petrine era focused on the larger significance of his reign as well as the minutia of various reforms enacted by Peter throughout his reign. Bogoslovskii continued to emphasize the unique dynamism of Peter’s personality and the seminal nature of his reign in Russia’s progressive historical development. Like Karamzin, Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii, Marxist historians would eventually develop their own national histories of the Soviet Union but these histories demoted Peter from his prominent if contentious place in the narrative. Scholarship concerning Russian national identity and Peter’s role in the development of identity were largely ignored or downright refuted by Marxist historians. There were those who resisted pressure to transmute their scholarship into a form accepted by the Soviet government and academic community.

Non-Marxist academic activities established a connection between tsarist and proto-Soviet forms of historiography, countering the theory of a clean philosophical separation between the two groups. Boris Anan’ich and Viktor Paneiakh’s chapter, “The St. Petersburg School of History and Its Fate,” provides an example of tsarist historians continuing their work throughout the changing academic and political climate. Specifically they analyze a number of post-revolutionary academic kruzhoks, or “circles” that continued to meet despite the restrictions of the Soviet authorities. Many of the kruzhoks consisted of younger historical scholars led by older academics such as S.F. Platonov and Evgenii Tarle. The kruzhoks were not born from defiance of the Bolsheviks but unconsciously fell afoul of the Soviet authorities; in fact they were a common occurrence prior to the October Revolution. Barbara Walker’s book Maximilian Voloshin and the Russian Literary Circle describes the kruzhoks “a central phenomenon of Russian intellectual life…[where] members of the Russian educated elite gathered themselves throughout this period into small groups dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual and educational
development and high culture.”¹¹⁹ After the October Revolution these groups were often considered seditious and were actively monitored, repressed or taken over by the Soviet authorities.¹²⁰ Deteriorating academic and political conditions transformed these gatherings into philosophical havens for Russia’s pre-revolutionary historians.¹²¹ Although Anan’ich and Paneiakh focus specifically on the St. Petersburg school of historiography, their analysis of these kruzhoks offers insight into the post-revolutionary activities:

A very specific historiographical axis was being developed...during the 1920s, one that drew on the academic traditions of St. Petersburg. This group aspired to a special place in our national historiography...The kruzhki were a natural form of scholarly interaction—one, however, that conflicted with the government’s course toward establishing control of the historical discipline and confining it within...official ideology.¹²²

The post-revolutionary kruzhki were not established specifically to continue the work of nationalist scholarship but rather to continue developing the Russian historical discipline with the methodology established during the tsarist period. The unwillingness of these scholars to abandon their academic roots, combined with their informal atmosphere of academic interchange, made them prime targets for the authorities. The sparring between the tsarist and Marxist historians was a crucial moment within Russian nationhood where the older methodology struggled to persist in spite of pressure from the Marxists to abandon it.

-The Red Historian-

Although the activities of pre-revolutionary scholars are important to understanding the underground survival of the debate, it is equally important to analyze the foe with whom they contended. Mikhail Pokrovskii (1868-1932) was the founder of the Pokrovskiian “School” of Russian history and one of the leading proponents of orthodox Marxist historiography. His

¹²⁰ Walker’s book focuses primarily on the literary kruzhoks developed by Voloshin and Gorki but she analyzes the variety of methods the Soviet utilized when dealing with the kruzhoks. While some kruzhoks were disbanded, others were integrated “into the emerging Soviet system of bureaucratized welfare...By the end of Stalin’s rule [this merger] had become one of a great carrot chain of social services and privileges for Russian writers that would bind them to the Soviet state perhaps as much as the whip of censorship and fear.” (Walker, 5). The variation between the punitive and conciliatory methods of the Soviet state meant that cooperation and merger could be richly rewarded whereas resistance frequently led to severe consequences.
¹²² Ibid., 153, 152.
training under the tsars was significant to his Marxist scholarship under the Soviets. Born in 1868 to a family of state officials and church leaders, Pokrovskii was reared in a well-educated and financially secure environment. He attended Moscow University where he studied history under Vasily Kliuchevskii, one of Russia’s preeminent nineteenth century historians, whose work helped establish the theory that interactions between the social classes significantly accelerated the development of the Russian state into its present form rather than the state being the result of autocratic design. Pokrovskii’s political activism increased after he received his diploma in 1891 and took up his advanced studies in Moscow. His early works were not aligned with Marxist ideology but rejected the Russian autocracy’s formative role in the state, an attitude that resulted in his being banned from public lecturing.\footnote{George Enteen, \textit{The Soviet-Scholar Bureaucrat: M.N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marist Historians} (London: Pennsylvania State University, 1978), 11-29.} He returned to his academic pursuits after the 1905 revolution and connected with Lenin in Finland at the Social Democrats Congress in 1907. By this point Pokrovskii had joined the Forwardist movement in the Bolsheviks who “favored militant means of action” rather than Lenin’s theory of “employing parliamentary institutions for revolutionary means.”\footnote{Ibid., 19.} Despite his ideological conflict with Lenin, Pokrovskii later fell in with his political faction. The relationship between the two would be mutually beneficial in the early years of the Soviet Union’s growth and development.\footnote{Following the Bolshevik overthrow of the Provisional Government, Pokrovskii established himself firmly with the developing Soviet academia and maintained close connections with state interests concerning education. He served as Assistant People’s Commissar for Education from 1918 until his death in 1932 and was the progenitor of many early Soviet academic institutions including The Institute of History, the Society of Marxist Historians and the Institute of Red Professors, to name just a few. He was a vehement opponent of doctoring Marxist academic philosophy and produced a considerable number of historical works including a large narrative history of Russia. In spite of his somewhat meteoric rise in Soviet academia, his greater significance is limited by the fact that his academic philosophy was refuted and lambasted by Stalinist scholars following his death in 1932. (Mikhail Pokrovskii, \textit{Brief History of Russia}. Vol. 1 Trans: D.S. Mirsky Bristol, UK: Burleigh Press, 1933 7-10.)}

Pokrovskii was not Kliuchevskii’s only pupil to turn towards Marxist historiography. Nikolai Alexandrovich Rozhkov (1868-1927) endeavored to develop a Marxist historical narrative for the Soviet Union. His work \textit{Iz russkoj istorii} is a collection of essays concerning a number of historical topics. His chapter entitled \textit{Denezhnoe khozyaistvo i formy zemleladienii v novoi Rossii} (The Monetary Economy and Land Tenure in the New Russia) analyzes the Westerner and Slavophile interpretations of the Russian historical narrative with regard to the role of Peter’s reforms:
Not so long ago…it was accepted that the beginning of the new Russian history was the
reforms of Peter the Great…In the eyes of extreme Westerners, until this time Russia did
not even have a historical life…The Slavophile School…saw Peter’s reforms and their
subsequent history only as a sad deviation from the native beginnings of a national-
Russian life.126

Rozhkov advocated a focus on the history of capitalism’s development within Russia, a topic
whose chronology preceded the Petrine era. Rozhkov never succeeded in developing a large
Marxist historical narrative of Russian history. His choice of research topics varied considerably
and he concerned himself primarily with the development of major economic and political trends
in the Russian Empire and their relation to contemporary Marxist historiography. Although not a
direct contributor to Pokrovskii’s efforts, he should be remembered as another of Kliuchevskii’s
academic progeny, allied with Pokrovskii, who sought to establish the Marxist school of
historiography in the Soviet Union. His inclusion of Peter within his Marxist scholarship was
prophetic as it foreshadowed the later rise of Stalinist historiography and the union between
semenal historical figures and Marxist ideology.

Mikhail Pokrovskii’s contributions to the historiographical debates on Peter the Great’s
legacy were defined by his unique application of Marxist theory to preceding scholarship
concerning Peter and the Russian historical narrative. George Enteen’s work The Soviet Scholar-
Bureaucrat provides a synopsis of Pokrovskii’s basic philosophies:

Pokrovskii’s first principle is historical determinism. People, like all other natural objects,
are subject to laws. Society, like nature, is as it must be…The theory that meets the test
most successfully, in his opinion, is economic determinism…The next principle is
historical materialism, which is a refinement of the postulates of historical
determinism…Marxism is ‘more complicated than simple economic materialism:
Marxism not only explains history by economic causes but depicts these causes in the
precise form of class conflict.’127

Pokrovskii’s scholarship attempted to reconcile Marxist ideology with historical
scholarship by developing a scientific form of Marxist historical theory that excluded tsarist and
alternate Marxist ideologies that developed liberalized accounts with reduced emphasis on
economic determinism and class warfare. 128 Amongst this supposedly impure pre-revolutionary
scholarship was the tsarist focus on major historical figures such as Peter I, figures whose legacy

127 Ibid., 30-31.
128 Ibid., 32-33.
was anathema to the developing theme of class warfare as their individual roles were not of the collectivist nature emphasized by Pokrovskii. Despite their efforts, the Marxists would find that the historical foundations of figures such as Peter the Great ran too deep and their connection to nationhood was too strong, inevitably the Soviets would anchor their regime to these historical pillars of stability.

Three works strongly reflect Pokrovskii’s path of Marxist development and his interaction with preceding forms of imperial scholarship. In response to his mentor Kliuchevskii’s scholarship, Pokrovskii’s five volume work, *Russkaia istoriia s drevneshich vremen* (*Russian History since Ancient Times*) is his philosophical response to Kliuchevskii’s *History of the Russian State*. The work pays homage to his mentor while implementing the basic economic theories that became central to his later scholarship. These theories included the value of class warfare as well as the dynamic agency of the spread of merchant capitalism in Russia. The next stage of Pokrovskii’s academic evolution was his work, *Ocherk istorii russkoii kultury* (*Historical Sketch of Russian Culture*), which outlines major movements in cultural Russian history from the Marxist economic perspective. The final piece in Pokrovskii’s Marxist trilogy, *Russkaia Istoriya v samom schatom ocherke* (*Russian History in a Short Outline*) is considered a scholarly merger of the previous works and is the culmination of his Marxist analysis of the Russian historical narrative. Published during the first quarter of the twentieth century, these three works chart Pokrovskii’s departure from the prerevolutionary historical scholarship of luminaries such as Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii for a new Marxist interpretation of Russian history.

Pokrovskii’s *Russkaia Istoriya s Drevneshich Vremen* (*Russian History since Ancient Times*) pays homage to the historical narrative of his mentor-predecessor, Vasily Kliuchevskii. The multi-volume text refers back to imperial scholars such as Sergei Solov’ev and Alexander

---

129 Pokrovskii argued that because previous tsarist historians had failed to apply the idea of “class conflict” to their interpretive efforts, their supposedly “objective” accounts in fact reflected their own biases when it came to social strata and the unmistakable stain of “bourgeois literature, and bourgeois science” which could only be expunged by acknowledging the importance of class struggle. His scholarship focused on the interaction between the “economic base”, the proletariat and the “economic superstructure”, the nobility and other leading officials or lords in pre-Revolutionary Russian history. (Enteen, *The Soviet-Scholar Bureaucrat*, 32, 34).

130 James D. White, “M.N. Pokrovskii’s Interpretations of Russian History,” in *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 175-177.

Brückner and their contributions to the Russian historical narrative. Pokrovskii refers to Brückner and Solov’ev by describing their narrative histories of the Russian Empire as “the first step towards a truly scientific understanding of the ‘Europeanization of Russia.’”¹³² His reference to his historical predecessors is significant in that he references philosophical antecedents from their scholarship, specifically their work on the largely cultural process of Russian “Europeanization”. Pokrovskii acknowledges the process of “Europeanization” as one of several key dynamic forces operating within Russia, but his economic perspective of Russian history becomes apparent in his chapter entitled “Mercantilism.” The chapter covers the growth of the economic phenomenon in Russia and its impact on the course of Russian history. He describes Peter as “one of the representatives, of…the current economic policy (mercantilism) of his time, to say a long time…Petrine Russia was already familiar with this stage.”¹³³ His analysis portrays Peter as a dynamic participant in a larger economic process rather than the progenitor of Russian mercantile growth. Pokrovskii further qualifies Peter’s role in Russia’s economic development within his chapter entitled “Promyshlenaia politika Petra” (Industrial Politics of Peter) by limiting his responsibility for the plight of the working class due to his patronage of mercantile economic policies: “We would be mistaken, attributing this outcome to the individual error of ‘the Reformer’…Peter’s measure slightly benefited Russian industrial capitalism, but it was one of the forerunners…(of) feudal capitalism.”¹³⁴ Pokrovskii’s analysis of the Petrine era consists of several key philosophical elements: First, he does not completely dismiss Peter’s personal role in Russia’s historical development but rather sees him as playing an important but not outstanding role in the growth of capitalism within Russia, not all that dissimilar from Rozhkov’s abortive attempts at Marxist theory. Second, he absolves Peter of the bulk of the blame for the hardships developed by a capitalist system. Third, Pokrovskii develops the economic process of “mercantilism” as a major dynamic force within the Russian historical narrative, but he also takes note of the cultural process of “Europeanization” as another dynamic force within the Russian historical narrative. The author’s terminology contains a link to Kliuchevskii’s scholarship concerning Peter due to his use of the label “Reformer.” Pokrovskii’s scholarship includes several sections focused on the dynamic influence of economic processes

¹³² Mikhail Pokrovskii, Russkaya Istoria s drevneishik vremen (Trans: Russian History since Ancient Times) (Moscow: Tipo-Litografiya T-VA, 1913), 77.
¹³³ Ibid., 107-108.
¹³⁴ Ibid., 129.
within the Russian Empire, but his analysis contains antecedents from his mentor Kliuevskii and scholars such as Sergei Solov’ev and Alexander Brückner. His transition to the Marxist historical perspective is in progress but it develops in his scholarship gradually rather than in an abrupt break with previous academic traditions. He continues to expand his Marxist analysis of Russian history and culture in his next work, *Ocherk istorii russkoe kultury* (Short History of Russian Culture).

Pokrovskii’s *Ocherk istorii russkoe kultury* (Short History of Russian Culture) was originally published in 1914, shortly after the release of his *Russkaya Istoria s drevneshich vremen* (Russian History since Ancient Times). His survey of Russian cultural developments reflects his developing Marxist perspective on Russian history. He refers to the Petrine era several times throughout the book and its relationship to larger economic trends from that time period:

The greatest of the Russian Wars of the XVII-XVIII centuries, the so-called Great Northern War, was inspired by the trade idea, formulated for fifty years by a commercial man, not a Russian, but one who understood the commercial relations that existed during that time in Eastern Europe…Russia under Peter definitely takes the path of *mercantilism*. His perspective on the Great Northern War argues that economic ideas were developed by a foreign commercial expert who understood how to manipulate commercial currents. Pokrovskii labels this “torgovy chelovek” (commercial man) as a Swedish commercial agent by the name of “DeRhodes” (De-Rodes). Pokrovskii’s analysis of the development of the commercial theories that provoked the Great Northern War assigns agency to foreign elements within the Russian historical narrative by naming the economic formulator and emphasizing the seminal status of the Great Northern War within the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Peter is mentioned later in the passage but the agency attributed to his person is considerably less than the agency attached to him in Pokrovskii’s *History of Russia from Earliest Times*. The Great Northern War (1700-1721), a major event within the Petrine era, is developed as a significant event in Russia’s development, but Peter is not directly linked with the conflict and his personal commercial goals. Responsibility for the economic ideas which initiated the transformative war is assigned to a

---

135 James D. White, “M.N. Pokrovskii’s Interpretations of Russian History,” 175.
136 Mikhail Pokrovskii, *Ocherk Istorii russkoe kulturi* (Trans: Short History of Russian Culture) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo, 1925), 76.
non-Russian commercial figure. The growing significance of economic factors is readily apparent as Pokrovskii continues to develop the significant ramifications connected with the growth of capitalism within the Russian Empire while ascribing greater significance to economic theorists and agents in lieu of major, dynamic leaders such as Peter the Great.

Despite Pokrovskii’s increased attention to economic figures within the historical narrative, Peter is not completely neglected. In fact he is directly compared against a later Russian monarch with a similarly dynamic reign:

Already in the eighteenth century merchant capitalism in Russia had captured the process of exchange. Prior to that time, in the interval, the chronological boundaries of which are, on the one hand, the reforms of Peter (1690-1720) on the other, the reforms of Alexander II (1860-1870), Russia dominated the mixed type of economy: exchanged on a capitalist basis, products were not capitalist handicraft production—but mainly the products of peasant labor.¹³⁷

Peter I and Alexander II are used as benchmarks for a period of dynamic capitalist economic development which is set within the larger scope of Russia’s historical narrative. Peter’s reign is developed as the point of origin for mercantile capitalism while Alexander’s is viewed as the end point. Pokrovskii implies that merchant capitalism had already penetrated Russia prior to the eighteenth century but witnessed a period of considerable growth from the Petrine era to the reign of Alexander II. Both rulers’ reigns are remembered as periods of progressivism when Russia underwent a series of social and economic changes, but Pokrovskii analyzes the individual rulers as historical markers rather than major figures whose actions directly propelled the development of capitalism within the Russian Empire. Neither Peter nor Alexander II are expunged from the record but they are portrayed as initiators of economic development within the larger historical and economic narratives set during their respective reigns.

Pokrovskii’s *Short History of Russian Culture* analyzes a wide variety of events within the Russian Empire’s history but his analysis increasingly focuses on the role of economic movements and figures within the historical narrative rather than the role of Russia’s monarchs and other servitors of the imperial state. His analysis is markedly different from his previous *History of Russia from Earliest Times* which still bears many of the hallmarks associated with his academic predecessors such as Kliuchevskii and Solov’e. The final stage of Pokrovskii’s

¹³⁷ Ibid., 80.
methodological transfer to the Marxist method of historiography occurs within the third work of the trilogy, *Russkaia Istoriia v samom szhatom ocherke* (Russian History in a Short Outline).

A philosophical merger of the preceding texts, the book is not a complete linear narrative of Russian history, but rather a collection of short chapters detailing certain dynamic periods and their relation to Russia’s economic development. Although only one section is devoted exclusively to the Petrine era, *Severnaya Voina i Rossiskaia Imperiia* (The Northern War and the Russian Empire), considerable economic importance is attributed to the war and the Petrine era. Like his analysis in his *Short History of Russian Culture*, the chapter provides a basic overview of the Great Northern War (1700-1721)\(^{138}\) but focuses primarily on Peter’s efforts to gather additional funds for the war effort and their greater significance of these efforts for Russia’s economic development: “Large merchants paid the government a certain amount, and in return received rights…As we see, the field of collecting taxes in the state of Peter and his successors, correctly reflects its core identity as the dominion of a trading capital…This commercial capital creates a strong central authority.”\(^{139}\) Pokrovskii’s chapter focuses on the financial and commercial implications of the Great Northern War. The military’s demand for larger amounts of money forced Peter to expand the tax base, thus opening the way for the growth of the merchant classes. He articulates this economic growth in political terms as he defines the newly formed empire as “the dominion of a trading capital.” The phrase closes the chapter and establishes a sense of finality to the role of merchants within the Russian Empire. In Pokrovskii’s mind Peter’s only role was to open the door for the merchants who assumed positions of power as they established a privileged position within the expanded imperial tax base so desperately required by the tsar. Pokrovskii does not bother with the cultural or even the broader diplomatic implications of the Great Northern War. Instead he concerns himself with the role of Peter’s economic endeavors in the creation of the Russian Empire. Cultural themes and their role in the development of the Russian nation were subsumed beneath the economic ideology of Pokrovskii’s scholarship. The nullification of cultural historical phenomena further

\(^{138}\) The Great Northern War, fought from 1700 to 1721, was primarily a contest between Russia and Sweden for control of the Eastern Baltic coastline and maintenance of naval supremacy in the Baltic Sea. Although initially at a severe disadvantage, Peter’s often draconian military reforms gradually strengthened the Russian army and navy until Sweden was defeated. The Great Northern War is considered to be the crucible in which the Russian Empire was forged. For more information see Dr. Robert Frost’s book *The Northern Wars: 1558-1721*.

\(^{139}\) Mikhail Pokrovskii, *Russkaya Istoriya v samom szhatom ocherke* (*Russian History in a Short Outline*) (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo, 1929), 96, 94.
reduced the role of great historical figures such as Peter the Great, thus rejecting over a century of Imperial Russian nationalist scholarship.

Despite the overarching economic theme of the chapter, Pokrovskii does make a specific terminological choice that harkens back to Nikolai Karamzin’s *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*. Throughout the chapter, Pokrovskii utilizes the term “rossiia” and its adjectival form, “rossiiskii” in tandem with the germane “russkoe.” Pokrovskii’s use of both sets of terminology within the same chapter and the same page is curious as the former term has antecedents in prerevolutionary nationalist scholarship. The term’s presence suggests that Pokrovskii may have considered the economic processes of the Petrine era as singularly Russian, similar to Karamzin’s attempt at developing a sense of pre-Petrine cultural heritage. Although a minute detail within a single chapter of a larger text, the presence of these terms within his assessment of key moments in Russian history is strongly suggestive that Pokrovskii’s scholarship was occasionally marked by the same nationalist elements he was attempting to subsume beneath his personal brand of Marxist historiography.

Pokrovskii’s accounts of the Petrine era gradually diverged from prerevolutionary accounts as he progressively focused more and more on Petrine economic forces. Roman Szporluk’s doctoral dissertation *M.N. Pokrovskii’s Interpretation of Russian History* delves into the historiographical reasoning behind Pokrovskii’s analysis of the Petrine period from an economic perspective: “Pokrovskii wrote that to give a scholarly interpretation of Peter’s reform and its background the Russian academic historiography would have had to…become a history of national economy instead.” Szporluk highlights Pokrovskii’s attitude towards the role of commercial capitalism in dynamic periods of Russian history to the exclusion of other socio-political phenomena and major historical figures such as Peter the Great although Pokrovskii directly acknowledges the Petrine era as significant, thereby attributing some of its importance to Peter’s person.

Pokrovskii did not begin to apply his historical methodology to the larger academic community until after the Revolution when his position in the Soviet state gave him ample

---

140 Ibid., 94.
141 Roman Szporluk, “M.N. Pokrovskii’s Interpretation of Russian History” (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1965), 134.
opportunity to censure the non-Marxist historians, whose historical scholarship threatened the socialist narrative the Marxists were struggling to develop. Anatole Mazour’s Russian historiographical survey, *Modern Russian Historiography*, offers a modern perspective on Pokrovskii’s larger contribution to the revolutionary government and historical scholarship:

> To him Marxism was a means, not a dogma, a powerful weapon…a battleground on which to meet his political foe…To Pokrovskii the Revolution was the hour of *a verbis ad verbera* [words to blows]…A harsh critic, he spared no one, not even his colleagues, if they happened to be ‘class enemies.’ His acrid style made him a dangerous opponent: after the Revolution, many historians, some of them eminent figures such as Plantonov, Lyubavsky, and Tarle, suffered from the lash of his tongue, his piercing pen, and, most of all, his powerful political influence.\(^{142}\)

Pokrovskii’s considerable authority and philosophical stance not only nullified previous attempts at nationalist historical scholarship but also inhibited further academic developments in the field of national historical scholarship. The dual threats of political punitive action and academic censure proved to be quite potent to Russia’s historians. Emphasis on economic determinism\(^ {143}\) in the Russian historical narrative and vituperative exchanges with discordant Marxist and non-Marxist historians are remembered as the infamous qualities of Pokrovskiiian school of Russian historiography.\(^ {144}\) The dynastic linkage between Karamzin, Solov’ev and Klyuchevsky had been shattered by one of the latter’s own acolytes, Pokrovskii.

The years 1917 to 1932 can be best be remembered as a time of massive transition for Russian academics. The fall of the autocracy, the Russian Civil War and the establishment of the Soviet Union initiated a rift within the academic community. Nowhere was the rift more pronounced than amongst the disciples of Vasily Kliuchevskii. Some of his pupils such as

---

\(^{142}\) Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*, 84-85.

\(^{143}\) James Scanlan’s article “A Critique of the Engels-Soviet Version of Marxian Economic Determinism” provides an overview of the process of economic materialism: history proceeds through the occurrence of internal changes in a society’s economic system, changes which then produce social, political, and ideological alterations in the life of the society as a whole: ‘With the change of the economic foundation…the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.’ (James Scanlan, “A Critique of the Engels-Soviet Version of Marxian Economic Determinism,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* Vol. 13 1973: 11.).

\(^{144}\) Although the Pokrovskiiian school’s militancy is well known to Russian scholars today, it is important to consider that Pokrovskii’s efforts were part of a much larger political, economic and cultural restructuring occurring throughout the new Soviet Union. The harshness of Pokrovskii’s academic policies was an attempt to enforce a new academic perspective on the greater Russian historical narrative in a relatively short period of time. Considering the chaos of the October Revolution and the resulting Russian Civil War, Pokrovskii’s draconian policies and excoriating manner should be viewed as a partial product of the time in which he was undertaking these grand endeavors.
Mikhail Bogoslovskii remained devoted to prerevolutionary historical methodologies, i.e. the major role of great figures or institutions in the development of history instead of converting to the Marxist interpretation which emphasized class warfare and economic factors as the driving forces of history. In the end prerevolutionary historians were granted three choices by Pokrovskii and the Soviet state: convert to Marxist ideology, flee or suffer academic expulsion. Figures such as Mikhail Bogoslovskii would preserve the debate until it was taken over in the 1930s by Stalinist historians during “The Great Retreat” from orthodox Marxism. The form of Marxist scholarship championed by Pokrovskii and Rozhkov faded rapidly following the former’s death in 1932. The fall of the Pokrovskiiian “school” of Marxist historiography was both swift and brutal. During this period scholarship concerning the Petrine era underwent considerable changes which greatly reduced the status of Peter’s person within a new historical narrative. The Marxist reductionist treatment of tsarist historical figures occurred gradually as Pokrovskii and others attempted to subsume the individual legacy of Peter the Great beneath that of his economic reforms and later beneath larger economic forces not specifically ascribed to Peter. Peter became a minuscule historical marker for the larger Marxist historical narrative of Russian history. The rise and fall of Peter’s historiographical prominence mirrors the rise and fall of nationalist historical scholarship within the Soviet Union. The implementation of the economically deterministic historical narrative was met with resistance by scholars such as Bogoslovskii who continued to emphasize Peter’s personal role in the Russian historical narrative just as previous scholars had done prior to the October Revolution. The result was not a straight bifurcation of the historical profession but rather an inevitable union between the two as Soviet leaders adopted the resilient themes of tsarist scholarship to bolster their Marxist ideologies. By the close of the 1920s Marxist historiography had attained an official semblance of academic hegemony that in reality was only discernible within the Marxist historical profession. Bogoslovskii’s death in 1929 as well as the exile, imprisonment or submission of other prerevolutionary historians had left Pokrovskiiian Marxists as the major authorities of the Soviet historical profession even as the latter’s dominance was soon to be overturned by up and coming Stalinist historians who would resurrect Peter the Great and his corresponding scholarship in order to redevelop the nationhood debate into a new form that combined Soviet ideals with the gilded legacy of imperial historical figures such as Peter the Great.

145 Bogoslovskii was spared serious Bolshevik punitive action by his death in 1929.
The death of Vladimir Lenin in 1924 marked the beginning of a political and academic shift within the Soviet Union. Joseph Stalin’s rise to power precipitated a course change for the Soviet historical profession as Soviet leaders confronted the “National Question” and reevaluated their approach to nationalism. Whereas the period from 1917 through 1924 marked a decline in national scholarship and the rise of a Marxist interpretation of the Petrine era, the Stalinist era initiated a partial return to the nationalist imperial scholarship of the late Empire albeit with significant Stalinist overtones. The return to nationalist scholarship created another fracture within the Soviet academic discipline as Stalinist scholars shifted from Marxist Internationalism to developing a hybridized version of Russo-Soviet nationalism that glorified tsarist historical figures such as Peter the Great as progressive figures within the historical narrative. Kevin Platt describes Peter’s Soviet rehabilitation as part of Stalin’s nationalist edicts: “The rehabilitation of Russian national sentiment and tsarist historical figures reflected the adoption of political values of “Russocentric etatism” among party elites…and their…valorization of the Russian state and ethnicity as core ideals of ‘Soviet Patriotism.’”146 The resulting historical resuscitation was both an acknowledgement and a redevelopment of Imperial nationhood’s continued resonance amongst the populace. The historical redevelopment of Peter’s legacy was one element within a larger series of redevelopments in Soviet academia that gave birth to a new form of Soviet historiography. This academic birth required a death, the death of the Pokrovskii “School” of Russian historiography.

Following Lenin’s death in 1924 and Stalin’s victory in his feud with Leon Trotsky, Mikhail Pokrovskii’s historiographical star initially continued to rise in the Soviet historical profession.147 Despite the death of his primary political sponsor Pokrovskii had yet to reach the

---

147 The death of the Soviet Union’s first leader did not initiate an immediate turn against Pokrovskii and his acolytes. Following Lenin’s death in 1924, Stalin and Trotsky struggled for control over the Soviet Union and the effects of the conflict were felt within the academic community: “The situation changed...in the winter of 1923-1924, when a distressingly large proportion of Communist cells in the universities voted for Trotsky” (Enteen, 48-49). Once Stalin emerged as the definitive leader of the Soviet Union, he began to evaluate and assess Trotskyite threats throughout the Soviet Union including those in academia. Although Pokrovskii was not considered a major supporter or follower of Trotsky, the fact that much of the Soviet academic community had sided with him made it
zenith of his success: “The first and only All-Union Conference of Marxist Historians, held in December, 1928, and January, 1929, marked the full triumph of the new ‘Marxist’ scholarship over the old ‘bourgeois’ historical scholarship… [and] a personal triumph of Pokrovskii, who had become dictatorial chief-of-staff on the historical front.”\(^{148}\) Despite the honors granted him by the state and academic community including the latter declaring him the “leader of Marxist historiography,” Pokrovskii’s world started to crumble shortly after the conference and his death in 1932. E. Van Ree’s article “Stalin as a Marxist Philosopher” highlights the Soviet leader’s personal interpretation of Pokrovskii’s emphasis on economic materialism:

“In December 1931 he [Stalin] indicated…that only ‘vulgarisers of Marxism’ denied the ‘role of eminent personalities.’ ‘But of course people do not make history the way their imagination inspires them to….Marxism never denied the role of heroes. On the contrary, it recognizes this role as considerable, but with…reservations.”\(^{149}\)

Stalin’s philosophical commentary drew a clear distinction between pre-Stalinist and Stalinist historians. His refutation of Pokrovskii was a central point of dissent revolving around the treatment of imperial or bourgeoisie figures within the Soviet historical narrative. He expanded on his dismissal of Pokrovskiiian theory in 1934 with a specific reference to Peter the Great:

Sociology is substituted for history […] What generally results is some kind of odd scenario for Marxists—a sort of bashful relationship—in which they attempt not to mention tsars….We cannot write history in this way! Peter was Peter, Catherine was Catherine. They relied on specific classes and represented their mood and interests, but all the same, they took action—these were historical individuals.\(^{150}\)

Stalin’s attitude towards imperial historical figures directly contradicted Pokrovskii and drew them back into the historical narrative while restoring some if not all of their historical agency. Personality was developed as a necessary element within quality scholarship despite its connection with prerevolutionary elements. Pokrovskii was spared much of the criticism and humiliation associated with the collapse of his historiographical school as a casualty of a larger battle within the Soviet Union: “The political struggle in the Party which split it at that time into


\(^{150}\) Ibid., 284.
two hostile groups had as its basis the question of the possibility or impossibility of building socialism in Russia.”\(^{151}\) The controversy was complex and was related to the issue of developing a sense of Soviet politico-cultural affinity. The preceding debate needed to be replaced or coopted but the Soviet leadership failed to come to a definitive consensus, splitting the Soviet academic and political communities into two camps: the first comprised predominantly of Old Bolsheviks who strictly adhered to pre-revolutionary Marxist ideology, the second comprised younger post-revolutionary members who devoted themselves to a Marxist-Leninist doctrine that developed into Stalinism.\(^ {152}\) The Old Guard Bolsheviks, Pokrovskii and his acolytes among them, were devoted to orthodox Marxism whereas Stalinists were primarily concerned with “the retention of power, and questions of theory had no special value.”\(^ {153}\) The gap between the two factions defined the worsening relationship between the Pokrovskii “school” and Stalinist historians. Unable to survive as a divided profession, the Pokrovskii “school” was subsumed beneath the new historical theories of Marxist-Leninism championed by Stalin.

The philosophical divergence from the Pokrovskii “school” was due in part to Stalin’s response to a larger issue facing Soviet academics and leaders alike: the “National Question”. The Soviet leaders inherited the multi-ethnic composition of the Russian Empire and the dilemma of their place within the greater Soviet Union. While the Soviet leaders were struggling with questions of identity within Russia proper, they were equally concerned with the place and developed identities of other non-Russian ethnies in the Soviet Union. As the Soviets established control they took on the role of nationalist “midwife” in regions such as Central Asia, regions that had previously lacked any sense of national identity.\(^ {154}\) The internationalist policies of Pokrovskii had failed to develop an effective form of cultural identity conducive to strengthening Soviet authority.\(^ {155}\) These overriding pragmatic concerns drove the Soviets to change tactics. As

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 92-95.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 95.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 95.


\(^{155}\) See David Brandenberger’s *National Bolshevism* for a detailed description of Soviet cultural dissatisfaction in the late 1920s. Brandenberger connects the failure of early Soviet cultural policies with his general theory concerning the lack of a cohesive sense of Russian nationhood prior to Stalinization. I offer a dissenting theory that the failure of Soviet cultural policies in the 1920s was not due to a lack of national identity but rather due to the failure of Soviet authorities to offer a viable alternative to preceding imperial process of nationhood. Soviet scholars and leaders only achieved success when they joined their Soviet nationalist efforts with the imperial process of nationhood.
Francine Hirsch has argued, “the Bolsheviks did not wish to just establish control over the peoples of the former Russian Empire; they set out to bring those peoples into the revolution and secure their active involvement in the great socialist experiment.” Initial Soviet setbacks in the development of an effective sense of Soviet identity were due in part to the lack of an effective response to the “National Question,” one of many dilemmas facing Marxist theorists prior to and following the October Revolution. Joseph Stalin made a philosophical contribution in 1913 with his text *Marxism and the National Question*, which focused on a wide variety of issues concerning the Marxist response to nationalism including the elements that constituted a nation: “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” Stalin’s analysis of the constituent components reveals a multifaceted interpretation of the national community as an amalgam of cultural and economic elements that have a firm historical foundation. Stalin emphasizes a process of gradual accumulation strikingly parallel to Anthony Smith’s theories concerning the Ethno-Symbolic nationhood: “A nation is formed only as a result of a lengthy and systematic intercourse, as a result of people living together generation after generation.” Smith’s synopsis argues that a nation constitutes a “deposit of the ages, a stratified or layered structure of social, political and cultural experiences and traditions laid down by successive generations of an identifiable community.” Both men describe a gradual process that requires a multi-generational developmental span. Stalin’s description differs from Smith’s interpretation as he emphasizes a “systematic” process rather than an organic accumulation. Despite his references to the Revolution and the obstacles posed by capitalist societies, his definition of national communities includes elements apart from economic forces.

In addition to assessing the composition of national communities, Stalin argues that national development requires the participation of a large swath of the populace, joining the theories of Marxist internationalism with nationhood: “The strength of the national movement is determined by the degree to which the wide strata of the nation, the proletariat and peasantry,

---

158 Ibid., 13.
159 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 171.
160 Smith directly cites Stalin’s definition of a nation as one reliant on definitive “‘objective’ factors.” See Anthony Smith’s *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 11.
participate in it…. national autonomy is the conception of a nation as a union of individuals without regard to a definite territory.”

His stance on participation somewhat parallels the internationalism of Orthodox Marxism, due to his emphasis on large scale mobilization. That being said Stalin’s conclusions at the end of this particular treatise view nationalism as a force diametrically aligned against the interests of strict Marxist theorists. Published prior to the October Revolution, the chaos of the Russian Civil War and the ineffectiveness of other early Soviet cultural programs, it can be safely inferred that his philosophical about-face was due to an overriding sense of political pragmatism and his concerns about reinforcing the Soviet powerbase. The philosophical militancy of scholars such as Pokrovskii failed to develop the internationalist society envisioned by the revolution’s progenitors. Facing a threat from the cultural fault lines endemic in any multi-cultural society under considerable transition, Stalin reverted to imperial nationhood previously subdued and excoriated by Pokrovskii. The resurgence of Russian nationhood resulted in a cultural union between the results of the Westernizer-Slavophile debates and the new cultural models associated with the Soviet proletariat. Like their imperial predecessors, Soviet academics soon found themselves to be vital to Stalin’s new vision of Russo-Soviet nationhood as Stalin took a vested interest in the efforts of academics just as Nicholas I did with the early Slavophiles.

The abandonment of Marxist internationalism undermined Pokrovskii’s assertion that Russian history was the byproduct of nonaligned commercial capitalism. As David Brandenberger puts it, “Pokrovskii rejected national-patriotic histories that focused on individual heroes and villains in favor of a more materialist approach oriented around Marxist economic stages.”

His dismissive treatment of Peter’s personal role within the reforms bearing his namesake ran contrary to the Stalinist vision of the Petrine era as a period of progressive development led by a dynamic leader. Stalinist historiography marked a partial return to the scholarly patterns of the pre-revolutionary era but it still maintained oversight over the academic

161 Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, 28,50.
162 Brandenberger makes a similar argument in National Bolshevism. He argues that the early Soviet Union’s emphasis on “proletarian internationalism” inhibited the development of an early Soviet sense of national identity. While he does not directly discuss Stalin’s possible pragmatic turnaround, he discusses potential catalysts for such an event.
profession and emphasized certain Marxist ideologies in the documentation of the Russo-Soviet historical narrative.  

The Soviet historical ideology that emerged in 1930s Stalinist Russia focused on epic figures such as Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Catherine the Great whose monumental actions shaped the pre-revolutionary state into the environment that bore the Soviet Union. Like Karamzin, Stalin’s utilization of tsarist historical figures sank the cultural foundations for Soviet patriotism deep into Russia’s imperial past, thus establishing a solid base upon which to build and a definitive link to the nationalistic efforts of tsarist academics. As the Pokrovskiiian “school” was refuted, the rising Stalinist School of historiography implemented several philosophical changes in the academic and political realms meant to replace those developed and espoused by Pokrovskii. The subsequent changes shifted the focus and the parameters for Soviet historians as they suddenly found their scope of analysis widened beyond the narrow economic confines of Pokrovskii’s perspective on Russian history:

“The ‘revision of Marxism’ that emanated from the Stalinists...threatened to change...the original nature of bolshevism—no matter what distortions it had already suffered...was planned in two main directions: along the line of the rejection of ‘economic materialism’ in favor of ‘political voluntarism’ and along the line of the substitution of nationalism for the class principles, the substitution of national state methods of political action for international revolutionary methods.”

The death of the Pokrovskiiian School was, as Enteen has written: “Stalin’s affirmation of the dogma of the national origins of the Russian Revolution.” Russian nationhood would continue to evolve under Stalin, but its foundations were firmly embedded in the tsarist past. Even Pokrovskii could not completely raze the methodologies of imperial Russian history. Up until Pokrovskii the Russian nationhood discourse had incorporated the works and theories of various scholars into its debates on national identity. Pokrovskii’s impermanent and markedly 

---

164 In addition to replacing the works of Pokrovskii with new text books, the faculties of Moscow and Leningrad universities were restored to their respective history departments, thus ending the chronic shortage of qualified teachers for the new Soviet academic classes. One such scholar who openly criticized Pokrovskii’s work was Nikolai Bukharin who composed a piece highlighting some of Pokrovskii’s major methodological errors in documenting the Russian historical narrative: “Bukharin accused Pokrovskii of subjectivity, a poor understanding of dialectics and frequent recourse to mechanical sociological formulas and anti-historical universalism. He also criticized the late academicians for allowing Peter the Great and a variety of non-Russian ethnic groups only a marginal role in Russian history.” (David Brandenberger, “Politics Projected into the Past,” Reinterpreting Revolutionary Russia, 205.)

165 Shteppa, Russian Historians and the Soviet State, 95-96.

166 Enteen, The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat, 199.
anti-nationalist sentiments led to his professional exclusion not only from the debate but from consideration as a serious Russian scholar. Even today Russian scholars continue to write the name of the Pokrovskiian “school” with quotation marks surrounding the latter word, a scholarly brand of disgrace that has lasted beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union. For all their scholarly disagreements, no other Russian scholar has been burdened with such a visible scholarly albatross.

-Stalin’s Bronze Horseman-

As Pokrovskii faded into academic obscurity, historians were mobilized by Stalin to craft a Marxist-Leninist sense of national identity, establishing a new Soviet presence with the Russian nationhood discourse. The pre-war era was defined by scholarship that sought to Sovietize the past and reach large audiences in order to develop Russo-Soviet patriotism in support of Stalinist endeavors. Their efforts included acknowledging the nineteenth century historiography as important and engaged with it, illustrating that the imperial debates could be viewed as part of the larger debate concerning the Russianness of the Soviet Union. The campaign of rehabilitation extended into popular culture as artists assisted historians in reforming tsarist historical figures so that their legacies would be palatable to Soviet audiences.

Published in 1937, Andrei Shestakov’s Kratkii kurs istorii SSSR (Short Course in History of the USSR) occupies a place of prominence in Stalinist historiography. The book itself is a mere 217 page textbook intended for Soviet students but its construction was the product of “years of juried competitions, internal debates, and editorial work…including the active involvement of Stalin himself, [establishing] a standard interpretation of Russian national history for the Stalinist Era.”167 The previous sixty pages cover Russian history from the early Kievan Rus onward providing a basic chronology while highlighting the deeds of exceptional leaders in Russia’s pre-Petrine past. Shestakov devotes seven pages to Peter and refrains from developing a detailed analysis of Peter’s greater significance. The short summary of the Reformer’s reign is somewhat congruous with Pokrovskii’s scholarship but makes several scholarly deviations:

Merchants and factory owners quickly grew rich. Peter gave merchants in the cities their own control. In Peter’s time Russia moved ahead significantly, but remained a country where everything relied upon serfdom and imperial arbitrariness. The strengthening of

the Russian Empire under Peter I was achieved by the deaths of hundreds of thousands of workers, due to the devastation of the people. Peter I did a lot to build and strengthen the state of the landlords and merchants. 168

Like Pokrovskii, Shestakov focuses a considerable portion of his limited analysis on Peter’s economic reforms while also summarizing Peter’s military reforms during the course of the Great Northern War. Unlike Pokrovskii, Shestakov develops Peter’s personal role in forging the Russian Empire and the cost of his actions. His analysis is critical at several points but the most notable section focuses on the human cost, placing the death toll in the “hundreds of thousands.” In addition to the lives lost the text emphasizes that some of Russia’s established institutions remained essentially unchanged despite Peter’s all-encompassing reforms. The discussion of serfdom and the empire’s “arbitrary” nature are clearly displayed as a means of qualifying Peter’s reign and its greater significance. While Peter did establish the foundations of the Russian Empire and deliver a progressive boost to the nascent empire’s archaic institutions, some of Russia’s preeminent social, political and economic fallacies remained largely untouched by Peter’s progressive will. In a manner similar to Kliuchevskii’s analysis, Shestakov documents the reforms that Peter enacted as costly to the Russian people. In the end, Shestakov’s chapter concerning Peter the Great preserves the image of Peter as a progressive figure albeit with considerable limitations.

Shestakov’s analysis of the Petrine era and its controversial figure was part of a larger Stalinist effort to develop a new chronology for the Soviet historical narrative and reevaluate the role of key historical figures. As Kevin Platt argues:

The Shestakov text…was founded on a principle of political and social genealogy linking the Russian past and the Soviet present, and it exhorted readers to realize an affective continuity with the progressive actors of Russian history, whose accomplishments blurred together in a coherent, grand march toward Soviet reality. 169

Peter’s preeminent status made him a particularly valuable historical asset for the Soviet leadership due to the progressive nature of his reign, ensuring his incorporation into the Soviet “grand march” that constituted a return to the “organic” historical narrative synthesized by Solov’ev. The analysis of Peter does not specifically discuss the nationality but the book’s

introduction does contain a passage with links to the development of Russo-Soviet national identity: “We love our motherland and we should know her splendid history.” The statement implies the establishment of a communal historical narrative for the Soviet citizenry that extended beyond the traditional boundaries of the Russian Empire and into populations previously beyond imperial control but now within the borders of the Soviet Union. Like his prerevolutionary forerunner, Nikolai Karamzin, Shestakov’s text established the idea of a proud historical lineage from which the Soviet citizenry could draw lessons and models fit for laudation. The text’s status as an instructional material is indicative of the wide scope of dissemination within the Soviet populace and its implications for Russo-Soviet nationhood. Unlike Karamzin’s Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia, Shestakov’s Short Course in the History of the USSR does not focus on the issues surrounding the Europeanization of Russia’s cultural heritage. Both historians’ texts established creative historical heritages meant to influence state policies. Despite the ideological gap separating the scholars as well as the span of 126 years, the scholarly congruity is considerable. Shestakov’s textbook provides a concise Sovietized Russian historical narrative that closely parallels Nikolai Karamzin’s development of a pre-Petrine historical heritage although the former text adopts a positive tone instead of Karamzin’s critical perspective. Shestakov’s brief narrative was further developed in the larger multi-volume History of the USSR by Vladimir Lebedev.

Vladimir Lebedev’s Istoria SSSR (History of the USSR) furthers the Stalinist development of Russian history and historiography. Offering Stalinist insights into the significance of Peter’s reign, Lebedev evaluates the prerevolutionary historiography of the Petrine era and its contributions to the Stalinist understanding of the historical narrative. His multi-volume history of the Soviet Union focuses on Peter’s reforms in various sectors of the Russian Empire while focusing on the Empire’s economic and diplomatic relations with European states. His historiographical summary of Petrine scholarship opens with an analysis of Karamzin’s attitude towards Peter the Great and the Westernizer/Slavophile debate:

170 Shestakov, Kratkii kurs Istorii SSSR, 4.
171 Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger come to a similar conclusion as I do in their works: Terror and Greatness, 195 and National Bolshevism, 52-53 respectively. Their analysis does have its limitations as they do not draw a connection between Karamzin and the Imperial Russian process of nationhood. Nonetheless their congruity with my conclusions is worthy of note.
Karamzin, a noble historian at the beginning of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the revolutions in the West and the ripening crisis of the feudal systems in Russia in his ‘Writings on Ancient and New Russia’ (1811) criticized the violent execution of the Petrine reforms, especially ‘passion for customs new to us’, loss of Petrine national feeling because of the imitation of the west…In nineteenth century Russian historiography, questions about the reforms of Peter I struggled with two currents—westernizers and Slavophiles. Westernizers criticized Russian serfdom and demanded further Europeanization. Slavophiles were supporters of Russian identity. 172

Lebedev’s analysis of Petrine historiography does not applaud or deride specific scholars with the notable exception of Mikhail Pokrovskii whom he labels as “false and ahistorical.” 173 His analysis of Karamzin’s scholarship connects it with the cultural ramifications of Peter’s reign and the philosophical bifurcation in later imperial scholarship. Two important themes appear in his summary of Karamzin. First he emphasizes Karamzin’s caustic treatment of Peter due to the “loss of Petrine national feeling,” an indirect reference to Russian nationhood. He does not counter Karamzin’s assertion that Peter compromised Russian nationhood.

The second theme revolves around the connection Lebedev draws between Peter’s contentious legacy and the Westernizer/Slavophile debate in Russian academia during the nineteenth century. The discussion shifts from the monarch’s role in the Westernizer/Slavophile debate to a broader analysis of the two philosophical factions and their ideologies. He labels the Slavophiles as “supporters of Russian identity,” connecting them with Nikolai Karamzin and the development of Russian nationhood. The analysis establishes a historiographical foundation for Stalinist scholarship concerning Peter and a national historiographical lineage stretching back to Karamzin while excluding Pokrovskii’s brief academic prominence as unimportant. He expands his analysis of prerevolutionary scholarship by analyzing Sergei Solov’ev’s treatment of Peter within the Russian historical narrative:

S.M. Solov’ev…proved, that all the economic and administrative politics of Peter were an extension of the 17th century preparations for reforms at the beginning of the eighteenth century. ‘People had risen and readied for the journey but waited for someone-waited for the leader’. The leader appeared in the person of Peter. In Solov’ev’s opinion, the Petrine epic in the lives of the Russian people—was an age of transition. 174

173 Ibid., 595.
174 Ibid., 593.
Lebedev’s summary of Solov’ev focuses less on Peter’s cultural ramifications and more on Peter’s place within the Russian historical narrative. He emphasizes the dynamic quality of Peter’s reign and his progressive, near messianic status within Russian history. His analysis of previous Petrine scholarship establishes a historiographical link to the prerevolutionary past that revitalizes the importance of historical personages within the Russian historical community while utilizing nineteenth century scholarly trends and their development of Russian conceptions of nationhood, referring to Pokrovskii’s work as ahistorical and void.

Lebedev’s analysis of the Petrine era’s historiography also focuses on Peter’s role in the Sovietized narrative of Russian history. His interpretation of Peter’s significance reflects the attitudes of the Soviet leadership as well as the theoretical elements formulated by the Pokrovskiian “School” of Marxist historiography: “‘Peter did a lot for the creation and strengthening of the national state (natsionalnaia gosudarstva) of landowners and merchants.’ Stalin…In the economic field, Peter pursued a policy of West European mercantilism.”

Lebedev’s inclusion of Stalin’s statement emphasizes the economic significance of Peter’s reign while loosely connecting it to Russian nationhood through Stalin’s use of the term “national state (natsionalnogo gosudarstva).” Lebedev and Stalin’s analysis of the economic contributions of the Petrine era contains the requisite nods to Marxist scholarship but adds the national exclusivity of these reforms and Peter’s personal role as their initiator. They reassign historical agency to Peter instead of placing it within a broader economic movement, altering Marxism’s bond with Peter’s legacy. Lebedev assigns additional significance to Peter’s reign by developing the role of the Petrine era in the rise and development of the Soviet Union centuries after Peter’s death: “In the bowels of the empire, grew the proletariat which committed the Great October Socialist revolution.” He establishes a linear connection between Peter’s formation of the Russian Empire, his role in Russian commerce and the policies that led to the advent of the October Revolution, labeling Peter as the progenitor of the Russian industrial proletariat. Effectively Peter is branded as the distant forefather of the Soviet Union, establishing a link between the progressive policies of the Stalinist state and Peter’s similarly dynamic policies.

Lebedev closes his chapter with a summary of Peter’s greater historical significance:

---

175 Ibid., 623-626.
176 Ibid., 645.
**Historical Value of the Petrine Era.** Under Peter I the Russian Empire was created, its possessions stretched from the Baltic to the Pacific. Russia was not a colony or a semi-colony of the economically stronger neighboring Western European states, and among the strongest European powers.  

The Soviet scholar’s overall treatment of Peter the Great emphasizes the multifaceted reforms of his reign and their greater significance for the Russo-Soviet historical narrative. His large scale narrative of Russian history returns to the prerevolutionary emphasis on significant historical figures while emphasizing the Marxist value of economic reforms and their connection to the October Revolution. Lebedev forges a connection with a distant historical figure and previous historical accounts in order to form a national historical heritage that supports what Platt calls “Soviet Patriotism;” an idea not entirely dissimilar from Karamzin’s goal to halt the “Europeanization” of Russia. In both these cases, the progressive but controversial legacy of the Petrine era maintains a prominent place within academic debate.

-Alexei Tolstoi’s Peter I-

Like Alexander Pushkin’s poetic memorialization of Karamzin’s national scholarly efforts, Soviet historical rehabilitative efforts were linked with Soviet popular culture. Despite Pushkin’s tsarist legacy “the Soviet regime…revived the tsarist tradition of venerating Pushkin…By incorporating aspects of the nineteenth-century Pushkin myth, [Pushkin]… assumed wider significance as part of the process of grafting prerevolutionary customs onto the Stalinist regime.” 178 His Soviet cultural revitalization maintained his relevance to nationhood as Soviet scholars reinterpreted The Bronze Horseman to bring it into line with Stalinist cultural mandates. Peter’s role was gradually redeveloped to the point that by the 1940s “the poem [was] mainly a defense of Peter the Great… [who is] consumed with ideas of grand social benefit, never thinking of selfish individual projects.” 179 Peter’s personal progressivism was rapidly gilded during the Stalinist Era, marking a return to Peter’s iconic imperial legacy. While Pushkin’s artistic depictions were redeveloped along Stalinist lines, new cultural icons such as Alexei Tolstoi contributed to the artistic precedents of the prerevolutionary period with their own

---

177 Ibid., 645.
artistic perspectives. A Soviet product of Peter’s public rehabilitation was Alexei Tolstoi’s incomplete novel *Peter I*. The first two parts of Tolstoi’s novel were published in 1930 and developed an epic narrative of Peter’s life from his childhood to the capture of the city of Narva during the Great Northern War in 1704. The novel marks an important chapter in the Stalinist rehabilitation of the Petrine era as a whole. Although Tolstoi makes no specific reference to imperial or Soviet historians, the dissemination of his novel contributed to the debate in the same manner as Alexander Pushkin’s *The Bronze Horseman*.

*Peter I* was not Tolstoi’s only work devoted to the first Russian Emperor. Kevin Platt describes Alexei Tolstoi’s unique place within Soviet literary society and his complex relationship with Russian history:

Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi considered the literary investigation of history to be as deeply concerned with the present as with the past….In the course of his career Tolstoi wrote an impressive number of works revolving about the person of Russia’s first emperor. These include several stories, three versions of a play, the screenplay for a two part film, a children’s novel, and a monumental, unfinished historical novel, written intermittently over two decades.\(^{180}\)

Many individual pieces carried the same title as the novel: *Peter I*. Platt suggests that this may have been a deliberate effort to join the artistic pieces into a single, cohesive path of artistic and cultural development.\(^{181}\) Tolstoi’s focus on the controversial reign of Russia’s first emperor was not merely the result of artistic temperament but part of a much larger socio-cultural rehabilitation orchestrated by Stalinist authorities. Cultural rehabilitation was a major objective for Soviet academics and cultural leaders who “sought to mobilize popular support by means of a…Russocentric vision of the past, in which the legitimacy of the Russian empire translated in mystical fashion into the legitimacy of the Soviet Union.”\(^{182}\) The Soviet campaign to develop this “Russocentric vision of the past” acknowledged the validity and cogency of the imperial nineteenth century historians, stretching back to Karamzin’s *Memoir*. In the campaign to make the pre-revolutionary past acceptable, figures such as Peter proved challenging to portray as iconic figures Soviet citizens should seek to emulate. Tolstoi’s early works, begun around the


\(^{181}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 48.
time of the Revolution in 1917, were deeply critical of Peter’s debauchery and cruelty. Literary animosity gave way to more lenient evaluation of Peter as a conflicted figure whose progressive programs were stifled by monumental cultural restrictions. This interpretation was developed into a heroic Stalinist depiction of Peter as a complex leader.

Tolstoi develops Peter’s dynamic role within the Russian historical narrative by creating an elaborate if contentious image of a dynamic monarch. Key passages are devoted to developing the archaic and unenlightened appearance of pre-Petrine Russia, establishing a blank slate for the future tsar’s reforms.

“Nothing new had come to pass. The age-old darkness of poverty, slavery and misery still hung over Moscow and the towns, over hundreds of districts scattered through the vast land. The peasant with flogged back somehow or other scratched the hated earth. The townsman in his cold house howled under unbearable dues and taxes…And where was the money? Hard to get, very hard. Trade was bad….The seas belonged to other nations. All foreign trade was in the hands of foreigners…What dark spell held Russia? When at long last would she move forward?

Pre-Petrine Russia is depicted as a nation hopelessly backward and impoverished. Peter’s literary treatment establishes a definitive link between Westernizer and Marxist progressivism, connecting the tsarist and Soviet eras. Somewhat in line with Pokrovskii, Tolstoi details various economic inequities and the widespread impoverishment of the Russian people at the hands of foreign tradesmen and ineffective administrators. The Russia Tolstoi envisions bears little resemblance to the idyllic cultural utopia documented by Nikolai Karamzin’s *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*. Pre-Petrine Russia’s appearance belies a theme of economic and political pragmatism that echoes throughout the novel and accentuates the utilitarian persona of Tolstoi’s literary incarnation of Peter I. Cultural factors such as the Russian Orthodox Church can be found throughout the novel but they are portrayed in a malevolent or critical manner. Positive emphasis on Peter’s economic, industrial and military reforms is developed in tandem with the theme of national mobilization similar to the widespread industrialization and mobilization in 1930s Stalinist Russia. His positive portrayal of Peter’s legacy is more pragmatic in nature than

183 Ibid., 49.
184 Two different versions of Alexei Tolstoi’s novel were used for this passage. The first is a 1956 English translation of the final version of Tolstoi’s novel while its Russian counterpart was published by the Moscow State Press in 1947. Quotations were taken from the English language version and compared against the Russian original for errors or alternative interpretations.
Pushkin’s description of Peter’s contentious legacy in relation to St. Petersburg’s contentious place within the Russian Empire. Neither icon outdoes one another in its positive portrayal of Peter. Both men included certain criticisms of Peter within their works; the tragic death of Pushkin’s main character at the hands of Falconet’s statue and Tolstoi’s early emphasis on Peter’s cruelty. Both men should be considered equal contributors to developing Peter’s role within nationhood despite Pushkin’s greater cultural prominence.

In addition to developing Russia’s pre-Petrine status, Tolstoi describes the immense tasks challenging Peter’s reign through the character Vasily Golitsyn, Regent Sophia’s Westernizing chancellor, to establish a set of utopian goals for modernization in Russia:

“It would be a great and difficult task to enrich the whole nation… Many millions of acres are lying fallow. This land should be ploughed and sown. The number of cattle should be increased….Burdensome taxes, tolls, duties and imposts should be abolished and replaced by a moderate poll-tax. This is only possible if all the land is taken from the landowners, and free peasants settled on it. All existing forms of servitude must be abolished, so that in future no one should be in bondage to any other.”

Golitsyn’s hopes for a modern Russia required a similar degree of mobilization as that seen in Petrine and Stalinist Russia. Although the English translation uses the term “nation” within the passage, the Russian original uses the term “narod,” a term open to interpretation as “nation” or “people.” Either term could suffice for the specific passage but it does suggest the presence of a kinship network based on a developed sense of politico-cultural continuity. The reforms are documented in such a way that they are meant to contribute towards the wellbeing of the Russian people or community that are constantly articulated as a single whole. The image of a unitary Russian population is similar to Karamzin, Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii’s documentation of the Imperial Russian populace within their compiled national histories of Russia. Combined with Tolstoi’s rehabilitated portrayal of Peter the passage paints a picture of a progressive monarch engaged in reforms meant to benefit the population of the nascent Russian Empire on a broad socio-economic scale. Tolstoi balances the economic and political pragmatism expected of a Marxist with his creative cultural characterization of the Russian people’s unity.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{186}} \text{Ibid., 77.}\]
Vasily Golitsyn is not the only character developed into a mouthpiece for inspiring Peter’s reforms. Peter’s companion, Francis Lefort, makes critical suggestions for Peter’s military and diplomatic endeavors:

“You can’t live without the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, Peter…Nor can you do without the Baltic, Peter. If you don’t do it of your own accord, the Dutch will make you”…Peter as he listened, angrily struck the steel against a piece of flint…Immovable, age-old stagnation… “Peter, Russia is a terrible country. It must be turned inside out, like a fur coat, and re-made”…Peter began to feel as if this was the firm ground his feet were seeking. This was no longer a matter of three play-regiments, but stability, power.  

Like Golitsyn, Lefort not only charts Russia’s progressive course but also emphasizes the extensive scope of Peter’s reforms. The “fur coat” analogy is a particularly potent literary device that may have been inspired in part if not wholly by the complete restructuring of the Russian Empire following the October Revolution. Although the similarities are subtly developed, it is possible that Tolstoi’s novel sought to indirectly draw comparisons between Peter’s reign and Stalin’s term of power. The characterization of Golitsyn and Lefort as inspirations for Peter’s reforms is congruous with Solov’ev and Kliuchevskii’s documentation of the Russian historical narrative as a drawn out course of progressive development. In Tolstoi’s case the iconic, progressive Peter is forged by those around him until emerging as the first Russian Emperor. The similarities between Tolstoi’s artistic depiction of the early Petrine era and preceding historical accounts concerning the period’s significance are indicative of a definite connection between Stalinist nationhood and late Imperial Russian nationhood. One final passage not only reinforces the idea of national mobilization but is also strikingly similar to the Soviet Union’s entry into the Great Patriotic War and the resulting nationalist fervor.

Alexei Tolstoi’s novel breaks off prematurely in 1704 and thus does not chronicle the Russian victory at the Battle of Poltava, the declaration of Peter as the first Russian Emperor and the end of the Great Northern War in 1721, but it does highlight the Russian defeat at the First Battle of Narva in 1701. Tolstoi’s depiction of the event develops a powerful image of Peter and the task set before him by the defeat of the Russian army.

---

187 Ibid., 236-239.
188 Tolstoi was working on book three of the novel before his work was cut short by his death in 1945. A.B. Alpatov, Alexei Tolstoi-master istoricheskogo romana (Trans. Alexei Tolstoi-Master of the Historical Novel) (Moscow: Sovetski Pisatel, 1958), 56-57.
“This defeat is a good lesson. We are not seeking glory. They’ll beat us another ten times, and in the end we shall win…We have drunk to the beginning!” he said with a laugh. “Well, merchants, have you heard? The Swedish king has given us a little drubbing. Good enough for a start. A beaten man is worth two unbeaten ones, isn’t he?…We will rouse the whole country. We have suffered a defeat—all right! This war is only just beginning.”

Peter is portrayed as a man of action who does not submit to despair. He takes the news of the defeat as a hard-won lesson of considerable worth to the Russian army. The theme of national mobilization is strongly represented in the passage as the tsar emphasizes the long struggle ahead and the considerable sacrifices the Russian people will suffer before final victory is achieved. Tolstoi’s personal environment is blatantly obvious within this passage due to the rising tensions between the Soviet Union and Germany. Peter’s speech is prophetic when compared to the Soviet Union’s entry into the Great Patriotic War and the considerable hardships inflicted upon the Soviet people. Tolstoi edited the novel extensively prior to his death in 1945, thus the similarities between the ancient and modern conflicts is likely an intentional analogy on the author’s part. He was influenced by Russia’s imperial and Soviet historians during his artistic development of Peter. His early artistic musings portrayed Peter in an extremely negative fashion, “an outgrowth of late-nineteenth century views of Russian history, as exemplified in the influential works of V.O. Kliuchevskii and his pupil P.N. Miliukov…In their [Kliuchevskii’s and Miliukov’s] view, Peter’s ruthless methods of rule often undercut the beneficial effects of his reforms.” Tolstoi later downplayed Peter’s personal role within his artistic works due to the influence of Mikhail Pokrovskii’s emphasis on “merchant capital economy.” The image of Peter in Tolstoi’s novel marked a final stage of the latter’s artistic development of Peter in relation to Soviet cultural policies. This final stage ran in tandem with Stalinist rehabilitation of historical figures, rendering Tolstoi’s novel both a product and a propellant of Stalinist historical rehabilitation. Peter’s response parallels Stalin’s answer to the German invasion thus reinforcing the connection between the two figures. Victory could only be achieved through unity and sacrifice on the part of the Russian people. His portrayal of Peter’s response to the Russian defeat establishes a national legacy of surviving severe defeats and gaining victory through great sacrifice.

\[^{189}\text{Ibid., 591-593.}\]
\[^{190}\text{Kevin Platt, "Rehabilitation and Afterimage: Aleksei Tolstoi’s Many Returns to Peter the Great, Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda, ed. Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger, (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 51.}\]
\[^{191}\text{Ibid., 52-53.}\]
efforts. The “Red Count” took part in the final stage of Peter’s Soviet restoration by assisting in the production of a film based on Tolstoi’s novel which unveiled a Sovietized Peter the Great to the Soviet populace.

-Tsar Peter goes to Lenfilm-

Vladimir Petrov’s film, Peter I, occupies a unique niche within Stalinist pre-war cinematography. The film, a product of Alexei Tolstoi’s artistic endeavors devoted to historical literary portrayals of the first Russian Emperor, develops Peter I as a conflicted, dynamic and progressive figure within the Russian historical narrative. The film is derived from Alexei Tolstoi’s novel by the same name, albeit with considerable alterations and popularizes the Stalinist version of Peter the Great. Released in two parts in 1937 and 1939, the film was part of a growing number of Soviet propaganda films that lionized aspects of the pre-revolutionary past for the purpose of stirring the Soviet citizenry to support Stalin’s progressive programs.

In September 1937, following the release of Petrov’s film, Alexei Tolstoi was interviewed about his response to the film’s reception and the production of the film. His responses to the interviewer’s questions offer insight into the film’s relation to Tolstoi’s other works and its greater purpose in Soviet society:

‘The idea of making the historical film Peter I initially came to me three years ago…Not a single truthful film has ever been made about Russian history until now—neither here nor anywhere else…The epoch of Peter I was one of the greatest pages in the history of the Russian people. Virtually the whole Petrine epoch was permeated with the Russian people’s heroic struggle for their existence as a nation (natsionalnoe sushchestvovanie) and independence….The great Soviet people should know the true history of their country.’

Tolstoi viewed the film as a unique entity within Russian cinematography due to its supposedly “truthful” depiction of the Petrine era. The film was meant to glorify the Petrine era as a period of discovery and growth for the Russian people in line with Tolstoi’s earlier artistic development of Peter’s role in Russian history. Glorification was necessary to effectively popularize the

---

patriotic Stalinist image of Peter to Soviet audiences, providing them with an ideal historical cultural icon.

*Peter I* is not an all-encompassing narrative of Peter’s life from birth to death; rather it is restricted to the time period covering the Great Northern War (1700-1721) between Russia and Sweden. Throughout the course of the film virtually all action is directly or indirectly related to the greater military struggle at hand and the various sacrifices required from the Russian people for the sake of the war effort. The merger of military and industrial progressivism is transparently obvious throughout the film but the same cannot be said for the film’s coverage of Peter’s social reforms such as his implementation of foreign dress. The film’s artistic development of the military, social and industrial reforms establishes historical context for the contemporary Soviet audience as they witnessed a similar degree of reforms in all three sectors throughout the Soviet Union under the auspices of their own great father, Joseph Stalin.

The film opens after the severe Russian defeat at the hands of the Swedes at the Battle of Narva. The atmosphere of panic and sorrow is vividly cast as Russian priests pray for deliverance and Peter’s officers sit around a dimly lit table, drinking and casting nervous glances towards the figure of Peter, cast in shadow and gloom. News of the defeat drives the priests and many of Peter’s generals to despair but Peter is only invigorated. He begins issuing orders to gather fresh recruits and raise funds for a new army. He upbraids the priests for their cowardice and orders church bells to be melted into cannon. The final edicts reflect Peter’s pragmatism and the immense sacrifices required to assure victory. The film emphasizes the endemically resilient nature of Russian leaders and their role in mobilizing the Russian people to greater goals. His utilitarianism often comes at a great cost to the Russian people including those within his own family. From the outset of the film Peter is represented as a conflicted figure whose progressive reforms have a wide gap between their benefits and detriments.

Tolstoi’s image of Peter the Great and the latter’s New Russia emphasizes the adoption of modern ideas for the greater welfare of the Russian people. Such goals necessitate sacrificing certain traditions or cultural elements that do not benefit the cause of progress. The film’s message would have resonated with the Soviet audience, who had been coping with the enormous pressures of Stalin’s rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union. The messages of the novel and film are clear: progress must be made at any cost and you must be prepared to make
sacrifices in order to benefit the common welfare. Unlike his earlier works which mirrored Kliuchevskii and Miliukov’s assessment of Peter’s reign as a period of greater loss than gain, Tolstoi acknowledges the cost of the Petrine era while emphasizing that progress was made. He does not ignore the death toll or the economic cost but emphasizes that Peter’s progressive legacy outweighed the costs. The scenes portray two overarching themes which govern the plot of the film: Progress and Cost. Like Shestakov’s aforementioned summary of Peter’s economic reforms, touting the increased wealth of the merchants at the cost of the people or Lebedev’s acknowledgement of Solov’ev’s characterization of Peter as the long awaited leader of Russia, Tolstoi balances the benefits and costs of Peter’s reforms while characterizing Peter as a seminal historical leader.

The theories and debates of Russian academia were brought to Soviet audiences through Tolstoi’s novel and Petrov’s film, years of postulation, debate and scholarship crammed into the stride and eloquence of actors. The interaction between these two dynamic motifs creates a dramatic representation of a dynamic period in the Russian historical narrative, a time which would have resonated for contemporary Soviet audiences due to Stalinist industrialization. The parallels drawn between these two periods of Russian history are part of the Stalinist stage of Russian nationhood. The film conveys the idea that progress through sacrifice is an endemic quality of the Russian people and one that should be embraced despite the enormous costs borne by the greater Soviet population. The progressive sacrifices of the Petrine era propelled Russia onto the imperial stage and Stalin’s reforms were meant to be viewed in a similar fashion. Both periods were placed within the Soviet historical narrative, thus merging their roles and goals into one clear and concise path of development.

Petrov’s film serves a number of purposes for the Soviet populace. First, the film is meant to serve as propaganda for Stalin’s industrialization programs by glorifying a similar era of dynamic industrialization and modernization. Second, Petrov enhances the Soviet restoration of Peter the Great for use within the Soviet historical narrative by portraying a dynamic, progressive but conflicted leader, willing to sacrifice everything for Russia. Third, the film plays a significant role in the development of a Russocentric form of Russian nationalism by building upon TsarTsarist cultural foundations and simplifying the image of a historical figure normally incongruous with the Marxist historical narrative. Peter’s achievements are adopted as proof of
the endemic progressivism of the Russian people, providing further support for Stalin’s reforms while forming a solid cultural foundation upon which to carry out his reforms.

Peter occupied a prominent place in the Soviet press during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Once such article discusses the publication of M.M. Bogoslovskii’s work “Petr I”, materiali dela biographii (“Peter I”: Material for a Biography) the article opens by describing Peter’s reign as a time “full of events of great significance for our country (rodina).” An earlier article from June 1937 described Tostoi and Petrov’s film as a “big event in the life of Soviet Cinema.” The article goes on to state that “Historians are anticipating the screenwriting of ‘Peter I’...for it is a rare phenomenon when art is preceded by history.” The film’s significant cultural status is further exemplified by the review’s opening which severely critiques Pokrovskii’s analysis of Peter the Great as “anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist.” The Soviet media’s inclusion of Bogoslovskii and Pokrovskii’s scholarship on Peter is not only indicative of the prominence of the historians in Soviet mainstream media but also the direct influence or in Pokrovskii’s case the lack thereof, in the film’s development. Rovinskii even states that art is taking a backseat to the historical portrayal of Peter’s character, bolstering the importance of the film and Tolstoi’s work in Russian nationhood. Just as Karamzin and Pushkin were openly joined together in The Bronze Horseman, historiography and art came together in the production of Petrov’s Peter I.

The Soviet Union’s status as a multi-national empire complicated the issue of nationhood to a considerable degree. David Brandenberger provides insight into the film’s unique role in the development of Stalinist nationalism:

Destined to win a Lenin Prize during the following year, the film stunned audiences with its unprecedentedly positive depiction of the Russian imperial past....As a hero from the distant past, Peter often seemed more ‘epic’ and ‘legendary’ than contemporary celebrities drawn from the ranks of hero-Stakhanovites and Red Army commanders.

---

196 Brandenberger, National Bolshevism, 56-57.
Brandenberger not only explains the significance of *Peter I* to Soviet audiences but also the specific utility of focusing on a historical figure such as Peter the Great. The release of *Peter I* is comparable with the films *Alexander Nevskii* and *Ivan the Terrible* by Sergei Eisenstein. Although the former film’s release was delayed by the politics surrounding the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the latter was not released until after the start of the Great Patriotic War, all three films revolve around the rehabilitation of remote historical figures for the benefit of a pantheon of Soviet heroes, glorifying a Russocentric form of Soviet identity. Peter was well known to most Soviet citizens but the remoteness of his reign in relation to the contemporary period of nationalist development made him an ideal historical figure to lionize in popular media as much of the controversy surrounding Peter could be easily subsumed beneath Tolstoi’s and Petrov’s artistry. The more prominent the historical figure, the greater the necessity to incorporate their legacies into Stalinist propaganda. Brandenberger elaborates on the establishment of this Soviet Russocentric pantheon of nationalist heroes:

> Because the party hierarchs’ interest in the tsarist past was so instrumentalist, they seem to have expected…that a new stress on…[a] pragmatic history of the prerevolutionary era could coexist quite gracefully with other, more visible campaigns concerning Soviet patriotism…The USSR’s Olympus was to be an integrated one…with Peter the Great, Alexander Nevskii, and Pushkin joining Lenin, Stalin, [and] Chapaev.\(^1\)

The debate is transparent to even a cursory analysis.\(^2\) The release of these various patriotic historical films should be considered the final rehabilitation of these figures and their incorporation into the aforementioned nationalist pantheon. Stalinist propaganda made a minute dent in Peter’s already prominent legacy due to the longstanding academic debates and historiographical lineage behind his contemporary popular persona. The films’ display of these national heroes established a new series of cultural perspectives for Soviet audiences who were meant to equate the lives of these historical figures with the goals and values of their contemporary Soviet society. Kevin Platt provides further insight into this particular case of utilitarianism by describing Alexei Tolstoi’s view towards the utility of these historical figures and their personal legacies for Stalinist leaders and general Soviet audiences: “‘in every historical phenomenon we must take what is necessary for us, discard what is archaic, and

\(^{197}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{198}\) The rehabilitation of Russia’s imperial past coincided with a merger of key Soviet heroes from the October Revolution and the Russian Civil War. Several films fall into the same nationalist category as *Peter I*. These include *Chapaev* (1934), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944,1958).
extract that which resonates with our age’…In recognition of Tolstoi’s prominent role in the Stalinist reshaping of Russia’s past, we must grant the ‘Red Count’ the additional title ‘dean of Stalinist historical writing.’” Tolstoi’s pragmatic assessment of the past is representative of the general Stalinist attitude towards historiography. Scholars and artists were primarily concerned with the coloring of the past for the Soviet audiences rather than presenting an all-encompassing image of the figure in question. Certain positive and negative aspects, when presented in the appropriate manner, developed an image the Soviets marketed as timeless and endemic to their cultural community, a symbolic representation of their heritage. Although this cultural heritage was by construction Russocentric, it was intended to transcend and amalgamate the multiple nationalities of the Soviet populace. The plot of Peter I reflects the progressivism of Peter’s reign with its benefits and costs. Although his programs sought to modernize the Russian nation for the benefit of the people, his rapidly paced reforms required immense sacrifices from the populace. Peter is portrayed as a visionary Russian hero, but his progressive ideas are cast in a transnational fashion to serve as a nationalistic binding agent for the Soviet Union’s non-Russian ethnicities.

The historical drama of Peter I is developed as a heroic narrative of the first Russian Emperor’s reign. Although Peter is a distinctly Russian historical figure and is portrayed as such throughout the majority of the film, his progressive personal characteristics are styled in such a way as to be discerned as transnational or international in application. Heroic Russian historical figures such as Peter the Great and Alexander Nevskii were lionized by Soviet artists as great heroes of the present regime in conjunction with other contemporary luminaries such as Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin and Chapaev. Revolutionary figures required no rehabilitation but glorification was needed to develop their role in the Russo-Soviet historical pantheon. These seemingly incongruous sets of heroic figures were used as tools to forge a conglomerate sense of Soviet national identity with a distinctly Russian cultural core. The role of the Soviet Union’s outer peripheries posed a serious dilemma for Soviet scholars and political figures as they sought to develop a number of identities that could be applied not only to Russia but to other regions such as Central Asia. Although the Soviet authorities actively attempted to develop various identities for their various communities, they also attempted to create symbols that could bridge

the gap between these nationalities. Figures such as Peter were developed as Russian heroes who emulated transnational, progressive values that were meant to bridge the gap between the Soviet Union’s ethnicities. These efforts mirrored those of the imperial historians and their debates concerning nationhood. The conversation that had begun in 1811 continued as the Soviets “internally colonized” their empire just as the imperial historians “internally colonized” the Russian Empire.
Anthony Smith’s assertion that nations are “dynamic, purposive communities of action,” establishes the theory that they are constantly evolving politico-cultural entities, subject to the will of those who declare themselves to be members of a specific “community” or “nation.”

The primary goal of my thesis was to offer a new perspective on the issue of Russian nationhood. While I do not disagree with Brandenberger’s analysis of the minutia and inner workings of Stalinist nationalism, I find that his argument rests on the contentious theory that the Russian Empire lacked a forum pertaining to the nature of national identity. Modernists reduce nationhood to a finite, quantifiable entity that scholars can easily grasp and develop. This reduction requires a clear means of defining and cataloging national communities while distinguishing them from other politico-cultural entities in human history. Although uniform I believe this means of cataloging and analyzing human politico-cultural communities to be somewhat limited if not exclusive. Nations are not woven from a single piece of cultural fabric. Looking beyond our basic biological uniformity, human civilization is extremely diverse and does not develop in a parallel or congruous manner. Rather than objectify and quantify national identity, I believe that a more suitable approach is to analyze the gradual development of nations through a broader chronological lens. Russia’s diverse historical narrative falls outside of the Modernist definition for much of its documented history including the “Age of Nationalism.” For centuries the region under Moscow and St. Petersburg’s control has been home to numerous ethnies, religions and races. The presence of other ethnies within the greater cultural community does not mean that the region becomes unsuitable for the development of national identity. The birth of Belarusian, Ukrainian and the Central Asian identities portrays the Russian Empire as a politico-cultural realm that fostered their growth through processes such as Etkind’s “internal colonization.” The politics of empire provided fertile soil in which fractious senses of national identity could grow. Russian national identity was not exempt from the group and responded to imperial Russian policies in kind.

My thesis attempts to emphasize the constructive nature of nationhood rather than its theorized limitations. Franklin and Widdis’ focus on the idea of “competing Russias” is the ultimate expression of the positive construction associated with nationhood. The emphasis on the

---

originality of Stalinist Russocentric national identity as well as its permanence and popularity is compelling but severely limited in scope. The assertion that scholarly discourses concerning Russian national identity, such as the Westernizer-Slavophile debates, “found little reflection in Russian society at that time outside gentry circles and the small urban intelligentsia.”

He emphasizes the dearth of educated or literate citizens and its inhibiting effect on the conception of “a larger political community [apart from] their provincial economic, cultural, and kinship associations.” Although Russia lacked a large educated populace up until the death of the empire does this sole factor indicate that the Russian Empire was unsuitable for a debate concerning the Russianness of the Empire? It is true that a minute portion of Imperial Russian society was fully literate but that does not mean that Russia’s citizens had no conception of national belonging. Brandenberger also assumes that Stalinist national identity succeeded where the tsars failed. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 could be viewed as an equal failure by the Soviets due to the collapse of an even larger multi-ethnic empire. I am not denying the existence of a Stalinist form of national identity but I believe that national identity can only be deemed effective or cohesive when it preserves the politico-cultural entity to which it is attached.

After expelling Pokrovskii’s Orthodox Marxist theories, Stalinist scholars built their Russo-Soviet sense of identity on the solid and deeply planted national themes born from the imperial debate, thus validating the efforts of Russia’s imperial nineteenth century historians and their debates concerning Russian national identity.

It is possible to trace the debate through Peter’s memorialization in historical works such as Karamzin’s Memoir and Pushkin’s The Bronze Horseman. The late tsar’s contentious and active reign has been the source of innumerable controversies within the Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. This consistent controversy made it an ideal topic to trace due to the popularity of the topic over time. References to Peter’s cultural legacy yielded the greatest discussions of Russian nationhood and cultural identity. Imperial scholars were severely divided about the positivity of the Petrine era’s effect on Russia’s cultural legacy which was in effect an embryonic academic attempt at national scholarship. Whereas Westernizers argued in favor of a dynamic and ever changing cultural heritage, Slavophiles argued in favor of a static and ancient heritage usurped by Peter and others. This debate gradually faded as scholars such as Vasily

---

201 Brandenberger, National Bolshevism, 10.
202 Ibid., 10.
Kliuchevskii combined Karamzin and Solov’ev’s interpretations into a more or less cohesive national historical narrative that established both the greater historical significance of the Petrine era as well as a limited understanding of Russia’s cultural transition. Evidence suggests the presence of a lively debate concerning Russian national identity and the conflict between dynamic and static conceptions of heritage. Brückner’s theory of “Europeanization” was just one cultural theory closely related to Russian nationhood. These scholarly developments would very likely have achieved greater clarity had it not been for the political and cultural upheaval in February and October 1917.

Early Soviet scholars such as Pokrovskii paid little heed to Peter’s cultural legacy and limited their discussions to the economic implications of his reign. I believe that Pokrovskii’s brief period of academic supremacy should be viewed as an inconsequential moment in the discourse about Russian nationhood due to his nullification by Stalinist historians following his death in 1932. The lack of adherence to Pokrovskii’s visions of Marxist Internationalism may be considered a byproduct to the former process’s resilience in the face of erasure. This failed adherence was very likely the inspiration for Stalinist contributions to nationhood which built upon the older work of tsarist historians and molded them into a form palatable to the larger Soviet educated audience. Stalin’s programs should be viewed as additional elements within Russian nationhood although it had changed considerably since the days of Nikolai Karamzin and Vasily Kliuchevskii. Stalinist scholars continued to push for a cohesive sense of nationhood based on similar Russocentric perspective as that championed by Karamzin over a century ago. The dynamism championed by Westernizers was coopted by the Soviets in order to develop a concrete connection between events in the tsarist historical narrative, the October Revolution and other major events in the Soviet historical chronology. Stalin’s nationalist efforts picked up where other late tsarist scholars left off, bypassing the void that marked the Pokrovskiian period. The connection between tsarist and Stalinist forms of nationhood was primarily pragmatic. Having failed to establish an Orthodox Marxist form of internationalist cultural affinity within the Soviet Union, Stalin was forced to return to the nationalist efforts of imperial historians in order to ensure the political stability of the regime.

Although my chronology’s start date is set in the early nineteenth century, I do not believe that scholars can safely choose a point of conception for Russian nationhood any more
than we can safely quantify or qualify the precise nature and composition of Russian national identity. The Ethno-Symbolist perspective emphasizes the gradual development of nationalism, nationhood and identity within a politico-cultural community over the course of several centuries or even millennia. The year 1811 marks a point where I discern the start of nationhood within the writings of Russia’s premier historical minds. Karamzin, Solov’ev, Kliuchevskii and Miliukov’s groundbreaking works directly and indirectly documented a greater process of cultural development within the Russian Empire. In order to try and understand the complex nature of Russian nationalism, we cannot limit scholarly discussions to identifying a date of origin or attempt to measure hegemony in so vast a region. Stalinist statecraft made considerable contributions and adjustments to nationhood but the period should be considered an era when pre-revolutionary imperial nationhood was resuscitated and continued its gradual cultural development, perhaps into the twenty-first century.

Perhaps Nicholas Riasanovksy put it best in the opening of his famous work *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*: “Every nation has its gods and its myths. One’s evaluation of their importance depends closely on one’s estimate of the significance of symbols, ideology, and psychology in nationalism… Images have lives of their own, sometimes over centuries and even millennia of human history.” Truer words were never spoken and by walking in the steps of Russia’s historical gods, we walk the same path as the scholars, statesmen and artists on the path of Russian nationhood. Much of this discourse is marked by Peter’s long historical shadow as his legacy, both positive and negative remains one of the most potent themes within Russian history.

---

203 Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, viii, 3.