On the Creation of Gods: Lenin’s Image in Stalin’s Cult of Personality

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to explain the continued presence of Vladimir Lenin’s image in Joseph Stalin’s cult of personality in the postwar era, long after the General Secretary no longer had to rely on his predecessor’s image or persona to legitimize his power over the Soviet Union. While the presence of Lenin’s image in the Stalin cult varied in both frequency and form, it continued to inform the imagery of Stalin cult up until the Soviet dictator’s death in 1953 and the placement of his body alongside Lenin’s in the newly christened Lenin-Stalin Mausoleum on Red Square. This thesis argues that the visual imagery of Stalin’s cult used the image and persona of Vladimir Lenin as the founder of the Soviet state to legitimize Stalin’s rule over the Soviet Union, and later to aggrandize the image of the General Secretary. This work also examines the changing purpose and nature of the Stalin cult, as well as the effect that World War II had on Stalin’s image. It posits that before World War II, the main purpose of the visual imagery of the Stalin cult was to legitimize Stalin’s rule over the Soviet Union, as well as his plans for constructing socialism through collectivization and industrialization. With victory over Nazi Germany in World War II and its legitimization of Stalin’s rule and policies, the purpose of the Stalin cult changed from legitimizing Stalin’s rule to aggrandizing his image. This thesis ultimately concludes that while the Stalin cult propelled the image of the Soviet dictator to near god-like heights of grandeur as a result of the victory in World War II, such resplendent depictions of Stalin relied heavily on the symbolic power of Lenin’s image within, and at times outside of, the Stalin cult in order elevate the General Secretary to such glorified heights.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Harold E. Dreeze, 1920-2012.
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Fields of Study

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Introduction: Happy Birthday, Comrade Stalin!

On December 21, 1949 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union hosted a unique celebration in Moscow. At the Bolshoi Theater an extravagant birthday celebration was held in honor of the 70th birthday of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. Though many events and ceremonies were being held throughout the Soviet Union to commemorate Stalin's birthday, the main festivities were centered in Moscow. One scholar has characterized this event as “something between a religious pilgrimage and an imperial triumph, a royal wedding and a corporate junket.”

Nearly all of the leaders of the communist world had assembled in Moscow to pay respect to Stalin, including Mao Zedong of China, Walter Ulbricht of East Germany, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej of Romania. With Stalin standing amongst them, they assembled on the stage beneath an enormous portrait of the Soviet leader surrounded by brightly colored banners, flags, and flowers. For the next few hours delegates, officials, and leaders gave speeches to Stalin, not only wishing him a happy birthday and many more years of life, but also thanking him for his leadership of the worldwide communist movement, his vast contributions to Marxist-Leninist socialist theory, as well as his role in the destruction of Nazi and fascist tyranny. In his speech Gheorghiu-Dej said, “You have, dear Joseph Vissarionovich, taught the Romanian Worker’s Party the theories and practices of constructing socialism, leading the fight for the happiness of the people,

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which is possible to achieve only under wise proletarian internationalism, only in the friendship of the Soviet Union.”

Even Mao Zedong, who had achieved victory over the Chinese Nationalist forces earlier that year with only token assistance from Stalin, offered up grandiose praises to the dictator. He said, “Allow me to say that the feeling of deep joy [I feel] is due to the unprecedented strength of the working class of the entire world, flourishing under the rule of comrade Stalin.” This extravagant celebration at the Bolshoi Theater, depicted in Oleksi Shovkunenko's painting below, and the plethora of events surrounding it, marked the apex of Stalin’s cult of personality.

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A personality cult is a "God-like glorification of a modern political leader with mass media techniques and excessive popular worship for this leader."\(^5\) In such a cult, the leader is an infallible figure with acute and immense political, economic, military, or cultural knowledge and abilities. Whether or not the leader actually possesses such attributes is irrelevant. There is usually a large propaganda apparatus, staffed by loyal followers of the leader, which actively promotes the leader’s cult through a plethora of different methods and available media. Other examples of personality cults analogous to Stalin’s own cult are the cults of the Kim dynasty in North Korea, Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, and Adolf Hitler in Germany.

\(^{4}\) [http://marxists.architecture.net/subject/art/visual_arts/painting/exhibits/socialist-realism/peoples-love.jpg](http://marxists.architecture.net/subject/art/visual_arts/painting/exhibits/socialist-realism/peoples-love.jpg)

The late 1930s has often been cited by some scholars as the height of Stalin's cult of personality. The reason for this assertion is the large number of images of the dictator that appeared in the Soviet press in the latter half of the 1930s. In fact, after World War II, the total number of images appearing in the press actually declined. One explanation for this is that by the 1940s, Stalin's image had become so prevalent in society, almost to the point of saturation, that there was a lesser need to publish a large number of images. Also, by this time, a distinct cultic canon, a ritualized, repeated, and state-approved way of portraying Stalin within the context of the cult, had been established. Furthermore, the cult had taken on a highly ritualized nature, with Stalin's image now usually only appearing in the press during state holidays and official celebrations. For a comparison, in 1949, the year of the 70th birthday celebrations, Stalin appeared in the newspaper Pravda 35 times. In 1939, the year of his 60th birthday celebrations he appeared in Pravda 142 times. Thus, from a narrow numerical perspective of the newspaper press, it is possible to argue that Stalin's cult reached its apex in the late 1930s.

However, while Stalin's image appeared less frequently in the Soviet press in the latter half of the 1940s, the content and nature of the postwar cultic images set them apart from the images of the late 1930s. World War II dramatically transformed Stalin's image, from a builder of socialism in the 1930s, to a military genius in the 1940s and 1950s who led the Soviet Union to victory over Nazi Germany. Starting during World War II, Stalin began to appear in the Soviet press in resplendent uniforms, bedecked with medals, and

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8 Ibid., 228.
within settings that conveyed not only the accomplishments that Soviet propaganda attributed to him, such as the building of socialism and victory in the war, but also the solemnity, magnitude, and importance of such events. While the cult portrayed Stalin in grandiose and solemn fashion during the 1930s, the postwar portrayal of Stalin in uniform and the legitimization of Stalinism that accompanied the victory over Germany, endowed Stalin's cultic image with a level of opulence and meaningfulness that was lacking from the prewar Stalin cult.

This differentiation is derived from the changing purpose of the Stalin cult. The original purpose of the cult was simply to legitimize Stalin's role as the paramount leader of the Soviet Union in the early to mid 1930s. By the time of Stalin's 60th birthday celebrations in 1939 there was no question as to General Secretary's legitimacy as leader. The terror of 1937-1938 strengthened this legitimacy in that any disloyal elements or possible challengers to Stalin's mantle of power within the party had been liquidated and the cult's portrayal of Stalin as a builder of socialism conveyed the idea that the General Secretary was the sole individual who could properly guide the Soviet Union along its path to communism and the Marxist promised land.

The Stalin cult's original purpose of legitimizing the General Secretary's rule over the Soviet Union had been based on the principles of Lenin’s cult. The Lenin cult, though very modest during Lenin's lifetime, was greatly expanded by the party after the Soviet leader's death in 1924. The party used Lenin's image to shore up its perceived political instability and lack of legitimacy in the wake of Lenin's death. Stalin played an important role in the development of Lenin's cult of personality in the early 1920s, later using it as a
basis for his own personality cult. In the early 1930s, Lenin's cult was subsumed entirely into Stalin's cult and the image of Lenin was used by the cult to legitimize Stalin as his rightful heir. Though the prevalence of Lenin's image in the cult lessened during the 1930s, it still functioned as a significant source of legitimacy for Stalin throughout much of the decade.

By the end of the 1930s, and with the victory in World War II, Stalin no longer had to rely on Lenin as a source of legitimacy. In a similar fashion, the purpose of the Stalin cult appears to have moved beyond simply reinforcing Stalin's power over the state, country, and party. While David Brandenberger argues that the Stalin cult came to serve as an ideological tool in the late 1930s, whose purpose was to indoctrinate the Soviet masses with Stalin-centric Marxist ideology, the cult also came to serve the purpose of simply further aggrandizing Stalin's image. By the late 1930s and the onset of World War II Stalin's legitimacy as leader of the Soviet Union was no longer an issue that could be contended and thus the original purpose of the Stalin cult had been fulfilled.

However, Lenin still appeared regularly in Stalin's cult throughout the postwar years. When he appeared, it was usually in the days around the annual celebration of his death on January 21st, or the anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution. But in these manifestations Stalin was always closely linked to his predecessor. It seems unusual that, during this time of unprecedented growth in the grandiosity of Stalin's image, the strong links between Lenin and Stalin would be emphasized by the cult. One possible

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reason for this was that Lenin was simply part of the cultic canon. Stalin had initially been associated with Lenin and it would thus have likely been impossible or anathema to completely exclude Lenin from the Stalin cult. However, this thesis will contend that such a conclusion ignores the intricacies and changing nature of the Stalin cult.

Nina Tumarkin states that with the full establishment of Stalin's cult, Lenin had faded to the background of his successor's cult, acting as a harmless icon and bestowing legitimacy onto Stalin for the duration of the Stalin cult. While there is no doubt that this description is accurate, it has short-comings. Lenin's image still did convey a sense of legitimacy, but this legitimacy became unnecessary and redundant due to the prestige and legitimacy that Stalin gained over the course of the 1930s and the legitimization of the Stalinist system as a result of World War II. Rather, in the postwar context, Lenin's image functioned as a tool to increase the grandeur of the Stalin cult to new levels. The most significant piece of evidence for this is the similar celebratory template used in the annual celebrations of Lenin's death and the main ceremony for Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations in 1949.

In this thesis, I will argue against Tumarkin's assertions about Lenin playing a relatively harmless role in Stalin's cultic background, showing that his image actually played an influential role in the increasing grandeur of Stalin's image in the cult in the postwar era. I conclude that the similarities between the annual ceremonies to commemorate Lenin's death and Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations in 1949, as well as the different portrayals of the Lenin ceremonies from the prewar to postwar era, indicate a shift in the role of Lenin's image in the Stalin cult, from one of conveying legitimacy onto the General Secretary to increasing the grandeur of Stalin's image. In this context I am
not arguing that Lenin's image was the sole reason for the increase in the resplendence and grandiosity of Stalin's postwar image, but rather that it served to facilitate this resplendence. I will also discuss the legitimizing factor of the victory over Germany in World War II and how this legitimacy proved instrumental in the shaping of the postwar cult. These arguments and conclusions are relevant because they reveal that Lenin was not merely a static figure or lifeless wallflower in the Stalin cult. They add nuance to Stalin's postwar image, showing that while the victory in World War II propelled Stalin's cult to new heights, Lenin's image also greatly influenced the development of Stalin's image.

In this work I treat the cult as a unified entity. I note later in the paper that the cult was made up of a complex network of various media, government, and artistic organizations. Furthermore, various officials, bureaucrats, editors, and artists were responsible for the creation, management, and distribution of the various cultic imagery. For the sake of simplicity these organizations are collectively referred to as "the Stalin cult," "the cult," or "the cultic organs."

This work focuses almost exclusively on the visual aspects of the Stalin cult. Though the cult included various types of writings\textsuperscript{11} and even poetry, its most powerful and far-reaching components were its visual depictions of the Soviet dictator.\textsuperscript{12} The

\textsuperscript{11} Robert Tucker notes that one of the first developments of the Stalin cult after the General Secretary's 50th birthday celebrations in 1929 was the solidification of Stalin's credentials as a Marxist philosopher and Communist Party historian. In criticizing a 1930 article printed in the journal *Proletarian Revolution* for its particularly critical interpretation of Lenin's view of the pre-war SPD in Germany, Stalin established himself as the supreme arbiter of Party history, Lenin's legacy, and scholar of Marxist thought. Stalin's rejection and criticism of an article that was critical of Lenin's pre-war Marxist views made Lenin an infallible figure, and thus nominated himself for similar future treatment. See Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), Chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{12} Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, xv.
relatively low literacy rates of the Soviet population in the 1920s and early 1930s ensured that visual images were the mainstay\textsuperscript{13} of the cult.\textsuperscript{14} In relying mainly on the visual aspects of the cult this paper draws heavily on Peter Burke's ideas on visual images. Burke states that visual images should be considered useful pieces of historical evidence, on par with written texts and oral testimonies, in the writing of history.\textsuperscript{15} He notes that images can allow historians to view certain historical events or people from the perspective of a contemporary viewpoint.\textsuperscript{16} However, he warns that historians should not automatically attribute images an innocent eye, free from bias, or assume that the images reflect a truthful depiction of an era or person. Burke states that it is necessary to understand the context under which these images were created, as well as the motives of their creators.\textsuperscript{17} In understanding the context that images were created under, historians can determine not only to what extent an image was reflective of a particular era, but also the purpose behind any possible distortions.\textsuperscript{18} In this manner, while images may not reflect historical reality, they can still tell us much about the history of a particular era, and within the content of the Stalin cult, show to the modern viewer what the state wanted reality to look like, as well as what they wanted the Soviet people to believe.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, xv.
\textsuperscript{14} David Brandenberger asserts that biography, specifically Stalin's \textit{Short Biography} of 1939, had just as much relevancy to the cult as its various visual imagery, such as sculpture and portraiture. While it may have been an important component of the cult and the union-wide literacy rates had been increasing all throughout the 1930s, cultic visual images had a significant head start and presence over the \textit{Short Biography}, considering the beginning of the Stalin cult in December 1929, and the increasing literacy rates did not necessarily ensure that wide swaths of Soviet peoples were reading the \textit{Short Biography}. See David Brandenberger, \textit{Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror Under Stalin 1927-1941} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 30-32.
Furthermore, this paper also utilizes some of the ideas of Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to anthropology. In this approach, the key to understanding a particular society is not focusing on its origins or causes, but rather studying the meaning of its various cultural systems and symbols.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, this thesis attempts to interpret both the state's purpose for the Stalin cult and how it functioned in Soviet society.

In addition to utilizing Burke's ideas on images, this paper will also use the ideas of W. J. T. Mitchell. In his study of pictures, \textit{What do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images}, Mitchell anthropomorphizes images and states that images take on lives of their own, almost akin to living organisms, and discusses what these lives mean, as well as asks the question "what do images want?"\textsuperscript{20} While this notion of anthropomorphizing images, much less asking them actual questions, may seem absurd, Mitchell points out that in reality humans possess a double consciousness towards images that oscillates "between magical beliefs and skeptical doubts, naive animism and hardheaded materialism, mystical and critical attitudes."\textsuperscript{21} In other words, while we humans know that images are merely ink on paper, shaped stone, and radio waves or electric signals projected onto a screen, we endow them with a meaning and agency that Mitchell contends is often on par with an animate being, and can also influence us and shape our thinking as though the image was a living and breathing organism.\textsuperscript{22}

While Mitchell's concept of granting images a sense of agency and using this perspective to try to determine what images want or what they are trying to do may seem

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{22} Mitchell, \textit{What do Pictures Want?}, 30.
unusual, his ideas can provide a unique avenue of looking at and understanding the Stalin cult. Firstly, it allows the viewer to better understand the power and meaning of the cultic imagery. The various images of Stalin exuded an aura of power and agency in that it represented not only an individual and powerful political figure, but also that Stalin's image represented something beyond his own physical persona and his rule over the Soviet Union. Mitchell notes that the potency of many images resides "in their status as enigmas and omens, harbingers of uncertain futures."\(^{23}\) Within the context of the Stalin cult, potency lay not in the image of Stalin as a harbinger of uncertainty, but rather as the harbinger of certainty, the certainty of the triumph of the Soviet Union, and its eventual arrival to the glorious communist utopia by his own hands.

Within this context, Burke, Geertz, and Mitchell provide a sound methodology for examining the images of the Stalin cult. The cultic imagery cannot be taken at face value alone. Generations of historians have proven the inefficiencies, failings, hardships, and deaths brought on by Stalin and his Stalinist system. It is not difficult to conclude that the cultic image of Stalin was an ideal that bore little relation to the actual man. However, the cultic ideal of Stalin should not be totally ignored or discarded into Trotsky's dustbin of history. The cult was a reality and a defining feature of the Stalinist era. Understanding the context of its creation and the message it was disseminating throughout the Soviet Union can shed light onto the motivations and purposes of the various cultic images. In this manner, understanding the cult and its imagery can help to contextualize the Stalinist era, as well as shed light onto how so much power and influence came to be embodied in one man.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 12.
Chapter 1: The Creation of the Lenin Cult and the Stalin Cult

Though its ultimate form was eventually very different from its predecessor's, the Stalin cult was born out of the precedent of the Lenin cult. In fact, as this thesis will further reveal, the specter of the Lenin cult would continue to haunt the Stalin cult for the duration of its existence. This chapter will address the establishment and development of both the Lenin cult and the Stalin cult, paying particular attention to how Lenin and Stalin were initially very closely linked, and later how the General Secretary eventually came to outshine his predecessor. In doing so, the following arguments and analysis will not only highlight and discuss aspects and characteristics of both cults, but will also emphasize the importance of the relationship between the Lenin cult and the Stalin cult. This relationship is pertinent because, as the reader will eventually come to see in later chapters, Stalin's connection with Lenin, despite the General Secretary eventually no longer requiring the legitimacy that Lenin's image once conveyed onto him, was vitally important in the culminating manifestations of the Stalin cult.

There is some dispute as to the origins and foundations of the Lenin cult. Tumarkin\textsuperscript{24} and Olga Velikanova\textsuperscript{25} both argue that the cult was inspired from long-standing traditional views towards religion and leaders, and that Lenin and Stalin were able to fill a socio-religious gap that the image of the tsar had once filled. Velikanova

\textsuperscript{24} Tumarkin, \textit{Lenin Lives}, 4-12.

further states that Lenin's charisma as a leader allowed him not only to assume the leadership of the Bolshevik party, but also inspired admiration and devotion among his various followers, eventually manifesting into a leadership cult. Jan Plamper, similar to Tumarkin and Velikanova, also states that the traditional tsarist cult influenced the creation of Lenin's cult, and that some of its concepts, such as the existence of a special connection between the leader and the narod, what he refers to as the "tsarist carryover," were visible in the cult. However, in acknowledging the tsarist carryover, he also argues that there had traditionally been small personality cults among leftist leaders and in many radical intelligentsia circles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and that these traditions played a more important role in the establishment of the Lenin and Stalin cults than the tsarist carryover. He also places the Stalin cult within a modern 20th century context, noting that new mass media techniques, as well as the apparent interaction or playing off of the other great leader cults of interwar Europe, those of Hitler and Mussolini, were also vitally important in the establishment and form of the Stalin cult. Benno Ennker, as will be discussed below, divorces the founding of the Lenin cult from any kind of tsarist carryover, noting that religious and Orthodox ideas were totally absent from the cult's establishment and that political considerations were the main motivating factor behind Lenin's cult. While it is ultimately impossible to determine the exact

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26 Ibid., 24-25.
27 Jan Plamper, The Stalin Cult, 9.
28 Ibid., 223.
29 Ibid., 222.
origins of the Lenin cult, it is possible to conclude that there were likely a plethora of different influences on the founding of the cult.

However, I contend that the traditions of the tsarist cult, such as its concept of the fatherly and protective batiushka-tsar (little fatherly tsar), played a significant role in the cult's development, if only that it helps to explain the acceptance and promotion of the Lenin cult, or at the very least explains a certain familiarity with it among the Soviet populace. Many citizens of the Russian Empire had been familiar with the tsarist cult. The cults focusing on the new Soviet leaders likely did not seem out of place to many people, but merely a traditional sign of power and authority. Thus, the Lenin and Stalin cults, though significantly different from their tsarist forerunners, were established in a context in which leader cults had been a regular and historical feature. This, combined with the precedent of leadership cults from the political left helps to explain why the concept of a leader cult, and the elevation of an individual over all others, was tolerated and even enthusiastically promoted in a Marxist society.

Lenin's personality cult had been established in the early 1920s while the Soviet leader was still alive. Initially the cult was quite modest, compared to the lavishness of Stalin's cult in later years. Lenin was actually quite uncomfortable with the use of his image in Soviet propaganda. His fiftieth birthday celebration in 1920 was a low-key meeting of old comrades in Moscow where he was lauded in speeches by Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev. Lenin found such talk embarrassing and unnecessary and
actually left the meeting early. 31 However, after his death in January 1924, the Lenin cult took off and gradually increased in its opulence. 32

Much of the Communist Party had early on been held together by Lenin's charisma, and there was significant fear that with his death the unity of the party, and even the state, might collapse. Lenin's status as the leader of both the October Revolution and of the country meant that he functioned as source of legitimacy for the young Soviet government. His heirs' fears over possible instability in the wake of his death played a significant role in their embalming of his body and its placement in the mausoleum on Red Square. Ennker notes that efforts to mobilize public mourning for Lenin's funeral were so successful that the party leadership itself became enthralled and attempted to perpetuate this perceived sense of political loyalty through the establishment of a Lenin cult, which eventually led to the permanent embalming of Lenin. The decision to permanently embalm and display Lenin's body was not decided immediately after his death but only after the Soviet leaders deduced the potentially lucrative political windfall that could be derived from putting Lenin's body on permanent display. 33 Ennker further notes that while Stalin appears to have supported the embalming of Lenin's body, there was significant disagreement among the leadership over the decision to embalm. 34 Fellow comrades, such as Trotsky, Bukharin, and Kamenev, and even Nadezhda Krupskaya,

34 Ibid., 123.
Lenin's widow, initially opposed the embalming.\textsuperscript{35} Even Voroshilov, Stalin's disciple, also initially objected. In fact it was Dzerzhinsky who was the most ardent supporter of the establishment of the Lenin cult and the embalming of Lenin's body.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite these protests, Dzerzhinsky was able to convince the various Soviet leaders to have Lenin's body embalmed for his funeral in January 1924. It was only in March 1924, after the body had been on display for some time, had begun to decompose, and that the various officials saw the political advantages of permanent display, that the decision was made to construct a permanent mausoleum and re-embalm Lenin's body for continual display.\textsuperscript{37} Most party leaders came to this conclusion reasoning that it honored the deceased leader, established a unifying symbol around which the party could rally for support, and thus ensured the legitimacy and continuation of the Soviet state. Velikanova notes that while the decision to put Lenin's body on permanent display was a political one, made to ensure stability by reinforcing the idea of Lenin's continued presence in Soviet society and thus the continued legitimacy of the regime, there were actual letters from citizens who called for the permanent preservation and display of Lenin's body.\textsuperscript{38}

While there were only a handful of these suggestions, (Ennker states that there were only 16 such letters!)\textsuperscript{39} this provided convenient justification for Dzerzhinsky in his attempts to rally support to temporarily, and then later, permanently embalm Lenin's body. Though Stalin was later attributed as being the final arbiter in the decision to embalm Lenin's corpse by his own cult, Velikanova states that is not accurate and was done only to

\textsuperscript{35}Velikanova, \textit{Making of an Idol}, 55-57.
\textsuperscript{36}Ennker, "The Origins and Intentions of the Lenin Cult," 123.
\textsuperscript{37}Velikanova, \textit{Making of an Idol}, 60.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{39}Ennker, "The Origins and Intentions of the Lenin Cult," 122.
emphasize Stalin's role as a loyal devotee of Lenin.\footnote{Velikanova, \textit{Making of an Idol}, 60.} Ennker also notes that the establishment of the Lenin cult was not part of the long term planning on Stalin's part.\footnote{Ennker, "The Origins and Intentions of the Lenin Cult," 126.} The permanent mausoleum was eventually completed in 1930\footnote{Since 1924 Lenin's body had been held in a temporary wooden mausoleum of the same design.} and portrayed by the Soviet media as one of the many triumphs of the First Five Year Plan.\footnote{Tumarkin, \textit{Lenin Lives!}, 205-207.}

In the course of the 1920s, Stalin gained control over most of the Soviet government, and in the process was also likely able to gain significant influence, if not total control, over Lenin's cult.\footnote{Ibid., 246.} The 1920s was a period of fervent and rapid expansion of the Lenin cult. Inspired by Lenin's permanent placement in the mausoleum, the cultic material at this time often conveyed the message of Lenin living on forever and that his teachings would continue to be the basis of the Communist Party for all time. Slogans such as "Lenin Lives!", "Leninism Lives!", and "Healthy or sick, living or dead...Lenin remains our eternal leader!" appeared in Soviet media in the subsequent years after Lenin's death. By the late 1920s, the broad and fervent propaganda campaign to spread and promote Lenin's cult had subsided and its appearance in media began to lessen. Stalin's likely plan for the promotion of the Lenin cult had been to establish it in a vigorous manner so that it would eventually give way to a more standardized and stable form of propaganda that could then be utilized in his own cult. Stalin completed this
likely process by 1929 and likely felt confident enough to launch of his own personality

cult, which began with his 50th birthday celebrations in 1929.\(^{45}\)

While Plamper asserts that Stalin actually had little to do with the orchestration

of Lenin's cult, he does not acknowledge that while Stalin may not have been the single

original orchestrator of Lenin's cult, he would have gained control over the cult by the

late 1920s or early 1930s as a result of his growing power in the Soviet government.\(^{46}\)

Tumarkin's narrative places Stalin as one of the initial prime movers of Lenin's cult. For

example, she portrays him as being the significant factor in the initial decision regarding

the embalming of Lenin's body.\(^{47}\) However, Velikanova and Ennker challenge

Tumarkin's ideas in this regard, adding nuance to Stalin's role in the decision to embalm.

Both state that while Stalin did support the embalming of Lenin's body, he was just one

of several Bolshevik leaders who also supported the initial embalming, and was not the

mastermind behind its creation. In actuality it was Dzerzhinsky. Thus, while Tumarkin

likely overstated Stalin's initial control and influence over the Lenin cult, her assertions,

that Stalin did eventually gain control over the Lenin cult as he gained control over the

government, are correct.

After the 1929 birthday celebrations, Stalin's image all but disappeared from

Soviet media for several years in the early 1930s, while Lenin's image remained visible,

\(^{45}\) Jan Plamper, , "Georgian Koba or Soviet 'Father of the Peoples'?: The Stalin Cult and Ethnicity," in The


Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 125.

\(^{46}\) Plamper, The Stalin Cult, 24.

\(^{47}\) Tumarkin, Lenin Lives!, 174.
albeit in a lessened presence compared to the heyday of his cult in the mid 1920s.\textsuperscript{48} The reason for the rapid retreat of Stalin's cult is unclear, though Plamper states that one possibility for this occurrence may have resulted from the unpopularity of collectivization. Though Stalin would later come to be associated with collectivization, he could not afford to be directly associated with the seizing of farmland and the often violent confrontations between the peasantry and government officials in charge of implementing collectivization. Plamper also speculates that opposition to Stalin's strong, but not yet supreme, hold over the government may have precluded the appearance of Stalin's cult in the years immediately after his 50th birthday. Ennker notes that the Stalin cult was a vital component of the Soviet system of political power and reflective of the level of control that Stalin exercised over the workings of the Soviet state. He essentially states that the more prevalent and grandiose the cult became, the more power Stalin exerted over the country. As such, it seems likely that one of the main reasons for the cultic retreat in the early 1930s, which was likely strengthened by the disastrous effects of collectivization, was simply the fact that Stalin was not yet the supreme overlord of the Soviet state. It would seem that while the General Secretary wished to use his nascent cult to establish his legitimacy as the leader of the Soviet Union, it is possible that he was

\textsuperscript{48} While Stalin's image might have disappeared from most Soviet media, the cultic organs were still functioning in other forms of media. As noted in a previous footnote, in 1931 Stalin began to establish himself as the supreme arbiter of both Lenin's history and the Party's history, as well as ideological matters with his critical response to a 1930 article from the journal \textit{Proletarian Revolution}. He noted that what was important about Lenin and other significant figures of the Party was not what they had written previously or what had been written about them. Rather, what was important were the deeds that they carried out. In this manner Stalin not only invalidated any and all of Lenin's pre-revolutionary writings that might have contradicted actions and decisions that were undertaken in the post-revolutionary setting, essentially offering justification and method for the re-writing of history, but also created a standard by which he himself should be considered and judged. In this context, Stalin's actions would always be significantly more meaningful than his worlds. Tucker, \textit{Stalin in Power}, 153.
unsure of his power over the government and waited until he had manipulated the various rulings organs so that there was no significant opposition to his power to re-cultivate the visual aspect of his cult.\textsuperscript{49} Regardless of the reason for its disappearance from Soviet propaganda, by 1933 Stalin's cult had reappeared fully in Soviet media.\textsuperscript{50}

With the reemergence of Stalin's image in Soviet media, Lenin's cult as an independent entity began to decline precipitously, and by 1933 had been completely subsumed into Stalin's. Lenin was now an image that Stalin used to promote his own legitimacy as leader of the Soviet Union. In this fashion, Stalin was portrayed as being Lenin's best student as well as his designated heir. Later on, as the cult progressed, Stalin was shown not just to be Lenin's pupil, but also his equal. For example, in 1937, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution, the equal representation of Lenin and Stalin in the media indicated that both leaders played an equal part in the carrying out of the revolution.\textsuperscript{51} Images of Lenin and Stalin, whether together in the same image or in separate images paired together, conveyed the ideas of friendship and equality between the two leaders. In fact the images often implied a friendship or relationship between the two that was on par with the dichotomy between Marx and Engels that was frequently seen in Soviet propaganda. However, these images could also, at times, hint at the idea of Stalin's gradual encroachment over Lenin's image as the centerpiece of the cult's dichotomy, as well as Lenin's subsequent move into the background of the cult. Tumarkin states that this is clearly seen in a 1922 photograph of

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\textsuperscript{50}Plamper, \textit{The Stalin Cult}, 37.

\textsuperscript{51}Davies, \textit{Popular Opinion}, 152.
Lenin, who was ill at the time, and Stalin that was first published in 1933. This photograph shows Lenin "as a tired old man". Stalin, on the other hand, has a relatively youthful appearance. This contrast conveys the image of Stalin possessing the youthfulness and will to lead the Soviet people, but it also embodies Lenin, the tired old man, fading to the background while Stalin emerges, as Lenin's legitimate successor, to take center stage. In fact, as the Stalin cult progressed, Stalin's growing usurpation over Lenin became more pronounced.

Figure 2. V. I. Lenin and J. V. Stalin in Gorky in 1922.  

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52 Tumarkin, Lenin Lives!, 250.  
A more ostentatious depiction of Lenin being pushed to the background of the cult is seen in Grigory Shegal's _Leader, Teacher, and Friend (J.V. Stalin in the Presidium of the Second Congress of the Kolkhoz Farmer-Shock Workers in February 1935)._ In this painting the statue of Lenin in the background is looking out of the picture at some unseen point. One possible interpretation of this is that he is looking intently into the glorious communist future, the workers' and peasants' paradise that he had sought to create. Lenin's stance in this image is different from the common portrayal of the Soviet leader with an outstretched arm, such as the statue of him outside of the Finland Station in St. Petersburg. The outstretched arm usually indicated Lenin's encouragement of the forward motion of Soviet society into the bright communist future, or his hailing of the contemporary accomplishments of communism. Within the context of this painting, Lenin's determined gaze, though different from the outstretched arm, also conveys encouragement for the movement of Soviet society towards the bright communist utopia.

But despite this sharp gaze, Lenin is lifeless, a fact reinforced by the paleness of the statue's color. This lifelessness conveys the idea that Lenin is dead and gone, and his gaze into the bright future indicates that the dream of a communist utopia had not been achieved in his lifetime. The image of Stalin conveys the exact opposite. Stalin is talking and working directly with the various _kolkhozniki_ (kolkhoz workers) and _stakhanovites_ (shock workers), presumably about increasing agricultural and industrial output. In this context Stalin is shown to be actively working towards the construction of socialism and the establishment of the bright communist utopia. This dynamic image of Stalin, which contrasts significantly with later images of him in which he barely moves, combined with
the inspiring, but lifeless, Lenin in the background, signifies that Stalin is the rightful, as well as active and virile, heir to Lenin's ideas, and thereby legitimizes Stalin as the valid leader of the Soviet Union.

While this picture clearly shows a lifeless Lenin regulated to the literal background of the portrait, it does not quite convey Stalin's total usurpation over Lenin. Lenin's enormous size and his towering stance over Stalin and the other individuals is likely meant to convey the lasting influence that Lenin has left on Soviet society. This portrait seemingly indicates that no matter what Stalin is doing, he is always going to be in Lenin's shadow to some extent. In addition to this, Stalin's connection to Lenin is greatly reinforced. In a different interpretation, the lifelessness and otherworldliness that Lenin's image conveys, combined with the image of Stalin actively working with the various kolkhozniki and stakhanovites, it almost appears that Lenin is gazing approvingly from the communist utopia in the sky. In this manner, while Stalin is conveyed by the painting as being a builder of communism and Lenin's heir, there is also significant respect and deference being paid to Lenin and his legacy, despite his position in the background of the cult. But even with the interpretation of Lenin looking approvingly upon Stalin from on high, Lenin's distance and absence from society is emphasized. The most important and relevant figure of the image is still Stalin.
In addition to portraying Stalin as Lenin’s rightful heir and as a builder of socialism, this painting also conveys Stalin as being the sole font of state power. No other Soviet leaders, except the distant, lifeless, and otherworldly Lenin, are present. The various workers are petitioning or consulting directly with Stalin as though he is the only person within the Soviet government who mattered or was powerful enough to affect meaningful changes. In this context Stalin and the state are shown to be one and the

same. Furthermore, this painting also reinforces that concept of Stalin as the "father of the peoples" of the Soviet Union. The *kolkhozniki* and stakhanovites, whose differing articles of clothing indicate that the individuals represent various ethnic groups of the Soviet Union, almost appear to be clamoring around Stalin, like children vying for the attention of their father.

This idea, Stalin as a father figure, has its origins in the concept of the *batiushka tsar* from the tsarist cult. In this concept, the tsar was a fatherly and saintly individual with a strong connection to God. This connection bonded the tsar with his people, to whom he was a kind and fatherly figure always looking out for the best interests of his subjects. An indicator of Stalin as the *batiushka tsar* is seen in the various petitions that Soviet citizens sent to the General Secretary. Traditionally, peasants had sent petitions to the tsar in the hope that the *batiushka tsar* would answer their requests. Davies indicates that the language and form of petitions in the Soviet era were at times similar to the pre-revolutionary petitions to the tsar. For example, some forms of language in the petitions to Stalin, such as *velikii gosudar*, weren't used in Soviet propaganda. While this may indicate some segments of the Soviet population saw Stalin as a *batiushka tsar*-like figure, Davies argues that this may have also simply been the continuation of behavior and social strategies that had worked in the past.

Stalin as the father of the peoples was also heavily promoted by the Stalin cult during the 1930s, conveying the General Secretary as a caring transnational leader,

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57 Your great majesty or your lordship.
58 Davies, 161-162.
watching out for his people as though they were his own children. This concept was
developed by the cult in order to facilitate a sense of unity among the Soviet Union's
numerous ethnic groups. An example of Stalin as a transnational leader can be seen in an
issue of Pravda from 1936. Stalin was photographed with a young girl named Gelya
Markizova, from the Buryat-Mongol republic. In this image he is depicted as the father
of the peoples not only in that he is shown to be a father-like figure next to a small girl,
but also because of the girl's ethnicity. She is of Asian, most likely Mongol or Buryat,
descent. In this fashion the Stalin cult portrayed Stalin not only as a father figure to
whom children and adults could look up to, but also as a trans-national leader whom the
people of various ethnic groups could turn to for guidance and help.

In portraying Stalin as a father figure and trans-national leader to the various peoples and ethnic groups of the Soviet Union, it is perhaps not surprising that Stalin's immediate family, his sons Yakov and Vasily and daughter Svetlana, were totally absent from cult. Unlike the cults of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, Kim Jong-Un in North Korea, Stalin's family was never mentioned in his cult. In fact any depictions of Stalin's family were absolutely forbidden. Stalin's Georgian ethnicity was also absent from much of the cultic material, only occasionally appearing in works, exhibitions, and literature that dealt with his youth or early days as a revolutionary in the Caucasus.

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61 Davies, Opinion in Stalin's Russia, 153.
had become furious when it was mentioned in the newspapers that he had gone to Georgia to visit his ailing mother.\textsuperscript{63} The reason Stalin's family and ethnicity were excluded from his cult was because it could detract from his trans-national cultic image. Any reference to his family, especially his mother who only spoke Georgian, could show the Soviet public that Stalin was like every other Soviet citizen and had a distinct ethnicity. Furthermore, the mention of a family would also portray Stalin as an earthly individual. Especially in regards to the post-war era, when Stalin's image began to attain increasingly god-like qualities, Stalin could not be depicted by the cult as having a family because the presence of a family would detract from his awesome image.

In discussing the Stalin cult it is necessary to briefly talk about the means of production for the various cultic material, as well as the regulation and control of the various cultic images. Many images of Stalin were actually produced in artistic competitions. Several of the Soviet Union's best and most well-known artists, such as Stalin prize laureate Aleksandr Gerasimov, entered into these competitions with the hopes of producing an award winning portrait of Stalin.\textsuperscript{64} The winners of these competitions received sizable cash prizes and would often have their works reproduced by other artists. A judging committee, made of up members from various artistic, educational, publishing, and party-state organizations, determined which pieces were the best paintings of Stalin. Those selected would then be mass produced by various publishing bodies and distributed by the media in newspapers, posters, and other types of

\textsuperscript{63} Montefiore,\textit{ Stalin}, 182.
\textsuperscript{64} Jan Plamper, “The Stalin Cult in the Visual Arts, 1929-1953” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2001), 114-118.
publications.\textsuperscript{65} The artists who did not have their paintings chosen by the judging committees were often recruited by officials to reproduce the winner's production. These artists often worked in publishing houses and visual art factories, reproducing selected works on an industrial scale.\textsuperscript{66} In addition to artistic competitions, some cultic works were also commissioned, produced, or facilitated as a result of a system of patronage. Kliment Voroshilov, a Marshal of the Red Army and the Commissar of War from 1925 to 1940, was an enthusiastic patron of the visual arts.\textsuperscript{67} He often provided various resources to petitioning artists, such as housing, permission to travel abroad, and even financial help. Plamper notes that Voroshilov was Gerasimov's main patron, at one point providing the artist with financial help in the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{68} Voroshilov's patronage of Gerasimov likely explains the artist's impressive portrayal of the marshal in the painting \textit{Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin}.\textsuperscript{69}

Even though a judging committee of various officials often determined the quality of a Stalin portrait and whether it was viable for reproduction or display, the ultimate approval of a particular image rested with Stalin and his secretariat. While Stalin projected an image of modesty and hesitant toleration of his cult, he directly facilitated and allowed the cult's expansion and increasing grandiosity. Plamper bluntly states that it was clear that "Stalin wanted his own cult."\textsuperscript{70} His action of allowing the cult is far more significant and meaningful than his words of disdain towards it. The cult and the

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 132-133.  
\textsuperscript{66}Plamper, \textit{The Stalin Cult}, 183-184.  
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., 145.  
\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., 150-151.  
\textsuperscript{69}See page 48.  
\textsuperscript{70}Plamper, \textit{The Stalin Cult}, 122.
immense amount of resources it consumed would not have been possible or available without Stalin's approval. The facade of disdain for the various aspects of his cult was a way for the Soviet leader to separate himself from the decidedly un-Marxist vanity that the creation and promotion of one's own personality cult implied and thereby attribute the cult's existence to genuine popular support. For example, in 1938 Stalin barred the publication of a book titled, *Stories of Stalin's Childhood*, saying that it was full of embellishments and false praises. He recommended that the book be burned.\(^71\) This facade extended all the way to Stalin's own personal archives. Plamper argues that the materials in Stalin's archive that emphasized the leader's modesty and contempt for the cult were likely planted there by Stalin, or a member of his secretariat, in an attempt to manipulate history and to reinforce the concept of his own modesty to future historians and scholars.\(^72\) While it is unlikely that Stalin personally approved of all the images in his cult or micromanaged its various aspects, he did play an integral role in the establishment and regulation of the cultic canon and his image. Furthermore, his secretariat functioned as a censoring organization, regulating all cultic images that eventually appeared in state media.

Plamper's ideas on Stalin's manipulation of his own cult through the select placement of documents in the archives, the concept of immodest modesty, and the possibility that the General Secretary himself might have dictated how his image should be portrayed, fits with some of Robert Tucker's ideas on Stalin, his personality, and the possible motivations behind the personality cult. In his psychologically-based history of

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\(^{71}\)Ibid., 123.

\(^{72}\)Ibid., 125-126.
Stalin's prewar rule, Tucker argues that Stalin's ultimate goal of accumulating power around himself was to achieve "fame and glory."73 This desire for fame and glory is visible in Stalin's response to the article on Lenin published in *Proletarian Revolution* in 1931.74 By bestowing on Lenin an unprecedented level of infallibility, in which the leader's actions were vastly more important than anything the leader had written or even said, Stalin retroactively made Lenin an infallible figure, and thus paved the way for his own future infallibility and the fame and glory that would accompany it. While Stalin's actions could be interpreted by an observer, and were at the time touted by the cult, as a disciple honoring the memory and works of his teacher, the fact that this took place in 1931, after the heyday of the Lenin cult in the mid 1920s and during the collectivization-enforced reprieve of the nascent Stalin cult, indicates a distinct agenda in the General Secretary's actions. He was not promoting Lenin's legacy solely out of respect and deference to the late Soviet leader. He was establishing a foundation upon which he could further build and develop his own cultic persona on par or even greater than that of Lenin's, and thus fulfill his desire for self-aggrandizement. Based on Tucker's arguments, the most apparent and visible way that Stalin would have achieved his desire for fame and glory was through his personality cult. While there are some problems with Tucker's ideas on Stalin, the most significant being that his psychological history of the Soviet leader is inherently based on a not insignificant level of conjecture and speculation, those ideas, along with Plamper's, offer a possible avenue for explaining the how and why of Stalin's manipulation of his cult to convey himself unprecedented levels of power and

74 See footnotes 19 and 56.
glory, while at the same time assuming an aura of modesty that hid his strong desire for such a cult.

Tucker's ideas on Stalin's desire for power and the apparent motivation behind the Stalin cult brings to the forefront the question of what was the ultimate purpose and function of the Stalin cult. Based on Stalin's perceived closeness to Lenin within the context of the cultic imagery from the 1930s, as well as Tucker's aforementioned example through which Stalin was able to establish himself as the ultimatearbiter of both Lenin's legacy and Marxist-Leninist ideology, the initial purpose of the Stalin cult was simply to legitimize Stalin as the ruler of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the perceived political legitimacy and power that the various Bolshevik leaders felt they could obtain from their eventual decision to permanently embalm Lenin's body and create a lasting Lenin cult also indicates that the Stalin cult was founded for similar legitimizing means, only this time to legitimize Stalin as the ruler of the Soviet Union and provide an avenue for the General Secretary to accumulate political power.

While Brandenberger asserts that the Stalin cult's original purpose was to provide a basis for the political mobilization and ideological indoctrination of the Soviet masses, he bases his arguments on the guiding function of Stalin's *Short Biography*, which was first published in 1939. However, he also notes that in the mid 1930s the various cultic material "was too disorganized and inconsistent to function effectively as an ideological tribune." Within this context Brandenberger asserts that the cult was only able to act as

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76 Ibid., 65.
a significant tool of ideological indoctrination once Stalin's *Short Biography* was published, which would act as a ideological supplement and guide to the cult and enhance the Soviet masses' understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology. While Brandenberger's assertions about the cult's function as an indoctrination tool once the *Short Biography* had been published appears correct, and elements of this are visible in the cultic imagery, his calculus seemingly indicates that the cult did not play an ideological function until the publishing of the *Short Biography*, and thus by his own reasoning, the original purpose of the Stalin cult could not have been the political indoctrination of the Soviet masses. Furthermore, the perceived ideological weakness of the cult in the mid to late 1930s highlights the one significant strength of the cult, which was the prevalence of Stalin's image and persona. This further reinforces the idea that the Stalin cult was initially created simply to legitimize Stalin's rule over the country and accumulate political power around himself.

In his article, "Vying For Stalin's Soul," Ennker discusses the importance of the cult in the political machinations of the state, arguing that in the early to mid 1930s the various members of Stalin's inner circle who would survive the purges (Beria, Molotov, Voroshilov et al.) lavished praises on the General Secretary and cultivated the cult in its various forms as a way to show loyalty to, and internalization of, the leader's will, thereby gaining the attention of and access to the leader, which was the ultimate display and source of power.\(^\text{77}\) While Ennker does not directly state that the purpose of the cult was to legitimate Stalin's political power over the Soviet Union, the connection that he

establishes between Stalin's accumulation of power through his manipulation of the Politburo and Central Committee, combined with his disciples' promotion of the cult to improve their own standing with Stalin, and thus accumulate power and influence in their own right, indicates that the cult is directly related to Stalin's rise and accumulation of power. In this regards, it would seem that the Stalin cult functioned not only as a way for Stalin to legitimize his rule over the state, but was also indicative of his power as well. Thus the growth of the Stalin cult in the 1930s is roughly proportional with the increasing amount of power and authority that Stalin exercised over the Soviet state and society during this time. By this logic, the dearth of cultic images in the early 1930s is representative of Stalin's still tenuous hold on power. Thus, the cult's increasing visibility and the development of Stalin's image as a wise creator of socialism were in response to his still unsteady hold on state power, indicating that the cult's initial purpose was to increase this power and foster Stalin's legitimacy as Lenin's rightful heir.

The function of the cult began to change in the postwar era as the need to legitimize Stalin's rule subsided after the massive amounts of legitimacy heaped onto his persona after the victory in World War II. In this context, the function of Stalin's cult began to change as it moved from its role in the prewar years of legitimizing Stalin's rule and acting as an indoctrination tool, to the postwar years in which it continued to function as an indoctrination tool but took on a new role of simply aggrandizing and even deifying Stalin's image. The further aggrandizing of Stalin's image in the postwar era, especially considering the victory over Nazi Germany, fits Tucker's described persona of Stalin desiring fame and glory. Though Stalin possessed a significant level of fame and glory by
the late 1930s, the war provided another avenue to further increase this fame and glory, which Stalin would have likely managed, as Plamper has shown, through his own personal control over the cult through his direct intervention or the interventions of his chancellery. Given Plamper's and Turner's ideas on the workings, motivations, and the possible functions of the Stalin cult, as well as the god-like portrayal of Stalin in the postwar cultic imagery, one has to wonder to what extent the five years of religious training that Stalin received as a seminarian at the Tiflis Seminary during his youth in Georgia had on the development of the cult and Stalin's cultic image. 78

To summarize, the Stalin cult was initially born out of the Lenin cult, and proceeded to use Lenin's image to portray Stalin as the designated heir and legitimate leader of the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1930s, Lenin's presence in the Stalin cult began to lessen and he faded to the background of cult, though still conveying legitimacy onto Stalin. Whereas initially Stalin was portrayed as being Lenin's pupil, by the end of the decade he was portrayed by the cult as being Lenin's equal. Stalin was also portrayed as a transnational father of the people, acting as a unifying factor by encouraging the different nationalities of the Soviet Union to work together to achieve socialism under the banner of communism. Starting in the 1930s and continuing through the remainder of Stalin's rule, the various images of the cult were produced by artists in competitions and through commissions, facilitated by the patronage of various Bolshevik leaders, most notably Voroshilov. During the whole of this time, Stalin exercised control over his cult despite a facade of modesty that was meant to portray the cult as the result of popular

78 Montefiore, Young Stalin, 54.
support, rather than government-run propaganda. Though difficult, if not totally impossible, to determine to what extent Stalin personally dictated how his cultic images should look, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Stalin's own religious background, and possible psychological outlook, played a significant impact in the grandiose nature of the cult, as well as its shifting purpose from legitimization and indoctrination, to indoctrination and aggrandizement. From its onset in 1929 with Stalin's 50th birthday celebrations, to 1939 with his 60th birthday celebrations, the Stalin cult had successfully subsumed the Lenin cult and became established in Soviet society as a permanent and defining feature of the Stalinist era.
Chapter 2: World War II and its Effect on the Stalin Cult

By the late 1930s the Stalin cult had elevated the General Secretary to a level nearly on par with Lenin. However, doubts and disillusionment among the Soviet populace as a result of the various hardships, suffering, and failures of collectivization, industrialization, and the purges indicate that Stalin had failed to reach the same glorified level as Lenin, and that any sense of Stalin's image as a wise creator of socialism had failed to permeate or widely take hold in the national consciousness of many Soviet citizens. But while many had doubts about Stalin's rule, the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II elevated Stalin to new heights that seemingly quelled major doubts that many Soviet citizens might have had about the dictator and his regime. This chapter will examine the sense of doubt and disillusionment that existed in Soviet society in the late 1930s and how this affected Stalin's cultic image. It will also examine how the victory in World War II had a profound and lasting effect on the Stalin cult and elevated the image of the General Secretary to unprecedented heights. Understanding the impact that World War II had on Stalin's image is imperative, not only to discern the development of the Stalin cult, but also to understand the continuing dichotomy of Stalin's and Lenin's image in the cultic structure. The wartime experience and the representation of Stalin as the military genius that saved the Soviet Union from fascist tyranny and led the Soviet people to absolute victory over Hitler elevated the Soviet leader to a position on par with, or
even exceeding that of Lenin. In other words it was not until World War II that Stalin was able to fully supersede the status of his predecessor. Understanding how this was achieved and portrayed in cultic imagery is imperative in discerning the changing nature and purpose of the Stalin cult in the postwar era, as well as contextualizing Lenin's continued presence in the Stalin cult.

In 1939, during the celebration of Stalin's 60th birthday, the apex of the prewar cult, Stalin was lauded by the media with such phrases as "The Great Continuer of Lenin's Ideas,"\textsuperscript{79} "Father and Teacher of the Workers,"\textsuperscript{80} "The Greatest Man of our Time,"\textsuperscript{81} "Stalin is the Lenin of Today,"\textsuperscript{82} and "The Teacher and Friend of Humanity."\textsuperscript{83} Poems were even written by professional poets for the leader's birthday.\textsuperscript{84} He had become the symbol not only of the Soviet government but also of the Soviet people and society. Stalin was the undisputed ruler of the country, having defeated both the real and imagined enemies lurking in Soviet society. His directives on collectivization and rapid industrialization had transformed the Soviet Union, supposedly resulting in vastly increased agricultural and industrial output. The 1936 Stalin constitution proclaimed the advancement of society into socialism, as well as guaranteed a wide variety of civil rights including freedom of speech and freedom of worship.\textsuperscript{85} While the Lenin cult had been

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82}Ibid., 6.
\item \textsuperscript{83}Ibid., 11.
\item \textsuperscript{85}Davies, \textit{Popular Opinion}, 102-103.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
quite prevalent in the early days of the Stalin cult, Lenin's image was less visible in Stalin's cult in the late 1930s, although his image of the late Soviet leader still functioned as a source of legitimacy. At first glance, the cult and Soviet media demonstrated that Stalin had not only succeeded in becoming the legitimate and beloved leader of the Soviet Union, but that he had also seemingly ascended to a level of prestige that had previously been occupied solely by Lenin.

In using Lenin as a source of legitimacy for Stalin, the cult had initially portrayed Stalin as being the loyal pupil of Lenin. However, by the latter half of the 1930s they were portrayed as equals. Some cultic images, such as the photograph of Lenin and Stalin at Gorky\textsuperscript{86}, even indicate Stalin's gradual overshadowing of Lenin. In order to reach a level of prestige comparable to Lenin's, Stalin had to obtain his own level of greatness. In the prewar era, Stalin's greatness was mainly derived from his role as the builder of socialism through collectivization and industrialization, as well as his close association with Lenin. As noted above, by the late 1930s the cult was bestowing praises onto Stalin for the successful and bountiful establishment of this new Soviet society, with its resultant creation of socialism and the ratification of the Stalin constitution in 1936.

However, there are numerous factors that indicate Stalin's image as a great and wise builder of socialism was not as solid as the cult proclaimed it to be. Collectivization had led not only to great resentment among large segments of the rural population, but it had also resulted in the deportation of thousands of kulaks, and a series of famines in 1932-1933, which resulted in the starvation of millions of people in the Ukraine. The vast

\textsuperscript{86} See page 21.
majority of Soviet citizens were worse off at the end of the 1930s than they had been before Red October, consuming barely half the amount of cereal grains, and significantly less meat, fat, and dairy products, than had been consumed in the 1890s.87 Furthermore, the cult appears to have had little effect on the people in the countryside in regards to arousing support of legitimacy for Stalin's leadership over the country. In fact the cult may have even aroused anti-government and anti-Stalin sentiment. In regards to the various pronouncements and propaganda against Leon Trotsky in the late 1920s and 1930s, many peasants voiced the idea that since, "Stalin hated Trotsky, Trotsky must have been an opponent of collectivization and friend of the Russian peasant."88

Industrialization also failed to live up to expectations. In his book, *Magnetic Mountain*, Stephen Kotkin describes the construction of Magnitogorsk, a new industrial city in the southern Urals, noting the incredible waste, inefficiency, and lack of real planning in the construction of the city and the production of steel at the local steel mills. In one instance in 1930, a "socialist competition" was undertaken by two groups of workers to determine which group could build their section of the dam the fastest across the Ural River. While the dam was completed in record time and stood as an exemplary example of what could be achieved through socialist shock work, it proved to be totally inadequate for its intended purpose and was later replaced, and thus made entirely redundant, by a larger dam further upstream.89 Kotkin undoubtedly proves that whatever

planning that actually went into the First Five Year Plan was totally inadequate, and that this inadequacy was highly visible to much of the urban population. Davies also notes that the average Soviet person was well aware, both from observation and experience, of the economic failures and hardships that industrialization had brought. She states that the famine of 1936-1937 caused a food crisis in the cities, and also exacerbated shortages of consumer goods. This situation, combined with ineffective leadership as a result of the purges, led to a significant economic slump that lasted from 1938 to 1941.\(^{90}\) Resentment against the government for the lack of food and consumer goods had grown to such high levels by 1941 that, in Leningrad, Communist Party organizations had actually given up trying to quell anti-Soviet attitudes.\(^{91}\)

In addition to the less than stellar results of industrialization and collectivization, the purges of the late 1930s also tarnished the image of the Soviet government, and by extension Stalin, as well as injected doubt and uncertainty into the population. Though it did not disappear entirely from view as it had during collectivization, the manner of Stalin’s cult in state media declined to some extent in 1937, in a likely attempt to distance Stalin from the purges.\(^{92}\) David Brandenberger argues that the purges crippled the state's attempts to properly indoctrinate and convey the official state ideology to the Soviet

\(^{90}\) Davies, _Popular Opinion_, 37-39.
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{92}\) Plamper, _The Stalin Cult_, 48. In actuality, 1937 and 1938 represent the third and second, respectively, highest years in regards to the number of Stalin's images in Pravda, with 1939 being the highest. While roughly half the images showed Stalin in the background, meaning he was not always the main focal point or subject of the image, and thus not directly linked to the calamity of the purges, it seems up for debate as to whether there really was any significant cultic retreat during the purges. There was a significant increase in the number of secondary images, those with Stalin in the background or not as the main subject with the onset of the purges, however, one would assume that, at the very least, the number of Stalin images in the newspaper would have decreased if there had been some type of orchestrated retreat. This, perhaps, indicates that public opinion or reception of the cult was of little concern to the cultic organs.
people. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the regime had struggled to indoctrinate citizens through such techniques as rallies, study circles, literature, and museum exhibitions. However, these techniques proved ineffective in mobilizing the masses.\(^\text{93}\) Later, the propaganda organs had more success at indoctrination by emphasizing individual heroism and patriotism, by exploiting the popularity of Arctic explorers, aviators, civil war heroes, and such events as the sinking of the Cheliuskin in the Arctic in 1934.\(^\text{94}\) However, with the onset of the purges in 1937, and the trials and executions of such notables as Marshals Tukhachevsky and Yegorov, among others, seeds of doubt were planted in the Soviet system as many people saw the idols they had once admired imprisoned or executed by the state.\(^\text{95}\) These occurrences hindered propaganda and agitation efforts, severely limiting the regime's ability to properly convey ideology to the Soviet people, and also led to many people questioning the Soviet system, and by extension, Stalin. In this context, Brandenberger highlights not only how the purges came to affect popular opinion of the regime, but also how deep the doubt extended into society. For many Soviet citizens, the imprisonment and eventual executions of such well-known figures as Bukharin, Tukhachevsky, and Yegorov, among thousands of others, would have likely seemed like the beginning of the collapse of the regime. One youth from Belorussia stated many years later that "We students were very concerned about [the arrests]. When Tukhachevsky's case appeared in Pravda. Everybody knew that something was wrong in the Kremlin."\(^\text{96}\) These individuals had all once faithfully fought

\(^{94}\)Ibid., 120.
\(^{95}\)Ibid., 146-148.
\(^{96}\)Ibid., 188.
for and served the Soviet state and their fall from grace not so much elevated Stalin and his loyal cadres above these supposed enemies of the people, though this may have been one possible motivation for the purges, but instead the execution of these notables cast a blanket of questionability over the sustainability of the entire Soviet system. Another Soviet citizen later commented that "until 1937 I thought that [party propaganda was true and that if the papers said something,] it must be like that...In 1937 in connection with the execution of Tukhachevsky and the military conspiracy, I stopped believing in Soviet Power."\textsuperscript{97}

While the conclusion that the state's portrayal of society in its various forms of propaganda did not correspond with reality is neither groundbreaking nor terribly hard to discern, what is important is the doubt and anxiety that many people likely fostered towards the state as a result of its failed promises and self destructive actions. The failed promises, hardships, and deaths surrounding collectivization, industrialization, and the purges, though omitted or twisted in the Soviet media, had been visible for all to see. Instead of proving the inherent superiority of socialism over capitalism and improving the quality of life, these policies resulted in lowered standards of living, increased hardship for millions of Soviet citizens, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of others. In the 1930s, NKVD reports on the mood of Soviet citizens in town and cities reported that the average "little man" was "dissatisfied with Soviet power" and often compared the NEP

\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., 189.
period and Lenin’s rule as being better than the current situation and Stalin's rule, respectively.\footnote{Sheila Fitzpatrick, \textit{Everyday Stalinism Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 224.}

In this context, the efforts by the cult to convey Stalin's greatness, much less his competency, to the Soviet people appear to have been less than successful. Even among individuals who believed in the ultimate goals of the Soviet system, the effects of the purges resulted in a lack of confidence in Stalin and his leadership over the state. In his diary, biochemist Vladimir Verdansky considered the possibility that Stalin and his cadres were suffering from some type of mental derangement. Verdansky could not contemplate any other reason for why the state would be destroying so many of its own citizens, hindering the ultimate goal of communism.\footnote{Jochen Hellbeck, \textit{Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 61.} The fact that the purges, in spite of the numerous depictions of success and triumph in the cult, could stimulate thinking that regarded Stalin as having a mental disorder in an individual who appears to have believed in the ultimate goals of socialism and communism, indicates that some Soviet citizens did not believe the messages or ideas that were being conveyed to them by the cultic organs.

In fact, Davies indicates that there was a wide range of opinions and views (or lack thereof) on Stalin, as well as his cult, in the latter half of the 1930s. Some Soviet citizens did appear to take the cult’s proclamations and images at face value and saw Stalin as a great leader worthy of praise. Petitions were sent to the government proposing naming cities and places after Stalin. Davies notes that in one letter sent in 1939, a certain
E. M. Chulkova argued for the renaming of Moscow to Stalinodar. At other times, the cultic images were misunderstood or made little sense to people. In 1935 a group of Komsomol (communist youth organization) members were unable to explain who Stalin was. Others criticized the cult for its un-Marxists nature, its increasingly extravagant declarations of adoration towards Stalin, the growing sense of Stalin as a god-like figure, and his apparent status as an infallible individual. Some also compared the praises accorded to the Soviet leader as being similar to exaltations of the tsars. Others, who apparently had a wider knowledge of events in Europe, criticized the Stalin cult by comparing it to the Hitler cult in Germany. A few individuals stated that Stalin was actually copying Hitler’s behavior. In this context, it appears that while the cult may have been able to convince some segments of the Soviet populace of Stalin’s greatness, it also elicited resentment and criticism from other segments of the population.

However, while there was significant dissatisfaction towards Stalin and the Soviet system, this never amounted to any kind of opposition or organized resistance. Stalin's firm control over the government and security organs, the devotion and loyalty of the cadres, whose own survival during the purges depended on their utmost loyalty to Stalin, as well as the hardships and challenges of everyday life prevented any type of viable challenge to arise against the government. Furthermore, according to Kotkin,

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100 Davies, *Popular Opinion*, 165.
101 Ibid., 169.
102 Ibid., 170-174. Plamper states that the cultic depictions of various European dictators, (such a Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin) likely influenced the dictators' depictions in their respective cults. He notes that Stalin's lack of movement or motion in the various cultic depictions may have been in response to Hitler's boisterous and forceful speaking style. In this manner, Stalin's stolid nature conveyed the sense that he was a wise and thoughtful leader, compared to Hitler, whose dynamic rhetoric might have portrayed him as an irrational hysteric.
many people actually did believe in the regime and accepted new identities in the process of building socialism as workers and stakhanovites, despite the many flaws of the state programs.\textsuperscript{104} He notes that while many had doubts about the regime and Stalin, these doubts were usually multifaceted, questioning certain policies and methods of the state, such as collectivization or improper industrial planning, and accepting of other policies, such as the welfare state. These people had to contend with their doubts and the scientifically based ideas on the "proven" success of socialism that the regime was promoting. To do this they had to accept the truths of their everyday lives, as well as the truths of the cult and government propaganda. In this manner, Kotkin argues that many people lived in a dual reality of sorts, learning to adapt and accept reality on the ground and reality according to the ideological principles and propaganda of the state. In this context, true to its socialist realist roots, the Stalin cult came to function as a bridge between the two realities, displaying not the current state of socialist construction, nor even really the utopian communist future, but rather how Stalin would lead the Soviet people to the communist promised land. While some could take inspiration from these images, and likely did, others could note how the skilled leadership that the cult bestowed unto Stalin was not analogous to reality. Despite this, the Soviet people had to accept their current situation. To do otherwise was impossible, as there was no place for vocal disbelief of, or resistance to, socialism in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{105} Thus, on the eve of World War II, while there were likely many doubts about the Soviet system and towards Stalin

\textsuperscript{104} Kotkin, \textit{Magnetic Mountain}, 224.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 227-229.
as an effective leader worthy of a status on par with Lenin, these doubts failed to directly influence or affect the polices and dealings of the country's leadership.

World War II and the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany irrevocably changed Stalin's image and his cult of personality. During the war, Stalin's cult fluctuated in intensity according to the fortunes of the war, so as to not associate the leader with military defeats, especially in the war's opening stages. His image appeared much less often in the press and other Soviet propaganda, especially when compared to the number of depictions of the leader that had appeared in the late 1930s. However, his cult never completely disappeared from view. As the Soviet army began to gain the upper hand in 1943, Stalin started to appear more often and his image as a brilliant military leader began to take shape, despite the fact that Stalin's inability to understand military strategy had been a major factor in the massive defeats suffered by the Soviet Union early in war. In 1943 Stalin became a marshal of the Soviet Union and later, in June 1945, he was promoted by the Politburo to the ostentatious rank of generalissimo, permanently enshrined as the supreme overlord over the Soviet armed forces. From the end of the war until Stalin's death in 1953, tens of thousands of cultic images would be produced and distributed throughout the country emphasizing Stalin's role as a military leader. Stalin as a military leader had been somewhat emphasized by the cult during the 1930s, but these depictions usually portrayed the leader wearing unadorned uniforms.

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108 Ibid., 43-44.
109 Dressing in military-style clothing was a relatively common characteristic of party leaders, even those not in the military, during Stalin's rule. While the unadorned nature of some of this clothing, as seen in
or military style clothing, as seen in *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin*. In the postwar years it was not uncommon to see an image with Stalin wearing an ornate marshal's or generalissimus' uniform, often bedecked in rows of medals and awards.

Figure 5. Aleksandr Gerasimov, *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin*, 1938.\(^\text{110}\)

Stalin emerged from the war in a much more powerful and secure position than that with which he had entered. He was now the indefatigable and omnipotent guardian of the Soviet Union. Before the war, the cult had personified the state as being one and

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Gerasimov's painting above, might have been meant to convey onto party officials the traits of modesty and utilitarianism, the clothing is likely more reflective of the militancy that swept through, and remained in, the party in the wake of Red October and the Civil War.

\(^{110}\text{http://historicalwallpapers.blogspot.com/2011/04/joseph-stalin-1878-1953.html}\)
the same with Stalin. As such, it was now impossible to separate the victory over Germany from Stalin. This inseparable link between Stalin and victory, combined with heavy doses of Russian nationalism in wartime propaganda, the reinstitution and mobilization of the Russian Orthodox Church\textsuperscript{111} to support the war effort, as well as a unifying feeling of hatred for the German invaders (solidified when the full extent of Nazi atrocities in the occupied regions became known), resulted in many Soviet citizens rallying behind the state in a show of genuine popular support and unity. This unity between state and people definitively legitimized the policies and methods of the Stalinist system.\textsuperscript{112} With the victory over Nazi Germany, Stalin was now being portrayed by the cult as the savior of the Soviet Union. The image of Stalin in his generalissimo’s uniform became a constant of the postwar cultic imagery. Furthermore, his image as a wise builder of socialism was also legitimized and further emphasized by the cult as a result of the war, despite the doubts that had existed in the immediate prewar years.

The official Soviet narrative of the war, including Stalin’s rise as a genius military leader and the legitimization of collectivization and industrialization, is visible in director Mikhail Chiaureli’s obsequious 1949 film, \textit{The Fall of Berlin}. The main character is a stakhanovite steel worker turned soldier named Aleksei, “a person of labor, simple and proud, good natured and masculine, able to work happily and creatively, and heroically defend his motherland.”\textsuperscript{113} His status as a stakhanovite, as well as the attention paid to the fruitful production of his steel mill in the early part of the movie, conveys to the viewer

\textsuperscript{111}Nathanial Davis, \textit{A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy} (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2003), 17.
\textsuperscript{112}McDermott, \textit{Stalin: Revolutionary in the Era of War}, 137.
an example of the new type of "Soviet man" that the regime had been attempting to create. It also emphasizes the success of industrialization and the Five Year Plans, as well as the importance they played in winning the war. Furthermore, Aleksei has a love interest named Natasha, a school teacher, who, at one point makes an impassioned speech about steel production and Stalin, during which she appears to almost succumb to tears of joy.\textsuperscript{114} Aleksei and Natasha fall in love as they are taking a leisurely stroll in the country, surrounded by impressively abundant fields of grain. This agricultural abundance conveys to the viewer the success and unprecedented production that collectivization has brought to the countryside. At this point in the movie, the Germans invade, capture Natasha, and seriously wound Aleksei, causing him to fall into a coma. The sudden shift from a love struck couple strolling in the countryside to the onslaught of German tanks, airplanes, and infantry is not only meant to convey the suddenness and surprising nature of the German invasion, but also that life in the Soviet Union before the war had been pleasant, productive, and full of abundance. Furthermore, it indicated than any and all hardships that had taken place during and after the war were solely the fault of the German invaders.

Aleksei eventually wakes up from his coma and becomes a soldier, fights in various battles, including Stalingrad, takes part in the storming of the Reichstag and the capture of Berlin, and is eventually reunited with Natasha. Throughout Aleksei's and Natasha's story, we see Stalin personally coordinating and directing the defense of

\textsuperscript{114} Stalin's actual surname was Dzhughashvili. He had adopted the name 'Stalin', derived from the Russian word for steel, \textit{stal}, during the pre-revolutionary era. Stalin, the original man of steel, likely modeled his name off of Lenin. Lenin's actual surname was Ulyanov.
Moscow in the winter of 1941, meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill during the various wartime conferences, planning the final assault on Berlin, and triumphantly arriving in the recently captured city, greeted by a cheering crowd. With these different story arcs, The Fall of Berlin reveals to the viewer not only the decisively important role that Stalin played in the war, but also how industrialization and collectivization were important components that led to the victory over Germany. The film thus communicates the idea that without Stalin, the war would not have been won.

While it is difficult to determine to what extent the average Soviet person conceptualized and internalized the regime's attempts to legitimize collectivization and industrialization, it is likely that the presentation of these concepts in propaganda like The Fall of Berlin, combined with the genuine support that existed for Stalin in the aftermath of World War II, as well as the pride that many Soviet citizens likely felt as a result of the victory, quelled many of the doubts that people had about the Soviet system, lending credence to the regime's official wartime narrative. These factors, among others, allowed for the massive expansion of the Stalin cult in the postwar years, not so much in the number of depictions of the leader in the media, though this number did increase from low wartime levels, but in the manner Stalin was depicted. With the portrayal of Stalin as a military leader, and the accompanying legitimization of his role as a builder of socialism, the cult began to ascribe increasingly resplendent and histrionic qualities to the Soviet leader.
One example of the cult that strongly conveyed Stalin's lustrous image was Fedor Shurpin's 1948 painting *The Morning of Our Motherland*. In this painting Shurpin heavily emphasizes Stalin's image as a builder of socialism. In this painting Stalin is described by the art magazine *Iskusstvo* as standing "among the vast expanses of the

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Kolkhoz fields watching the seething laborious life of the Soviet country.\textsuperscript{116} In the background of the image one can see the puffing smokestacks of a distant industrial complex, a freshly plowed field with seeders planting a new crop, electrical towers running along the length of the field, as well as a small row of saplings between Stalin and the field. The field being seeded, the smokestacks, and the electrical towers are obviously meant to convey the successful results of Stalin's drive for collectivization and industrialization and the bountiful establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the row of saplings directly behind Stalin denotes the mastery of Stalin and the Soviet state over the forces of nature. Not only was Stalin able to facilitate the construction of the various pillars of communism, but he also is able to bend nature to his will and reshape (or in this case replant) it as he see fits.

Stalin's image is particularly striking for a number of reasons. The first is the manner and style in which he is dressed. Stalin wearing an unadorned military style-tunic was mainly a feature of the prewar cult. However, in this particular context the plain white tunic, with matching white pants, seemingly presents Stalin in a more informal setting. The greatcoat across his arm conveys the possible image that Stalin had stepped out for a short walk through the countryside and that as the sun was rising it became too warm for the coat so he took it off and is carrying it on his arm. This relatively revealing scene, in which Stalin conveys a very unostentatious manner, which one could say was akin to the average Soviet citizen, adds further to the meaning of the leader's image. It conveys the ideas of humility, admiration, and respect towards Stalin.

\textsuperscript{116} “Utro Nashei Rodiny,” \textit{Iskusstvo}, 53.
Stalin's position in reference to the symbols of socialism behind him conveys the idea that he has just come from the factory, or walked off the field. The connotation that Stalin has just left these locations, combined with his clothing is evocative of an average Soviet working man's clothing, the coat in his arms, and the cultic canon which since the 1930s had portrayed Stalin as a builder of socialism, seemingly indicates that Stalin had not only recently departed from the various locations in the background of the portrait, but that he had seemingly created such structures through his own labor. In carrying out such labor Stalin would have of course worn simple clothing, instead of his bejeweled uniforms and tunics which had become common in postwar imagery. In carrying out such labor, in what is obviously the spring, considering the seeders on the field, he would have likely become warm and taken his jacket off. The spotless nature of his uniform, without any trace of dirt or grime indicates the Stalin knew exactly how to construct these various pillars of socialism in an efficient and productive manner, so efficiently that he was able to construct these pillars without any dirt soiling his clothing.

This interpretation of Stalin's image, further hammers home Stalin's aura as a builder of socialism, but in a more effulgent manner than in similar images during the prewar era. In Shegal's Leader, Teacher, and Friend, Stalin as a builder of socialism is emphasized through his direct dealings with the kolkhozniki and stakhanovites. However, it is never implied that he is the actual direct builder of socialism. The Soviet people are building socialism, acting on Stalin's directives. However, in Morning of the Motherland the painting implies not only that Stalin may have had a direct hand in the construction of

\[117\] See page 24.
socialism, but that he built it singlehandedly, without the aid of the Soviet masses. This is further emphasized by the lack of other individuals in the painting. Thus, Stalin's image as a builder of socialism is bolstered by the connotation that not only did he construct the various structures of socialism in such an unbelievably efficient manner in that he did not get dirty, which in and of itself hints at his incredible knowledge, but also that he did so by himself and with his bare hands. His position at the edge of the field, with his hands folded and gaze directed at some point outside of the portrait can be interpreted, much like Lenin's gaze in Shegal's painting, as Stalin looking forward or contemplating the construction of the future communist utopia.

Figure 7: B. Belopolskii, *Glory to Stalin, the Great Architect of Communism*, 1951.

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118 Though open to interpretation, the seeders seemingly have no one at their controls.

119 http://s50.radikal.ru/i129/1005/0f/ff7ae470ad45.jpg
This interpretation is a deeper reading of the quite obvious and powerful message that this image was meant to convey: that the world the Soviet masses had come to know had been brought about only through Stalin's personal power over and rule of the state and that the glorious communist paradise would only be reached through Stalin's continued leadership. This message, combined with the established precedent of Stalin as a builder of socialism, is not terribly hard to discern from Shurpin's painting. Nor is a similar message difficult to discern from other similar cultic imagery from this era. Note the title of the above poster denoting Stalin's direct role in the development of communism in Belopolskii's *Glory to Stalin, The Great Architect of Communism*, his gaze and similar associated implications from *The Morning of Our Motherland*, as well as the fact that the worker's are cheering Stalin, who is holding what looks like a set of rolled up blueprints, as though he was responsible for both the design of the hydropower plant in the background, *and* its direct construction.

In addition to the cult aggrandizing Stalin's role as the sole builder of socialism, it also emphasized the "decisive" role that he played in the victory over Nazi Germany. In his painting, *Triumph of the Conquering People*, Mikhail Khmelko commemorates the Victory Parade held on June 24, 1945 in Moscow to celebrate the surrender of Nazi Germany. The most memorable event of this parade was the presentation of banners and battle standards from defeated German military units, during which Soviet soldiers threw down the enemy colors at the base of Lenin's mausoleum.
At first glance it would seem that this image is not a vital component of the Stalin cult. The two images of Stalin, one of which is in banner form on the State History Museum and the other is Stalin himself on top of the mausoleum at the far end of the tribune, are neither very detailed, clear, nor the focal point of the image. Indeed, the name of the portrait, as well as the main focal point of the image being common a Soviet soldier throwing down a Nazi banner at the foot of the mausoleum, might lead one to view this particular image as one that is honoring the Soviet people. While this painting does honor the individual Soviet soldier to some extent, it also emphasizes Stalin's role in the war.

Jeffrey Brooks has stated that in the relationship between the Soviet state and the Soviet people there existed a "moral economy of the gift" in which "citizens were immeasurably beholden to the leader, the Party, and the state," "for having received ordinary goods and services as gifts from a generous and solicitous leadership."\footnote{Jeffrey Brooks, \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xv.} This moral economy of the gift manifested itself in the Stalin cult through images such as Belopolskii's \textit{Glory to Stalin, The Great Architect of Communism},\footnote{See page 55.} in which Stalin, through his own beneficence and power has bestowed upon the Soviet people some kind of gift or improvement, such as a hydroelectric plant. To reciprocate this gift the Soviet people often gave gifts to Stalin. For Stalin's 70th birthday the Pushkin Museum had on display over 8,000 gifts that citizens had supposedly sent to the Soviet leader.\footnote{Nikolai Sorin-Chaikov and Olga Sosnina, “The Faculty of Useless Things: Gifts to Soviet Leaders,” in \textit{Personality Cults in Stalinism}, ed. Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (Göttingen, Germany : V & R Unipress, 2004), 281.} \textit{The Triumph of the Conquering People} fits into Brooks' theme of the moral economy of the gift.

By showing Soviet soldiers throwing down the Nazi banners at the foot of Lenin's Mausoleum, this painting reinforces this gift-giving relationship between the Soviet people and Stalin, as well as emphasizes Stalin's role as the savior of the Soviet Union from fascism. In presenting their war trophies to the Soviet leadership on the mausoleum, the soldiers, and by extension the average Soviet citizen, are bestowing a gift onto the Soviet leaders for the wise leadership that they received during the war, which eventually led them to absolute victory over Nazi Germany. In other words, the Soviet people are
than the state for victory over Germany, even though disastrous military decisions taken by Stalin and other leaders in the opening months of the German invasion almost cost the Soviet Union the war and it was on the back of the Soviet masses that the state eventually won. Thus, the image of this staged ceremony was meant to rewrite history to the state's, as well as to Stalin's, advantage.

This particular painting, along with other visual war images and media in the cult, like *The Fall of Berlin*, were instrumental in the development of the postwar Stalin cult. Stalin's persona of war hero was the driving factor that allowed the Stalin cult to achieve unprecedented heights in the postwar era. The personal wartime experience of many Soviet citizens, and the costly and horrific experience of the war, made the eventual victory over Germany much more dramatic and powerful. This sense of drama and power, strengthened by the fact that the Soviet Union had now emerged onto the world stage as one of the most powerful countries in the world, further enhanced the power and symbolism of the victory. A combination of the drama, power, and symbolism of the war was conveyed onto Stalin's persona by the cult and served as the source of Stalin's postwar cultic resplendence.

Within the purview of the gift-giving relationship between state and people, as well as the Stalin cult, *The Triumph of the Conquering People* reinforces Stalin as the decisive factor in the winning of the war. As noted above, Stalin was displayed by the cult in the postwar context as being the main architect behind victory in the war, and as such the message was conveyed to the Soviet people that they owed gifts of thanks and praise to Stalin for his wise leadership in the war. This is emphasized in this particular
image through the main focal point of the painting, which is a soldier who is holding a standard with the swastika. He is the only soldier who is looking directly as Stalin. In this context, it is as though he is presenting this standard directly to Stalin, personally thanking him for the wise leadership that led the country to victory over the fascist invaders. Though it is likely that he is in the process of casting the standard onto the ground, the particular pose he is in almost seems to indicate that he is frozen in place. One can only assume that he is frozen in place due to the awe and power that the soldier interprets emanating from Stalin's persona.

Furthermore, it is the direction of this soldier's gaze that transfers the focal point of the image, the soldier, and the main theme of painting, the triumph of the Soviet people over Nazi Germany, to that of Stalin. Indeed, one can interpret the various lines and angles as all pointing to or leading to Stalin on top of the mausoleum. The horizon that is made up of the helmets of the soldiers, meets the horizon created by the pine trees surrounding the mausoleum, which in turn rises and meets the horizon made up of the Kremlin wall and the tribune on the mausoleum, and culminates in Stalin at the far end of the tribune. In this manner, the main focus of this painting both thematically, in that the soldier is looking directly at the General Secretary, and aesthetically, as the main angles and lines of the painting all point to one spot, is Stalin.

With Stalin thus being the main focus of this painting, one can interpret several factors about Stalin's post war cultic persona. The first and foremost is the attributing of victory to Stalin. The soldier who is looking directly at Stalin is laying down a standard that has both a swastika and Adolf Hitler's name on it. This should not be interpreted as
the soldier granting Stalin the mantle of victory, but rather the soldier thanking Stalin, by presenting to him his most prized war trophy, for bestowing the mantle of victory upon the entire Soviet people through his wise and skillful leadership during the war. The fact that an actual foot soldier, an individual who may have seen combat, killed Germans, and may have even seen his comrades die, is attributing the main agency of the war, and thus the credit for victory, onto Stalin further indicates that it is not the military that should be held in highest regards, but rather Stalin. Thus, while the Soviet people may have played an integral part in the defeat of Germany, the most important factor that allowed communism to triumph over fascism was Stalin. In this manner, main message of this painting and other examples of cultic media, such as *The Fall of Berlin* was that Stalin was responsible for the victory over Nazi Germany and that without him victory would not have been possible.

In analyzing *The Morning of Our Motherland* and *The Triumph of the Conquering People* in this manner, I have utilized Peter Burke's ideas on images in that I have taken cultic imagery and interpreted it while factoring in the context under which it was created and what function it was supposed to fulfill. The cult's initial main purpose was to legitimize Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union. Later, mainly through the publication of Stalin's *Short Biography* in 1939, which being a text-based component of the cult, is beyond the pale of this thesis, the cult began to function more as an indoctrination tool. Later in the postwar era, when Stalin's rule and legitimacy had been decisively solidified, the cult took on a new role of aggrandizing Stalin's cultic image by expanding upon the Stalin's prewar image as a builder of socialism, as well as developing a new persona of
the General Secretary as a military mastermind who decisively led the Soviet Union to victory.

This leads us back to W. J. T. Mitchell's ideas on pictures and other visual imagery, more specifically where did the potency of the Stalin cult lie. As noted in the introduction, Mitchell states that the potency of many images is "in their status as enigmas and omens, harbingers of uncertain futures."\(^{124}\) However, given Marxism's scientific view of progress and development in history, there was little to no room for the unknown in Soviet propaganda. The potency of the Stalin cult lay in Stalin's image as the harbinger of certainty. While the Stalin cult's main focus, in regards to visual media, was to always legitimate and later elevate the standing and persona of the General Secretary, it also functioned as a source of security and confidence in the Soviet state for many Soviet citizens. In addition to disseminating high hosannas to Stalin, the cult was unwavering in its confidence in the power and glory of the Soviet state, and that the Soviet people, under the leadership of Stalin, would one day reach the glorious communist utopia. While it might seem absurd, given the effects of collectivization, industrialization, the Great Terror, and the immense hardship suffered by the Soviet people during World War II, that people looked to the Stalin cult as a source of security and inspiration, given that their everyday lives corresponded little with what was portrayed in the cult or in other forms of state propaganda, the cult, and by extension the Soviet state, could produce physical and tangible results. The cult attracted believers because it could produce physical items or results such as factories, tractors, food, and

\(^{124}\) Mitchell, *What to Pictures Want?*, 12.
triumphant victories over foreign invaders, occasionally on demand and on schedule. Thus, the potency of the Stalin cult was that it did, at times, correspond with reality beyond conveying Stalin's total control over the Soviet state, and that the advances and successes that it touted, such as increased industrial output and victory in World War II, were seen by many citizens as slow but steady steps toward the socialist promised land.

This potency of the Stalin cult, the scientifically guaranteed socialist utopia, leads us to one of Mitchell's other ideas of approaching and decoding the meaning of images, "what is it that pictures want?" or in other words, "what is the purpose of the cult?" The purpose of an image is to grasp peoples' attentions, draw them in, and convey a particular meaning or idea to them. In this context, the cult's legitimizing and aggrandizing effects on Stalin's image needed to grasp and hold the Soviet people's attention deeply and long enough so as to impart its cultic message onto them. One way in which this was done was simply to inundate Soviet society with cultic paraphernalia. Plamper notes that Stalin's image appeared less often in Pravda in the postwar era in part because Soviet society was almost totally saturated with images of the General Secretary.\(^{125}\) Another way to attract people to the Stalin cult was to portray Stalin in grandiose fashion. The grandiosity of Stalin's image was reasoned and justified by officials, perhaps even Stalin himself, as a way to attract people to the ideas and promises of the cult, to make them believe in Stalin's Soviet dream. But while the postwar cult was portraying Stalin in a much more resplendent manner than in the prewar years, and the purpose of the cult had moved past legitimizing Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union to further aggrandizing his image, Lenin

\(^{125}\) Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 230.
was still very visible in the cultic background, continuing to convey legitimacy onto the General Secretary, long after he no longer needed it.

Figure 9. *Pravda*, June 27, 1945, "Hero of the Soviet Union Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin." ¹²⁶

Chapter 3: Becoming The Lenin of Today

Lenin's continued presence in Stalin's cult is a bit puzzling when one considers the legitimizing effects of World War II. Stalin no longer needed Lenin as a source of legitimacy. Even based solely on his new image as a "genius" military leader and savior, Stalin had shown himself to be a leader as competent as, or even greater than, Lenin. As such, Lenin was no longer needed. His image was by no means as prevalent as Stalin's, but he was still a regular component of the Stalin cult. Lenin, along with Stalin, was often portrayed by the press during the important celebrations, such as May Day or the anniversary of the October Revolution. For example, on November 7, 1947, both leaders appeared together on the front cover of Pravda to mark the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution. On the 20th of December 1949, a day before Stalin's 70th birthday, Stalin was on the front cover of Pravda, in his generalissimus uniform, holding a banner with Lenin's image. A crowd of people are standing in the background and holding a banner stating "Long live the Party of Lenin and Stalin!" Furthermore, on the very next day, Stalin's birthday, a uniformed Stalin is standing in his

\[127\]Pravda, 296, (November 7, 1947) pg 1 Pravda Digital Archive. http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/sources/article.jsp?issueId=937343&pageIssue=1#anchor (accessed February, 6, 2012) Though it is not unusual that Lenin's image appeared in the press on the occasion of the anniversary of the October Revolution, what is unusual is the equal portrayal of the two leaders, similar to the portrayal of the two leaders together in the late 1930s, within the context of the Stalin's cult postwar grandeur. Stalin's new cultic status meant that he no longer needed to be so closely associated with Lenin.

Kremlin office with a picture of Lenin on the wall. Lenin was continuing to fulfill the role that Tumarkin laid out for him as the icon in the background of the cult, legitimizing Stalin's rule. How is Lenin's continued presence in the Stalin cult to be explained if Stalin's rule had been unquestionably legitimated by World War II?

Figure 10. Pravda, December 20, 1949, "Long Live the Party of Lenin and Stalin!"

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One reason for Lenin still being in the Stalin cult is that his image was simply part of the cultic canon. Stalin's cult had originally been born out of Lenin's cult and the General Secretary had derived his legitimacy as leader of the Soviet Union from Lenin for so many years that in the immediate prewar years it would have seemed out of place for Lenin to be completely cut out of the Stalin cult. That Lenin's image was usually portrayed in the media only around a small number of state holidays indicates that Lenin had been isolated and marginalized so that more attention could be centered on Stalin. In this manner Lenin still functioned as a component of Stalin's cult, but with no chance that he would ever outshine the glory of his successor. His image was merely a polite and brief reminder of the past, with little to no potency. However, while Lenin was still Tumarkin's icon in the background, the role of Lenin's image in the cult changed in the postwar era, along with the function of the cult.

Lenin's new role in the postwar Stalin cult is derived from the changing dynamic that took place between the images of Stalin and Lenin in the late 1930s. As mentioned above, in the initial years of the Stalin cult, the General Secretary was portrayed mainly as being Lenin's pupil, albeit his greatest pupil. Towards the latter half of the 1930s, as in the 1937 celebrations commemorating the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution, Stalin was portrayed by the media as having played an equal role in the planning and execution of the revolution.\textsuperscript{131} During the celebrations marking the anniversary of Lenin's death in the 1940s, there were often pictures of Lenin and Stalin working together, presumably in planning the October Revolution or directing the Civil War. Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{131} Davies, \textit{Popular Opinion}, 152.
a closer look at the photograph of Lenin and Stalin together in Gorky might indicate not a rapidly aging Lenin and a youthful Stalin as Tumarkin has indicated, but rather two equals, sitting together discussing policies or ideas. In this context Lenin was not merely an icon or background fixture for Stalin, he was an ideal for Stalin to become. Thus, Lenin was still in the Stalin cult to reinforce the idea of what Stalin was trying to become, the ideal leader of the Soviet Union, much like Lenin had supposedly been. In this role, Lenin functioned as a powerful tool for increasing the grandiosity of Stalin's image. The well-known quote, "Stalin is the Lenin of Today," reveals the true essence and goal of the Stalin cult. Its purpose in the postwar era, having totally legitimized Stalin's rule in the 1930s, was to further aggrandize the image of the General Secretary and elevate him to the same venerated level as Lenin.

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132 See page 21.
A close analysis of the Stalin cult from its origins would identify the steadily increasing grandeur of Stalin's image. By the postwar years, Stalin was being portrayed as something almost akin to a Soviet god. As noted above, Lenin's persona had already achieved a highly venerated status as a result of the Lenin cult. Such status had been established through the Lenin cult and other propaganda that touted his successful leadership of the October Revolution and his role as the father of the Soviet Union. The preservation of Lenin's body and its placement in the mausoleum on Red Square ensured that the creator of the world's first socialist state would remain visible and relevant.

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134 For example, compare Stalin's image as creator in Shegal's *Leader, Teacher, Friend* and Shurpin's *Morning of the Motherland*, and his image as military leader or savior in Gerasimov's *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin* and Khmelko's *The Triumph of the Conquering People.*
forever. Lenin's mummified body and the mausoleum on Red Square became one of the defining symbols, and curiosities, of the Soviet Union and many Soviet citizens came to the mausoleum to pay their respects before these (holy) Soviet relics. The ever increasing grandiosity of Stalin's cult in the postwar era can thus be interpreted as part of a long process to achieve the same level of veneration that Lenin had been granted by his own cult. Stalin fully achieved a comparable status with Lenin in the wake of World War II. However, his aura of greatness was beyond Lenin's own aura as the father of the Soviet Union with the cultic focus on Stalin as both the builder of socialism and a genius military leader who led the Soviet Union to victory over Nazi Germany. In this manner, the cult did not simply portray Stalin as the heir to Lenin's idolized status, but seemingly attempted to highlight Stalin's usurpation over Lenin.

Nevertheless, within the context of the cultic canon, Stalin could never fully usurp Lenin's exalted position in the Soviet pantheon. Lenin had been the original creator of the Soviet Union, the prime mover who facilitated the creation of all things Soviet. His connection with the October Revolution, seen even during the heyday of Stalin's cultic splendor, reinforced this idea. Thus, while the cult went out of its way to portray Stalin in a more elevated light, Lenin's aura remained ultimate and sacrosanct. While Lenin’s aggrandized image worked in favor of the Stalin cult during the prewar era, in which Lenin's image functioned to legitimize Stalin's rule, in the postwar era Lenin as a source of legitimacy was an element that could detract from Stalin's own image of greatness. In order to circumvent Lenin's inherently superior status the prevalence of his image was lessened and restricted to a handful of state holidays and his image, when it appeared,
was often relegated to the cultic background. Furthermore, the cult emphasized Stalin's greatness beyond the context of Lenin's own greatness, most notably in Stalin's status as a war hero and military leader. Simply put, the grandiosity of Stalin's cult greatly increased in the postwar era in an attempt to overshadow Lenin's own elevated status. However, in an interesting twist Lenin's image was used by the cult to facilitate Stalin's increasingly exalted aura.

While there is a degree of irony in this situation, it is not entirely without precedent. The development of Lenin's cult does indicate some type of rough plan to elevate Lenin to a certain level, and then proceed to elevate Stalin to that level. Although Stalin likely directed the development of the Lenin cult in the late 1920s and early 1930s to some extent, it is difficult to determine to what degree he was personally managing Lenin's image in the postwar era. Though it is impossible to determine Stalin's direct role in the use of Lenin's image to increase the opulence of his own cult, it would not have been possible without Stalin's approval, or the approval of his secretariat. It should also be noted that without the legitimizing factor of the war it seems unlikely that the Stalin cult would have reached such heights as it did, or that the purpose of Lenin's image would have changed from granting unneeded legitimacy to acting as a tool to increase the grandiosity of Stalin's image. In this regards I am not asserting that Lenin's image was the

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sole reason for the cult's increasing grandiosity, but merely explaining Lenin's continued presence and its perceived influence in Stalin's postwar cult.

This function of Lenin's image can be clearly seen in the postwar ceremonies celebrating the anniversary of Lenin's death on January 21st. Since 1924, one of the central tenets of Lenin's cult had been his "death day" celebrations, often referred by state media as a "ceremonial funeral gathering." While the initial yearly celebrations were devoted entirely to Lenin and his legacy, they were eventually incorporated into the body of the Stalin cult by the cultic organs. In the early to mid 1930s, Stalin started to appear in the Soviet media just as often as Lenin did in the days leading up to and including the death day celebrations. Large images of both Stalin and Lenin appeared on the front page of the January 21st edition of *Pravda* in 1934 and 1935. This inclusion of Stalin in these celebrations is another example of how Lenin's image was used to bolster the image of Stalin and his policies. During the First Five Year Plan, Lenin's death day celebrations were used to promote industrialization and collectivization with the media presenting his image alongside factories and machinery. In January 1936, during the memorial ceremony at the Bolshoi Theater, the successes of industrialization, collectivization, and the recent ratification of the Stalin Constitution were widely praised by *Pravda*. The press described these successes as only having been possible through the teachings of Lenin and the leadership of Stalin, saying that "The teachings of Lenin are victorious.

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136 It is impossible to rule out Stalin's own megalomania as one possible reason for the cult's increased splendor.
throughout the entire world and we are approaching this victory under the leadership of comrade Stalin”.  140 Thus while these celebrations were ostensibly about Lenin and honoring his memory, they were in reality yet another aspect of Stalin's cult of personality. More so than any other component of the cult, except for perhaps the embalming of Lenin's corpse and its placement in the mausoleum by the party, the incorporation of Lenin's death day into the Stalinist cultic canon is the most blatant example of Stalin's appropriation of Lenin's legacy for his own use. Not only could Lenin not physically rest in peace, but the memory of his death was now being utilized and twisted by Stalin for his own purposes.

It is worth pointing out that it was the anniversary of Lenin's death, not his birthday that was annually celebrated during Stalin's rule.  141 While Lenin's birthday, April 22nd, was acknowledged by the media, the anniversary of his death was a far more important date. In 1955, during de-Stalinization, Nikita Khrushchev moved the annual commemoration of Lenin from the anniversary of his death to his birthday. One of the stated reasons for this move was that the death day celebrations emphasized gloominess and sorrowful feelings, whereas celebrations on Lenin's birthday conveyed the sense of the immortal nature of Leninist ideas.  142 A more likely purpose of this move was to disassociate Stalin from Lenin's image and weaken Stalinist traditions surrounding the


141 Interestingly, this dichotomy between Lenin's birthday and death day is strikingly similar to the Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas. In Christianity, Easter Sunday, the day on which Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion and death on Good Friday, is theologically significantly more important and meaningful than the birth of Jesus, Christmas.

142 Tumarkin, Lenin Lives, 257.
Lenin cult. It also brings to the forefront the possible symbolism that the annual celebration of Lenin's death conveyed toward Stalin's image. By emphasizing the anniversary of Lenin's death over his birthday, Stalin and his cult reinforced the finality and definitiveness of Lenin's absence from Soviet society. While paying superficial homage to Lenin's legacy, the celebrations bolstered the idea that Stalin was now in charge and that the era of Lenin, though glorious, was definitively over. This concept, along with the celebrations, proved conducive to the portrayal of Stalin as Lenin's legitimate and worthy successor. With the development of the notion that Stalin played an equally important role in the October Revolution as Lenin, it almost appeared as though Stalin's succession and rule over the Soviet Union was something that was preordained or inevitable. In this manner, Stalin was able to isolate himself as the supreme leader of the country, while at the same time drawing from a distant Lenin as a source of legitimacy.

This would not have been possible if the annual celebrations had centered on Lenin's birthday. The annually rejuvenated image of an immortal Lenin might have overshadowed Stalin's image, or weakened his image as the sole leader of the Soviet Union. As such, the annual death day celebrations not only functioned as yet another tool in Stalin's vast cultic arsenal to strengthen his legitimacy, and later his grandiosity, but they also emphasized the vast distance between Lenin and the Soviet people, reinforcing Lenin's permanent absence from Soviet society.

The main celebratory events of Lenin's death day celebrations were lavish ceremonies at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Throughout the 1930s the various leaders
of the Soviet Union, Stalin included, would gather at the Bolshoi Theater on the evening of January 21st to celebrate the memory of Lenin. From 1943 to 1946 these celebrations were moved from the Bolshoi Theater to the Great Hall of the Kremlin Palace, presumably for war-related reasons.\(^{143}\) In the postwar era these celebrations were similar to the celebrations of the 1930s and had become highly ritualized and repetitive. However, subtle differences existed between prewar and postwar ceremonies and their portrayal in the media, most notably in the newspaper *Pravda*. I focus exclusively on *Pravda* because it was the most widely circulated newspaper in the country and it also served as the main mouthpiece from which the state communicated with the people. The differences in the prewar and postwar portrayal of the ceremonies, combined with the fact that Stalin no longer needed Lenin's image as a source of legitimacy because of his newly acquired status as a genius military leader, appear to indicate a change in the role of Lenin in Stalin's cult, from a source of legitimacy to a tool to increase and expand the grandeur of the Stalin cult.

At these celebrations delegates and representatives from various government and party organizations, as well as delegations of selected workers, such as stakhanovites, and members of the armed forces, would gather at the Bolshoi Theater. The ceremony would begin at 6:50, the exact time of Lenin's death in 1924. At that time the ruling circle of the Soviet Union, Stalin, Beria, Molotov, Malenkov et al., would walk onto the stage to

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\(^{143}\) See January 22st editions of *Pravda*, 1943-1946. For 1942 it is unclear in *Pravda* where the celebrations were held. The paper simply states that they took place in Moscow. The picture that accompanied the January 22, 1942 edition of *Pravda* shows the ceremony in an unidentified, and previously unseen, setting. The low archways and ceilings give the impression of the ceremony being underground, perhaps in one of Moscow's ornate subway stations. Given the relative closeness of the front line to Moscow in January 1942, this likelihood does not seem totally beyond the realm of possibility.
thunderous applause. Once on the stage they would sit down at a large table facing the audience. Behind them would be an enormous portrait of Lenin. It was usually surrounded by a colorful combination of floral arrangements, flags, and banners. There were also honor guards stationed around the portrait that would rotate every five minutes. After the leaders had situated themselves at the table, one of them would open the ceremony and then give an extended speech extolling the works and actions of Lenin and, of course, Stalin.\textsuperscript{144} In the 1948 ceremony, Lenin was lauded by Mikhail Suslov, who would later become the party's chief ideologue under Brezhnev, as "the genius of humanity, the organizer of the Bolshevik Party, the founder of the Soviet state, and the leader and friend of the workers of the entire world."\textsuperscript{145} But alongside such praises to Lenin, there were also praises to Stalin. In the same speech, Suslov notes the various successes that Stalin had accomplished, such as his wise leadership during World War II. Stalin’s close relationship with Lenin was also emphasized by Suslov. He proclaimed Stalin to be a "faithful student and companion of Lenin", as well as "the leader of the Bolshevik Party, worthy successor, and great continuator of Lenin."\textsuperscript{146} After the speech, in which the speaker endlessly and nauseatingly described and praised the achievements of the two leaders, the audience often sang the Communist Party hymn, The Internationale. In addition to singing the party hymn, there was sometimes a concert or movie after the main ceremony had ended. At the end of the 1947 ceremony the film


\textsuperscript{146}\textsuperscript{146}Ibid.
Lenin in October was shown, and afterwards there was also a concert.\textsuperscript{147} But after the 1948 celebration Pravda mentions neither a concert nor a film.

Figure 12. Pravda, January 22, 1948, "In Memory of Vladimir Ilych Lenin: A Ceremonial Funeral Gathering at the Bolshoi Theater."\textsuperscript{148}

From this description of Lenin's death day ceremonies in the years after World War II it would seem that little had changed from the Stalin cult of the 1930s, with Lenin continuing to serve as a source of legitimacy. On the surface, this is true. However, a more nuanced look indicates a change in the role of Lenin's image. This difference was

\textsuperscript{147} "Pamyati Velikogo Lenina," Pravda, 20, (January 22, 1947), pg 1.

\textsuperscript{148} "Pamyati Velikogo Vladimira Il'icha Lenina," Pravda, 22, (January 22, 1948), pg 1.
how the celebrations at the Bolshoi Theater were portrayed in Pravda. Starting in the 1930s, the celebrations had been marked by the presence of a large portrait of Lenin, surrounded by flowers, banners, and guards, on the stage. However, it was not until 1947 that the entire image of the stage, with Lenin's full portrait, was portrayed in Pravda. Previously, the picture accompanying the description of the ceremonies displayed the leaders on stage standing behind the table, without the image of Lenin in the background.\footnote{There were no large images of Lenin at the ceremonies in the Kremlin Palace.} During the years when the main celebration was held in the Kremlin Palace, there was no image of Lenin at all. The reason for not including Lenin's image on the stage is unclear and unknown. It may have been that photographers or the press had been instructed by authorities to focus on the leaders gathered on the stage rather than the image of Lenin. While this may seem like a trivial difference, the presence or absence of Lenin in Pravda's depiction of his death day celebrations at the Bolshoi Theater is significant and can help to explain one reason for Lenin's continued presence in Stalin's cult.
Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has noted the importance and power of symbols, explaining that symbols "are both 'models of' and 'models for' in that they both represent the way things are while also directing human activity." In other words, symbols and their meaning, especially in a formalized and ritualized context, can be vitally important in explaining the workings of the society in which they are present. Thus, within the context of the Stalin cult and the Lenin death day celebrations, the absence or presence of

Lenin's image in *Pravda* during the ceremonies at the Bolshoi had significant meaning. Lenin's image was a symbol both for the birth of socialism and the creation of the Soviet Union, and thus a symbol of the foundation upon which Stalin's Soviet Union stood. The absence of Lenin’s image from the annually reported death day ceremonies in *Pravda* is another way that various cultic organs manipulated the occasion to pay a minimal amount of respect to Lenin, while emphasizing the achievements of Stalin. Thus, Lenin's image was both a "model of" and "model for" in that its limited appearance and closeness to Stalin reflected both a model of how Stalin's image and persona should be conveyed to the Soviet people (via a personality cult), as well as a model for how the Soviet people should honor and venerate Stalin (in a style similar to Lenin). In this manner, Lenin's image was a symbol of great power and influence, and its presence, especially in a situation or environment where there was no precedent for it, conveys a shift or change of significant importance.

These meaningful ramifications are made even more pronounced if one factors in the ideas of another anthropologist, Victor Turner. Turner stated that to understand the values of a particular society, it is necessary to understand its rituals.152 In coming to this conclusion Turner had expanded on the ideas of another anthropologist, Monica Wilson, who stated that "ritual reveals values at their deepest level."153 Within the context of the Stalin cult and the various celebrations and rituals that took place at the Bolshoi Theater, the introduction of the inclusion of Lenin's image from his death day ceremonies can be

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153 Ibid., 6.
viewed as a shift in the values not of Soviet society as a whole, after all it was not the
ceremony that had changed but instead its depiction and image to the Soviet people, but
rather a shift in the values of another key component of Soviet society, the Stalin cult.

Considering the fact that the anniversary of Lenin's death was among one of the
only occasions in the Soviet calendar where the main focus was ostensibly on Lenin, the
absence of his image when discussing the Bolshoi celebrations is rather conspicuous. I
believe, within the context of both Geertz's and Turner's ideas, that Lenin's appearance in
the postwar depictions of the Bolshoi ceremonies are directly related to Stalin's 70th
birthday celebrations in 1949 and that this connection with Stalin's 70th birthday
celebrations is itself reflective of the changing values and function of the postwar Stalin
cult, from one of conveying legitimacy onto Stalin's rule to one of simply increasing his
cultic grandeur. The appearance of Lenin's image on the stage of the Bolshoi Theater,
combined with the tradition of the annual celebrations of Lenin's death provided a
template for Stalin's own 70th birthday celebrations, as well as an avenue for the further
aggrandizing of Stalin's cultic image. This is clearly seen when one compares the
portrayal of Lenin's death day celebrations and Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations in
Soviet media. 154

154 See pages 1-3.
As indicated above, the apparent strategy for Stalin's cult had been to elevate Lenin's cult to a certain level and then slowly heighten and incorporate Stalin's image into Lenin's cult. In this manner, the transfer of Lenin's death day ceremonies back to the Bolshoi Theater from the imageless celebrations at the Kremlin Palace, as well as the new depictions of the ceremony in the media, provided the framework for the event that

would eventually culminate in the absolute apex of Stalin's cultic grandeur. By consistently portraying Lenin's image at the Bolshoi Theater for several years before Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations, the cultic organs set a new stylistic precedent around Lenin's image, providing another level of grandeur for the Stalin cult to move up to.

In this fashion, the Stalin cult used Lenin's image as a stepping stone of sorts, facilitating the expression of Stalin's glorified image in an unprecedented ceremonial fashion, but also, considering the foreign representatives present at the event, on an international scale. While it is highly unlikely that the absence of Lenin's image from the media reports on the ceremonies at the Bolshoi had been planned since the 1930s by Stalin or some cadre, the situation provided a convenient avenue for the increase in the eminence of the Stalin cult. Lenin as a symbol was able to provide a basis for a celebration of this magnitude. His status as the founder of the Soviet Union meant that his image was infallible and could more or less do or be associated with no wrong. By incorporating Lenin's image from the death ceremonies into the media accounts of the event after 1946, the cultic organs were not only providing a precedent for Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations, but they were also facilitating a distinct reason for the continued existence of Lenin's image in the Stalin cult. As noted above, one of the likely reasons of Lenin's continued presence in the Stalin cult in the postwar era was that Lenin was simply part of the cultic canon. His presence, whose purpose had once been to confer legitimacy onto Stalin, had been reduced to being synonymous with a meaningless tradition. However, within the context of his post-1946 death day celebrations and Stalin's 70th
birthday ceremonies, there was now a distinct reason for Lenin's continued presence in the Stalin cult.

In this manner, Lenin's image functioned beyond the role of Tumarkin's harmless icon in the background of the cult. While it still was present and was still conveying a sense of unnecessary legitimacy toward Stalin, Lenin's image had taken on another influential role, as a tool which the various cultic organs used to elevate the image of the General Secretary to new heights. Even though Tumarkin notes that Lenin's image had fulfilled a similar role in the early days of the Stalin cult, she does not describe it as playing any role beyond conveying legitimacy once Stalin's cult had totally subsumed Lenin's cult in the early 1930s. Combined with the legitimacy that Stalin gained from the victory over Germany, Lenin as a cultic stepping stone added to the increasing grandiosity of Stalin's cult in the postwar era. In this manner, Lenin's image in the Stalin cult was directly connected to the shift in the cult's function in the postwar years, to that of simply aggrandizing and enhancing Stalin's near otherworldly image. But despite the new heights that Stalin would achieve as a result of this, Lenin was still present in Stalin's cult throughout the early 1950s. It appeared that Lenin's image was not finished in its job of elevating the grandeur of Stalin's cult. In this final elevation, Stalin himself would transcend death and finally achieve the same level of resplendence that his predecessor had achieved.

In essence, one of the main goals of Stalin's cult was to elevate the image of the Soviet leader to the same near-deified height of his predecessor. However, Lenin's nature was ultimate and could not be surpassed. To circumvent this Stalin cult limited the
prevalence of Lenin's images, relegated them to the cultic background, and emphasized Stalin's sense of grandeur and importance beyond the pale of Lenin's. Furthermore, Lenin's image was utilized by the cult to facilitate the absolute apex of the Stalin cult, the 70th birthday celebrations in 1949. In this ironic fashion, Lenin's image was used in an attempt by the cultic organs to portray Stalin as being a step above Lenin. In the end, it was only in death that Stalin was able to obtain a level wholly equal to that of Lenin.

Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili died on March 5th, 1953 and after several days of mourning, and following an elaborate funeral on Red Square, his embalmed body was interred beside Lenin's in the newly christened Lenin-Stalin Mausoleum. Interestingly, Stalin had not left instructions to be placed in the mausoleum upon his death. The Soviet leadership took it upon themselves to order the embalming of Stalin and the placement of his body in the mausoleum. Robert Service states that, "There was nothing unexpected about this, even though Stalin had given no instructions. For two decades he had been hailed as the greatest living human being. The Presidium simply assumed that that his corpse should receive the same treatment as Stalin [among other Soviet leaders] had organized for Lenin in 1924." It appears that even in death, the cult had conditioned his successors to bestow upon him the highest possible praises and honors. Even though Stalin's body would be eventually removed from the mausoleum in 1961 as a result of a burst of de-Stalinist fervor at the 22nd Party Congress, he had


\[157\] Ibid., 588.
achieved the same level of resplendence as Lenin.\textsuperscript{158} The cult had succeeded in its final function. Through the embalming of his body and its placement in the mausoleum, Stalin was able to achieve the same level of immortality that Lenin had achieved, solidifying his image as being truly on par with Lenin's.

Conclusions: Stalin Descending From on High

Like at any birthday party there were presents. Stalin received an enormous number of gifts for his 70th birthday. These gifts came from not only Soviet citizens, but also from other communist countries, as well as from the delegates who had assembled in Moscow for the celebrations. The presents Stalin received ranged from the truly humble to the truly extravagant. Some of the former were simple letters from normal citizens conveying their thanks to the great leader for his wise leadership. The more extravagant examples, items that were created to commemorate Stalin's 70th birthday and can thus be construed as gifts, consisted of pottery emblazoned with Stalin’s image, paintings, such as Shurpin's *The Morning of Our Motherland*, and even the movie *The Fall of Berlin*. This gift-giving was utilized by the cultic organs to convey to the Soviet masses, and the world, that Stalin was a wise and great leader and that the people of the Soviet Union genuinely loved and revered him.

In the final scene of *The Fall of Berlin*, Stalin, played by Georgian actor Mikhail Gelovani, is portrayed in all his glory as the savior of not only the Soviet Union, but of all of Europe. While dancing and singing on the steps of the Reichstag to celebrate its capture, Soviet soldiers, including Aleksei, spot Stalin's plane in the sky and start to run from the Reichstag to a nearby airport to meet him. Once the plane lands, Stalin comes out, splendidly dressed in a crisp white uniform, and addresses the assembled masses.
This crowd not only includes Soviet soldiers but also war refugees and former POWs from different countries, as well as recently freed concentration camp prisoners. The large crowd enthusiastically (almost hysterically) cheers Stalin. He congratulates them on the end of the war and expresses his hope for continued peace throughout the world. This arrival of Stalin in an airplane is seemingly evocative of a divine figure descending from the heavens. This image, combined with the large crowds that have assembled at the airport offers a vivid opposite to the ascension of Jesus Christ as told in the Bible. Instead of the savior leaving his followers on earth, he is descending to earth to rule over them and the new socialist world order. This scene, which may have been inspired by Hitler's arrival at Nuremberg in an airplane from Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 film Triumph of the Will, is the culmination of Stalin's glory in The Fall of Berlin. This film was just one of many thousands of gifts given to the creator of Soviet society, thanking him for bestowing onto the people of the Soviet Union the gifts of collectivization and industrialization, assets which improved their lives and were essential to his glorious victory over Nazi Germany.

The main purpose of this thesis has been to explain the continued presence of Lenin in Stalin's cult of personality in the postwar era. The initial purpose of the Stalin cult had been to legitimate Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union. Lenin's image was present in the cult during its early years so as to legitimate the General Secretary's hold on power. Later, as Stalin's grasp on power became absolute, and his image as a builder of socialism, by way of collectivization and industrialization, was honed by the cult, Lenin's

original purpose of legitimizing Stalin's status as the paramount Soviet leader became less pertinent. While Lenin's image remained in the cult and continued to convey a sense of legitimacy onto Stalin, this legitimacy was no longer needed, and the cultic organs often relegated Lenin's image to the cultic background. Even though Stalin no longer needed to rely on Lenin's legitimacy, his image as a masterful builder of socialism, while touted extensively by the cult, was not wholly embraced by segments of the Soviet populace as a result of the cult's disconnect with, and distortion of, reality.

With the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II Stalin's image within the cult significantly changed. Much of the doubt exhibited or felt by the populace was quelled by the postwar jubilation and by the realization that Stalin and Stalinism had, for better or for worse, led the Soviet Union to victory over Germany, and facilitated the country's ascension to superpower status. Furthermore, Stalin emerged from World War II as a genius military leader who had guided the Soviet Union and its people on the path to victory and was thus ultimately responsible for Germany's defeat. The grandeur of Stalin's postwar image as both a builder of socialism and genius military leader, seen most clearly in Shurpin's *Morning of Our Motherland* and the climax of *The Fall of Berlin*, respectively, indicate a changing trend in the Stalin cult that had begun to manifest itself in the immediate prewar years. Once Stalin's legitimacy over the Soviet government had become absolute by the mid 1930s, the initial purpose of the Stalin cult, and thus the purpose of Lenin's image in the cult, had been fulfilled. While David Brandenberger argues that textual components of the cult developed to serve as tools for Marxist indoctrination, the purpose of the visual components of the Stalin cult moved
from reinforcing Stalin's legitimacy as leader of the Soviet Union, to simply aggrandizing Stalin's cultic image. The victory in World War II proved to be the ultimate facilitator of this process, to the point where some of the Stalin cult's postwar depictions of the General Secretary portrayed him as a near god-like figure.

Throughout this process Lenin's image remained a permanent, albeit secondary factor within the Stalin cult. Stalin's traditionally close association with Lenin likely precluded the possibility of fully excising the founder of the Soviet Union from the Stalin cult. However, while cult officials relegated Lenin's image to the background of the cult, sometimes quite literally, they used Lenin's image as an avenue through which they could further elevate the eminence of Stalin's cultic image. This process is most clearly seen during the annual ceremonies to commemorate Lenin's death. The postwar depictions of these ceremonies in Pravda provided both a visual and technical template for Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations in 1949, which were the absolute apogee of the Stalin cult. In this manner Lenin's image was used by the cultic organs to not only further aggrandize Stalin's cultic image, but also to facilitate the most grandiose manifestation of the Stalin cult. Thus the ultimate purpose of Lenin's continued presence in the Stalin cult was to further heighten Stalin's cultic resplendence.

The conclusion of this thesis brings up one very interesting factor about the Stalin cult: the enduring power and influence of Lenin's image. Even at its most grandiose the cultic depictions of Stalin were following a path that had been roughly set forth by Lenin's own image. In fact it was the power of Lenin's image exuded that allowed the cultic organs to use his image to increase the awesomeness of Stalin's image. Thus, even
within the context of Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations and his internment into the Lenin mausoleum, Stalin was only ever as good as Lenin had been. The power of Lenin's image outlasted that of Stalin's own image with the General Secretary's removal from the mausoleum in 1961. In fact, the aura of Lenin's image has outlasted that of the Soviet Union. More than 20 years after the Soviet Union collapsed, Lenin's body is still on display on Red Square for all the world to see. With this in mind, one has to wonder what was the ultimate driving force within the Stalin cult; the persona and image of the General Secretary, or that of his immediate predecessor.
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