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Rethinking the Nation: Imperial Collapse, Eurasianism, and George Vernadsky's Historical Scholarship

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Rethinking the Nation: Imperial Collapse, Eurasianism, and George Vernadsky's Historical Scholarship

There is only one Russia, “Eurasian” Russia, or Eurasia.

—George Vernadsky¹

It is very difficult for outsiders, Czeslaw Milosz famously noted, to understand the intractable national problems of Eastern Europe. Milosz, himself a “typical East European,” according to his own self-description, paints, in his beautifully written *Native Realm*, a nuanced and colorful picture of the mind-boggling mosaic of peoples, religions, and cultures cohabitating in the East European marchlands that were incorporated into the Russian Empire. In his childhood years in Wilno (now Vilnius), Milosz recalled, “Practically every person I met was different, not because of his own special self, but as a representative of some group, class, or nation. One lived in the twentieth century, another in the nineteenth, a third in the fourteenth.”² To be sure, the interplay among all those sociocultural groups, on the one hand, and the different relations each one had with the central government, on the other, made the issue of local loyalties and identities extremely complex. But as Milosz points out, the Romanov Empire’s disintegration and the rise of a number of national states in its former borderlands did not make matters any easier. In fact, he writes, the shift from the often loose imperial allegiance to a more rigid nation-based identity led to the most dramatic developments: sometimes it “severed even the closest ties and set brother against brother. *One was forced to make a choice*, the more emotional for being based on unclear data, yet, like every decision, demanding proper motives.”³

The chaotic exit from the imperial order from 1917 to 1920 could not fail to trigger a quest, both inside and outside “historical Russia,” for new paradigms that would problematize the relations between center and periphery, cultural (and political) liberation and subjection. Heated debates created an intellectual atmosphere concerned with the problems of cultural relativity and emancipation. Out of this very atmosphere emerged Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory of polyphony, or “heteroglossia,” which some scholars argue can be perceived as a latent theory of nation and nationalism.⁴ Within the Russian émigré milieu in Europe in the 1920s and ’30s, a notion of polyphony similar to Bakhtin’s was upheld by the Eurasianists, who were struggling with how to harmonize the “voice” of the imperial center with those of multiple sub-imperial communities.⁵

Significantly, over the last decade the body of scholarly literature on “classical” Eurasianism has been steadily growing.⁶ The broadest reason for this interest is obvious. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new geopolitical landscape in what has come to be designated—tellingly—as Eurasia, scholars and the general public alike have experienced crises of identity not unlike those that tormented the Eurasianists themselves in the wake of the unraveling of the Russian Empire, and are still grappling with how best to analyze the new reality. A 2004 essay by the historian Mark von Hagen is both a manifestation of those crises and a helpful attempt to show the way out of them. Remarkably, not only did von Hagen invoke the iconoclastic spirit of classical Eurasianists, he also advanced Eurasia as the “anti-paradigm for the post-Soviet era.”⁷

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The study of Eurasianism, however, has produced mixed results so far. As one contemporary student of this fascinating school of thought observes, “As a body of doctrine, Eurasianism has been much more frequently summarized than critically examined.”⁸ The Eurasianism-related archival materials, in particular the voluminous correspondence among participants in the movement, still need to be studied. Moreover, interest in Eurasianism traditionally has been skewed toward the geopolitical (the “Exodus to the East”), the sociopolitical (Eurasianism’s authoritarian leanings toward “ideocracy”), and, to a lesser extent, the historiosophic. Recently, a number of useful studies of Eurasianist theory of culture have appeared.⁹ But the Eurasianists’ attempts at rethinking empire and nation and at crafting a new historical narrative in which Russia’s multiethnic character would find a more thorough treatment have not been sufficiently explored.¹⁰

This brings me to the figure of Georgii (George) Vernadsky, who is rightly regarded as Eurasianism’s principal historian. There is, it would appear, a virtual flourishing of Vernadsky studies in today’s Russia. Most of the works of the émigré historian have been reprinted in his historical homeland, and there is a seemingly endless stream of monographs and articles on his life and scholarship.¹¹ “Surprisingly,” the eminent Harvard historian Richard Pipes recently remarked, “since its emancipation from communism a kind of cult of Vernadsky has emerged in Russia.”¹² This atmosphere of adulation has also prompted the senior Russian historian Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, Vernadsky’s most recent biographer, to comment that, while in Soviet times Vernadsky was a popular “whipping boy,” mercilessly criticized for his non-Marxist understanding of the historical process, in post-communist Russia, he has become the object of almost “limitless lauding.”¹³

But despite the impressive range of scholarly research on Vernadsky, the question persists: how well do we understand his intellectual legacy—in particular, the links among his own national identity (identities?), his choice of the Eurasianist paradigm, and his historical scholarship?

George Vernadsky is generally regarded as a historian of Russia.¹⁴ At first blush, this seems quite understandable: his multivolume magnum

opus is titled *A History of Russia*, and his last big study, published posthumously, was *Russian Historiography*. Yet this traditional perception of the scholar obscures the fact that Vernadsky’s ambition was to write not the history of Russia as a nation-state but the history of Russia-Eurasia—the vast territory, virtually a world unto itself, inhabited, to borrow his Eurasianist friend Petr Savitsky’s words, by an “assembly of peoples” (*sobor narodov*). Thus, Vernadsky tried to create a master narrative that would incorporate the histories of all major peoples living on the Eurasian plains—both the eastern nomads (“the peoples of the steppe”) and the western neighbors of the Great Russians, first of all the Ukrainians. In doing this, he naturally drew heavily upon the Russian imperial historiography in whose tradition he was steeped at Moscow and St. Petersburg universities. But Vernadsky also introduced a new vision of “Russian history” obviously inspired by his Eurasianism. In 1933, in a letter to his father, Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky, he described his work on *An Essay on the History of Eurasia*: “In the general concept of Russian history, I try to devote much more attention than has ever been given before to Western Rus’ and Ukraine.”¹⁵ In the same vein, in his study of Russian historiography one finds the scholarly portraits of the leading Ukrainian historians of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Mykola Kostomarov, Mykhailo Drahomanov, Volodymyr Antonovych, and Dmytro Bahalii.

Also, Vernadsky appeared to view the history of Ukraine as a legitimate subject per se. He authored an English-language biography of the 17th-century Ukrainian rebel leader Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and wrote an introduction and did editorial work for a translation of Mykhailo Hrushevsky’s one-volume history of Ukraine. Vernadsky seemed to be especially fascinated by the personality of the 19th-century political thinker and nationalist Mykhailo Drahomanov. In mid-1930s he urged fellow émigré Aleksandra Golshtein, a family friend and longtime Drahomanov acquaintance, to write a memoir about him.¹⁶ Golshtein later sent Vernadsky a manuscript of her reminiscences, along with her copious correspondence with Drahomanov.¹⁷

Among Vernadsky’s works preserved in his archive¹⁸ are two typescripts underscor-

ing his professional interest in the history of Ukraine: “The Kievan and Cossack Periods in Ukrainian History” and “Prince Trubetskoi and the Ukrainian Question.”¹⁹ Also in his archival collection are two folders of materials titled “The Ukrainian Question before and during the Second World War.” It would be only proper to add that as early as 1941, in an interview with an English-language Ukrainian publication, Vernadsky spoke in favor of plans to establish a Ukrainian research institute in the United States that would publish a Ukrainian-language journal.²⁰

Given all this, a strong case can be made for revisiting George Vernadsky’s understanding of what he himself called a “Russian history.” Particularly intriguing is the exploration of how Vernadsky’s Eurasianism relates both to his own struggles with identity issues and to his thinking on empire, nation, and Russian and Ukrainian history.

Thus, in the present article I propose to place Vernadsky’s research on Russian and Ukrainian history within the context of his biography and Eurasianist worldview. My central argument is that George Vernadsky’s post-1917 historical scholarship was influenced by one powerful motive—his personal search for national identity, a search that was obviously made more complicated by his exile. Internal contradictions and the resultant tensions between Ukrainian origin and imperial *Weltanschauung*, between his ardent love of “historical Russia” and his wretched status as an émigré deprived of his beloved homeland by the victorious Bolshevik regime, made grappling with the issue of identity emotionally agonizing for Vernadsky, but also fruitful in terms of producing new and unorthodox solutions.²¹

Like other Eurasianists, Vernadsky understood that after the 1917 revolution it was simply impossible to turn the former Russian empire into a classic nation-state. The early Soviet practices aimed at managing multi-ethnicity only confirmed his view. At the same time, in keeping with the Eurasianist intellectual tradition, he placed immense value on the preservation of that unique geopolitical and geocultural space that this school of thought called “Russia-Eurasia.” The need to reconceptualize the notion of *nation* and the way national history should be written was thus

inevitable. I argue that Eurasianism was precisely the intellectual framework within which to achieve this goal.

Two key Eurasianist ideas were instrumental in shaping Vernadsky’s historical vision. The first was the concept of Eurasian nationalism advanced by Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi. He contended that the nationalism of each people of Eurasia should be combined with pan-Eurasian nationalism. Being a precursor to the theory of multiple identities, this concept not only helped resolve the problem of Vernadsky’s personal soul-searching but also appeared to show how to preserve the precious unity of “historical Russia.” The other fundamental idea, set forth by Petr Savitsky, was the image of Eurasia as a natural “developmental space” (*mestorazvitie*) for the host of ethnic groups residing in its vast expanses. Eurasia, being a highly cohesive geographic world, had molded those groups into a unique “assembly of nationalities and religions,” and, in turn, was itself being reshaped in the process of those peoples’ economic and cultural activity. The Eurasianists asserted that the political unity of the Russian Empire had been the result not only of the efforts of the Great Russians but of many peoples of Eurasia. That vision had prompted Vernadsky to steer away from the traditions of Russian imperial historiography, which tended to write the history of Russia as that of a nation-state. In contrast, he was among the first to try to craft a historical narrative of Russia as a *Nationalitätenstaat*. The Eurasianist conceptual limitations, however, prevented him from writing a truly comprehensive history of Russia as a multiethnic empire.

BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Given all the current interest in classical Eurasianism, what is really surprising is the dearth of explanation of what exactly prompted George Vernadsky (and, for that matter, all other leading members of the movement) to adopt such an unorthodox outlook on the Russian historical process. Some researchers (for instance, Nikolai Bolkhovitinov) simply state the fact of Vernadsky’s association with the Eurasianist movement without bothering to investigate the underlying reasons for this affiliation.²² Other scholars (such as Natalia Alevras) try to prove that Vernadsky was some-

how predestined to become a Eurasianist, given his pre-revolutionary scholarly interests in Russia's eastward expansion and colonization of Siberia.²³ Alevras refers to the early, pre-1917 works by George Vernadsky and Petr Savitsky²⁴ as "proto-Eurasianist" essays that prefigured these authors' post-revolutionary embrace of Eurasianist historiography.²⁵ There are also scholars who, while acknowledging the tremendous importance of Vernadsky's selection of the Eurasianist paradigm to frame his subsequent historiographic development, claim that we will probably never know the true reasons behind his Eurasianist affiliation. "Only detailed biographical information about individual Eurasianists can illuminate the distinct characteristics of those original minds which led them to non-normative beliefs," wrote Charles J. Halperin, Vernadsky's American biographer. "For Vernadsky," he added, "and perhaps for all the Eurasian epigones, such information is lacking."²⁶ Indeed, Halperin was right when he noted that Vernadsky "was not a self-revealing man and did not dwell in his memoirs upon this momentous intellectual event"—that is, his joining the Eurasianist movement in the mid-1920s. But I think the lack of direct evidence still should not prevent a researcher from attempting to reconstruct George Vernadsky's intellectual evolution in the aftermath of the 1914–21 "Russian catastrophe." My starting point will be the analysis of all available information that might shed light on Vernadsky's struggle with the problem of his own national identity following the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Whites' defeat in the civil war, and his flight into European exile.

In his seminal 1967 article "The Emergence of Eurasianism," Nicholas Riasanovsky noted that it is probably not accidental that the main Eurasianist theorists had Ukrainian roots.²⁷ Riasanovsky did not elaborate on this valuable intuition, and it was largely neglected in the subsequent scholarly literature.²⁸ Indeed, it does not seem merely coincidental that three of the four founding members of the movement—Petr Savitsky,²⁹ Petr Suvchinsky,³⁰ and Georgii Florovsky³¹—originated in Ukraine or spent some time there in their childhood and youth. Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi,³² Eurasianism's fourth founding father, was the descendant of Gedymin, the Grand Prince of Lithuania, and

his keen interest in all things Ukrainian was, in Vernadsky's words, a manifestation of an ancestral instinct.³³ Vernadsky himself (who joined the movement somewhat later), although he was born and grew up in Moscow, could boast of a long and illustrious Ukrainian pedigree.

This "Ukrainian connection" appears to be crucially important indeed. On the one hand, the attachment to Ukraine and its culture would distinguish Vernadsky and other key Eurasianists (particularly Savitsky) from the bulk of their fellow Russian émigrés who continued dreaming of Russia's resurrection as a "unified state"—"one and indivisible"—and who were bent on denying the Ukrainians even a modicum of a distinct identity that might make them look somewhat different from the Russians and result in some sort of Ukrainian autonomy.³⁴ On the other hand, Vernadsky and his fellow Eurasianists held that the Russian-Ukrainian unity forged over several centuries of intense interaction within one state had produced tremendously beneficial results for both East Slavic peoples. Most important among these outcomes was the high culture of the late imperial epoch that was, in Vernadsky's view, both Russian and Ukrainian—a magnificent product of the two peoples' fruitful collaboration. This dual loyalty—Ukrainian *Landespatriotismus* co-existing with appreciation of the imperial high culture that flourished under the conditions of political unity of "historical Russia"—created an internal tension that had to be resolved. This resolution appears to have involved the reconceptualization of empire and nation within the Eurasianist philosophical framework.

The Vernadsky family's Ukrainian roots are very well documented, by, among others, George Vernadsky himself. Shortly before his death in 1973, Vernadsky started publishing his memoirs, several chapters of which were serialized in *Novyi Zhurnal*.³⁵ A fascinating manuscript in the Vernadsky archival collection titled *The Story of the Vernadsky Family as Related by My Father* is particularly interesting in that it shows that both Vernadskys, father and son, had made an attempt to reconstruct their Ukrainian lineage and trace the ties that connected the Vernadskys with other illustrious old Ukrainian families such as the Korolenkos and Konstantinoviches.³⁶ Highly valuable information on the Vernadskys' Ukrainian roots

and interests can also be gleaned from Vladimir Vernadsky's diaries.³⁷

But of course, place of origin or ethnic roots do not necessarily define one's national identity and loyalty. More important, most scholars within the humanities disciplines today hold that national identity is "not a fixed category, but a fluctuating process, in the course of which one or more identities can evolve side by side in the same person, in greater or lesser tension with each other... national identity can be multiple or compound... an individual can be both Scottish and British, or Ukrainian and Russian. The two (or more) national identities are not just superimposed on one another, but may complement each other, since the defining features of each nation differ from case to case."³⁸ In this sense, the Vernadskys' case is particularly instructive in that it shows how complex, contradictory, and vague the issue of national identity and political loyalty was in imperial Russia's twilight years. Most contemporary historians seem to agree that, starting in the 1860s, when the slow but steady rise of Ukrainian ethnic nationalism prompted the imperial regime in St. Petersburg to come up with its own "nationalizing project," and until the Russian Empire's collapse in 1917, Ukraine represented an administrative territory where a whole gamut of loyalties and identities existed simultaneously.³⁹ To be sure, the bulk of Ukraine's population, the local peasants, had not yet been affected by this new nationalist discourse. For the most part, they remained in the premodern stage until approximately the late 1910s, defining themselves just as "locals," good Orthodox believers and loyal subjects of the tsar. Ukraine's "nationalist front" was represented by a tiny group of activists, mostly members of the local intelligentsia, who consciously called themselves *Ukrainians*—in contrast to *malorosy* (Little Russians), an official appellation of the region's population that recognized certain insignificant regional differences but generally presupposed the unity of *malorosy* and *velikorosy* (Great Russians)—and advanced the idea that the Ukrainian people were a full-blown nation, linguistically and culturally distinct from the *velikorosy*. For its part, the imperial establishment, which was until the mid-19th century very wary of pursuing a nationalization policy (as any author-

ity presiding over the multinational empire would be), decided that the time had come to confront the challenge posed by what it labeled "Ukrainian separatism." Thus, the government launched a set of measures that some scholars characterize as a "greater Russian nation project"—a policy that ideally was supposed to lead to the formation of a core nation comprising all three East Slavic peoples—the Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians (Belorussians).⁴⁰

This nationalizing activism on the part of St. Petersburg authorities, with its incoherent and poorly executed policies of Russification and persecution of nationalist-minded members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, made the picture of local identities and loyalties even more complex.⁴¹ Depending on how they perceived the imperial government's policies, one can discern—apart from the mostly passive and premodern peasantry and those members of local society who retained a prenatalist, dynastic type of loyalty—at least four other social types that existed in pre-revolutionary Ukraine. First, Ukrainian nationalists, quite naturally, opposed Russification and rejected the idea of a single Russian nation. (This attitude, however, did not prejudice the vision of further political relations with Russians: some Ukrainian nationalists advocated complete separation, while others were ready to settle for a federation.) Second, those people in Ukraine who, regardless of ethnic origin, believed they were Russians wholeheartedly supported the authorities' attempt to forge a "greater Russian nation." Third, there were ethnic Ukrainians who persisted in proudly calling themselves *malorosy* and who perceived themselves as constituting part of an inseparable Russian triad, together with the Great Russians and Belorussians. They were supportive of the government's efforts to form the empire's "core nation" and castigated Ukrainian nationalists for their perceived desire to break the "historical" East Slavic unity. Finally, there were people, mostly ethnic Ukrainians, who would, in fact, have a hybrid or dual identity. They would describe themselves as "both Ukrainian and Russian" or as "Ukrainians belonging to the world of Russian [high] culture." This group, arguably the smallest in comparison with the other three, found itself in the most difficult situation, as its relations with Ukrainian national-

ists on the one hand and Russian nationalists on the other were equally strained. Its members were appalled by the crude Russification measures and the stubborn reluctance of the imperial government to recognize Ukraine as a nation in its own right, possessing its own language and culture. But they also found Ukrainian nationalists' drive toward political separation counterproductive, and believed that Ukraine would be much better served if it stayed united in one powerful state with Russia, sharing in the magnificent riches that the late imperial culture had produced.

As the Russian Empire's days drew to a close and the struggle over the "Ukrainian question" became more acute, the dual-identity group found itself between a rock and a hard place, being forced by circumstances to make a political choice and define what its ultimate loyalties and identities were. For the members of this group, that was the kind of choice they would rather avoid making.

All the available evidence suggests that the Vernadskys likely belonged to this small group of ethnic Ukrainians with a dual "Russian-Ukrainian identity."⁴² There were some interesting nuances, though. The paths that led Vladimir and George Vernadsky to this dual identity differed markedly. There is a consensus among scholars that from very early on, Vladimir Vernadsky (who, though born in St. Petersburg, did live as a young boy with his parents in Ukraine, in the city of Kharkiv), was conscious of his Ukrainian origins.⁴³ He kept a keen interest in Ukrainian affairs after he moved to St. Petersburg and then Moscow,⁴⁴ and during the decade preceding the Russian Revolution participated in all the important debates on the "Ukrainian question" in his dual role as prominent academic and influential politician.⁴⁵ But with George Vernadsky, the situation appears to be much trickier. It is only now that evidence found in his personal papers makes it possible to reconstruct the long and winding odyssey in the course of which he developed what appears to be a dual Russian-Ukrainian identity.

It would seem that throughout his life in Russia—the period between 1887, the year he was born, and November 1920, when he fled together with the remnants of Baron Petr Wrangel's army to Constantinople—George

Vernadsky thought of himself as Russian. There is fascinating evidence to this effect provided by none other than his father, who, in 1920, wrote in a letter to his Parisian friend Aleksandra Golshtein, "I am tremendously happy with my kids.... [But] the children, though they're good friends, turned out to be quite different. My son is Orthodox and Russian, lacking any Ukrainian sympathies whatsoever, while my daughter is Ukrainian, and in this sense she is spiritually closer to me."⁴⁶ George Vernadsky himself was quite explicit about his self-identification in an unpublished passage in his memoirs in which he described his trip in the summer of 1908 to the Slavic congress in Prague, presided over by Professor Tomáš Masaryk. One of the three delegates elected to the congress from the Moscow University student body, George met at the gathering the student representatives of other Slavic peoples, including the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians, Vernadsky pointedly noted, "treated us Russians in a particularly unfriendly way."⁴⁷

The collapse of the Russian ancien régime, followed by the string of political upheavals that irretrievably buried "historical Russia," could not fail to deeply shake George Vernadsky and affect his perceptions of his personal identity. Between November 1920 and February 1922, he and his wife, Nina, were literally struggling for survival, leading the difficult life of refugees on the eastern periphery of postwar Europe. The painful sense of being "stateless persons" undoubtedly exacerbated their angst and deepened the identity crisis. "We will likely never return to Russia—we're already a cutoff piece [*my otrezannyi lomot'*]," Nina Vernadsky wrote in her diary. "We had left Russia because we could not accept [the rule of the Communist] Internationale but now we have lost nationality ourselves."⁴⁸ From Constantinople, the Vernadskys moved in 1921 to Athens and then, in 1922, to Prague, where the Masaryk government had just launched the so-called Russian Initiative [*Ruska akce*], having provided funds to support a number of Russian scholarly and educational institutions in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹ It was also in Prague that Vernadsky reunited with his parents, almost two years after their dramatic parting in the Crimea on the eve of the Bolshevik seizure of the peninsula. (In May 1922, the Soviet government allowed Vladimir

Vernadsky to go abroad to take a teaching position at the Sorbonne. As soon as they were issued foreign passports, he, his wife, and their daughter traveled to Paris via Prague.)

I would argue that this family reunion—particularly the re-establishment of ties with his father that would be never broken again until the latter's death in 1945—played a crucial role in the transformation of George Vernadsky's personal identity. Reflections on Russia's—and his own—trials and tribulations following the 1917 revolution, coupled with his father's powerful influence, appear to have reshaped Vernadsky's perception of himself, steering him away from the exclusively Russian identity and toward a Russian-Ukrainian one.

Archival documents provide evidence illustrating this fascinating process. While Vladimir Vernadsky was staying in Paris, from 1922 to 1925, father and son appeared to have used the opportunity of personal meetings to discuss, among other things, matters pertaining to family history and the Ukrainian connection.⁵⁰ George Vernadsky's interest in the issue seems to have grown constantly, as he would frequently return to it in his diaries and notes in the 1930s. For instance, in 1932, George had a chance to see his father again—incidentally, in Prague, which they chose as a meeting place since George was coming from the United States and Vladimir from Leningrad (St. Petersburg). An entry in George's diary for that year begins, "These last days, both Dad and Mom were telling a lot about the lives of their parents and families. All this is precious and very interesting. It's a pity that previously I knew so little and paid little attention, but now I want to learn every single detail." Then he adds, "In general, everyone has to know the history of his family and kin, and I—a historian—even more so.... And I knew so little."⁵¹

A document he finished compiling in 1936—but which was based, as he himself specifies, on conversations he had with his father in Paris in August 1923—provides a good idea of what George Vernadsky learned about his Ukrainian ancestors and their political attitudes. Here's a noteworthy description of George's grandfather, Ivan Vasilyevich Vernadsky, who at one time was an economics professor at Kyiv University. Ivan Vernadsky, George writes in this genealogical memo, "knew Ukrainian very well and

loved this language. He was on friendly terms with [Taras] Shevchenko, [Panteleimon] Kulish, [and Mykola] Kostomarov [the leading members of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the mid-19th century], and his pro-Ukrainian sympathies had likely increased partially under their influence." George also notes that Ivan, even when he was a young boy, criticized his own father for failing to learn Ukrainian. Later, George adds, Ivan Vasilyevich passed on his Ukrainophile sentiments to his son Vladimir, George's father. George ends the description of his grandfather with a short but telling outline of his historical-political views: "Ivan Vasilyevich believed that [Hetman] Mazepa was one of the last fighters for Ukraine's independence. And he had a negative view of Peter the Great because of his [ruthless] Ukrainian policy."⁵² Among the many additions and corrections Vladimir Vernadsky personally introduced into this genealogical text, one is particularly remarkable. Its heading, in Vladimir's own handwriting, reads, "About our family as Ukrainians, *not* Russians" [emphasis in original]. Vladimir stressed in these notes that both his father and his mother "felt very acutely their distinctiveness from the Russians. [They] knew from legends and books the history of Ukraine. [I] heard a lot [about it] in my childhood."⁵³

Boosted by his renewed close association with his father, whom he revered, George Vernadsky's reevaluation of his identity appeared to be moving apace in 1924, as a diary entry by Vladimir Vernadsky from September 5 of that year indicates, in which Vladimir refers to the "Ukrainian tendencies of [my] son."⁵⁴ That those tendencies persisted and probably grew even stronger over time we know from George Vernadsky himself. In January 1940, in a letter to an editor of the Ukrainian émigré publication in America, he wrote (in Ukrainian!), "[I] regard myself as both Ukrainian and Russian and also believe that the strength of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples lies in cooperation and not in separation of one from the other."⁵⁵ These were precisely the words his father could have used to describe his own identities and loyalties.

It would be pretty safe to conclude, then, that throughout the 1920s the positions of George and Vladimir Vernadsky on the "Ukrainian question" grew closer together until they be-

came basically identical. The stance they shared can be summed up in five points:

1. Both the Great Russians (*velikorosy*) and the Ukrainians are closely related but still distinct peoples in their own right, each with their own language and culture.
2. At the same time, their close association throughout the ages, their common endeavors, and their shared sacrifices gave rise to the great imperial state—a global power with a world-class culture that can be truly called pan-Russian (*obshcherussky*), in that it is the result of the close collaboration of the Great Russian and Ukrainian peoples.
3. Russian-Ukrainian unity can rest only on mutual understanding and respect, including the appreciation of national (cultural and linguistic) peculiarities.
4. Both the attempts to suppress national distinctiveness and the desire to politically separate one people from the other are equally lethal for the unity of the pan-Russian state and the wholeness of pan-Russian culture.
5. Thus, the worst enemies of Russian-Ukrainian unity are (a) radical Russian nationalists, who deny the very existence of the Ukrainian people and hold that the “Ukrainian question” is a mere instrument in the perfidious geopolitical designs of Russia’s European neighbors, and (b) Ukrainian separatists, who, by seeking to tear Ukraine away from Russia, doom Ukrainian culture to wretched provincialism and Ukrainians to a parochial existence.⁵⁶

It seems plausible that, having shaped the perspective outlined in these five points, George Vernadsky would find the previous approaches to Russian history—as well as the previous interpretations of what “Russia” and “Russian” mean—inadequate. What type of loyalty do these terms describe—imperial, political, cultural? Do historians of Russia and historians of the Russian Empire study the same subject? If not, how do these different subjects correlate?

To answer those questions, a thorough reconceptualization of the Russian historical process was needed. But what would the proper analytic framework be for such a rethinking? Incidentally, in February 1922 George Vernadsky was living in Prague—the

Central European city which, in the first post-war decade, was turning into the center of the Eurasianist movement.⁵⁷ It would not take too long for Vernadsky, who was looking for a new paradigm to better understand Russia’s past and present, to realize that Eurasianism was exactly the framework he sought.

THE EURASIANIST FRAMEWORK

In a letter to a friend, the linguist Roman Jakobson, dated March 7, 1921, Prince Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoi, the indisputable intellectual leader of the emerging Eurasianist movement, famously asserted that most of the basic ideas he had expressed in his fascinating *Europe and Mankind* (1920)—ideas that underlie much of what he wrote on historical-cultural issues in the 1920s and ’30s—were formulated at least a decade before, around 1909–10.⁵⁸ But there is little doubt that several factors born of the global turmoil of 1914–18 gave rise to classical Eurasianism as we know it. These factors included the disintegration of the Russian Empire, the unprecedented upsurge of “borderland nationalisms,” the victory of the Bolsheviks in the atrocious civil war that followed the Russian Revolution and the initial implementation of the Soviet nationality policy, the West’s reaction to the “Russian catastrophe,” and the Entente powers’ plans for the restructuring of the defeated continental empires. Last but not least was the very fact that all the major Eurasianist theorists were émigrés—people deprived of their homeland by harsh circumstances and living in an alien and often unfriendly environment. According to one witty commentary, the Eurasianists had lost Mother Russia and also failed to find a Mother Europe.⁵⁹ “When Europe proved an alien world, there followed a fundamental reexamination of the self—what was Russian in a Russian.”⁶⁰ The urge to sort out the profound identity crisis was thus one of the most potent driving forces of Eurasianism. As one perceptive observer, Russian philosopher V. V. Zenkovsky, himself an émigré who left Russia at the end of 1919, noted, “Not ideology, but psychology, is essential and influential in Eurasianism.”⁶¹

To fully comprehend the inner logic of Eurasianists’ reconceptualization of empire and

nation, one then has to place and analyze their writings within four intersecting contexts:

1. Russia's pre-revolutionary imperial policies
2. Soviet practices
3. Heated debates within the Russian émigré community in Europe
4. The discussion of nationalism in what the Eurasianists called, not without a degree of contempt, the "Romano-Germanic world"

As most of the key Eurasianists had originated in Ukraine, they were likely well aware of the uneasy relationship between empire and nationalism even before the First World War brought about, along with unspeakable destruction, the previously unheard of mobilization of ethnicity.⁶² Their personal experiences in the tumultuous years spanning the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war left them with no illusions as to the destructive potential of ethnic nationalism and the grave danger "borderland separatism" posed to the integrity of "historical Russia." For example, Petr Savitsky, the second founding father of Eurasianist doctrine, writing from Istanbul on February 4, 1920 to his superior in the diplomatic corps, Konstantin Gul'kevich, a Russian ambassador posted in Norway, vividly portrayed the situation he had witnessed in war-torn Ukraine:

I saw the regime of the Central Rada; for three months, by the force of word and the force of arms, together with my officer friends I defended my Chernigov estate from the Bolshevik gangs; I was liberated from this siege by the Germans and was witness to their seven months' long regime; as a subaltern I fought in the ranks of the Russian Corps, which defended Kiev from Petliura and I lived through the fall of the city; together with my father I fled—or left, who can tell?—the city of Kiev; I saw and made contact with the French in Odessa and waited long enough to see the "glorious" end of l'occupation française. From March to August 1919 I was in Ekaterinodar; from August to November I was floundering in the whirlwinds of the Russian "White Sovdepia," the Russian South, which was just liberated from the Bolsheviks. I spent

several weeks at the front line and I lived in the cities and villages of Kharkov (Kharkiv) and Poltava. Then I moved to Rostov.⁶³

For his part, Trubetskoi witnessed this period of turmoil in the empire's other borderland—the Caucasus. At the time of the October 1917 Bolshevik coup he was in Kislovodsk; then he moved to Tiflis (now Tbilisi) and finally to Baku. In December 1920, he wrote to Roman Jakobson from Sofia, "During my wanderings in the Caucasus I came to Baku in March 1918, just in time for the 'rebellion of the Muslims against Soviet Power,' or, to be more exact, during that short time when the Armenians were slaughtering Tatars. I was alone there, had no means of subsistence, caught typhus, and after hospitalization got a permit to leave with great difficulty. I did not have a single acquaintance there."⁶⁴

It is no wonder, then, that Nicholas Riasanovsky came to the conclusion that the Eurasianists had a "catastrophic view of history."⁶⁵ What is even more important for the purposes of the present discussion, however, is that the Eurasianists' experiences during the Great War and its truly catastrophic aftermath in Russia—the experiences that, among other things, revealed the fragility of their homeland and its borders—compelled them to address head-on the tangled relationship between empire and nation. This was done, mostly by Trubetskoi and Savitsky, in essays written during the first half of the 1920s, beginning with Trubetskoi's 1920 tract *Europe and Mankind* and Savitsky's 1921 review of this book, which is rightly regarded as Eurasianism's foundational text.⁶⁶ That the problems of nationalism from the very beginning lay at the heart of the Eurasianists' intellectual preoccupations is evident from a letter Trubetskoi mailed to Jakobson in March 1921. Trubetskoi told his friend that *Europe and Mankind* was in fact initially conceived as the first part of a trilogy that was going to be titled *A Justification of Nationalism*. At the core of this study there should have been a discussion of true and false nationalism. "Our Russian 'nationalism' of the pre-revolutionary period," Trubetskoi asserted, was definitely false. "The true nationalism is yet to be created," he concluded.⁶⁷

The intellectual task the Eurasianist theorists set for themselves can be roughly formulated as follows: how to remap (re-imagine) “Russian imperial space” to escape the seemingly unavoidable contradiction brought about by modernity—the one between empire and nationalism. Given that the Eurasianists’ ultimate goal was, of course, to prevent the political fragmentation of this “Russian imperial space” at all costs, some students of the movement perceptively note that the Eurasianist strategy was to seek the preservation of the empire through its negation.⁶⁸

Three main considerations appear to have influenced the Eurasianists’ thinking. First, they sought to repudiate certain aspects of the legacy of tsarist Russia’s nationality policy. However contradictory and incoherent the nationality policy of latter-day imperial Russia might have been,⁶⁹ recent research demonstrates that there was a slow but steady trend toward revamping the traditionalist dynastic empire and refashioning it according to the modernist Western template whereby the state would pursue national policies in certain regions of the realm and colonial/imperial policies in other regions.⁷⁰ In the last decades of imperial rule, there were debates on the need to single out something resembling a “national core” within the Russian Empire and clearly define the territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia as colonial possessions. “The direction in which the late imperial Russian state’s practices were moving was very similar to ‘overseas’ colonial empires such as Britain and France,” Peter Blitstein argues. “Russia was looking more and more like a colonial ‘empire of a nation.’”⁷¹ Remarkably, Trubetskoi sharply criticized tsarist imperial policy in the Caucasus, especially the brutal subjugation of the mountain peoples. In a letter to Petr Savitsky, Trubetskoi derided this policy as “colonial,” adding, “I believe that for the Eurasianists the tendency to idealize the Russian great-power spirit and Russian nationalism is especially dangerous, and should be suppressed by all means.”⁷² To be sure, for the Eurasianists, such an “aping” of the “pernicious West” was an anathema—not only because nationalism was a Western concept, but because they sensed that any attempt at defining a Russian-based “national core”—no matter

which criteria for determining “Russianness” were to be employed—would undermine their cherished image of the cultural, political, and economic integrity of the imperial space.

Second, the Eurasianists were definitely wary of the liberal Wilsonianism that sought to bring the notion of sovereignty based on national self-determination to the eastern and southern borderlands of the collapsed continental empires.⁷³ The meddling of the victorious Entente powers in “Russian” affairs from 1918 to 1920, including the decision to recognize several “secessionist territories” of the former Russian empire as sovereign states, was still vividly remembered by the Eurasianist thinkers.⁷⁴ They understood full well the challenges presented by Wilsonian ideas and policies. On the one hand, they now had to rethink the “Russian space” in such a way that it could not be classified as yet another unwieldy continental empire ready to be partitioned into national states. On the other hand, as they were aware that nationhood was increasingly becoming the name of the game in the contemporary world, the Eurasianists sensed the need to refashion the multiethnic imperial space so that it could be represented as a kind of “supernation,” a “multiethnic nation,” or, to use their metaphoric manner of expression, a “symphonic personality.”

Finally, the Eurasianists could not fail to reflect on the rival project of rethinking empire and nation—namely, the Bolshevik project. The latter, of course, was not just pure theorizing; instead, it represented a set of concrete policies that were being implemented right before the Eurasianists’ eyes. Ironically, the Soviet government, which by the end of 1920 had restored its control over most territories of the former Russian empire, was itself keen to preempt calls for decolonization and thus sought to appease “borderland nationalisms.”⁷⁵ In 1920, the Bolsheviks convened, in Baku, the First Congress of the Peoples of the East—a gathering that forcefully upheld the ideas of national liberation and anti-imperialism. At the same time, the Bolshevik ideologues—not unlike the Eurasianists—sought to place strong emphasis on the “organic,” almost indestructible tie between Russia and its Asian possessions. “Indeed,” G. V. Chicherin, the Bolshevik commissar for foreign affairs, wrote

in 1919—some two years before the first Eurasianist symposium saw the light of day!:

*The history of Russia and of two-thirds of Asia practically forms one indivisible whole. In the course of historical events two centers of state power emerged alternatively in this part of the world: the center of Mongol-nomad power, and the center of Great Russian, agriculture-based power.... The Tatar Khans were the immediate predecessors of and... to a large extent models for the Moscow tsars.... The 19th century expansion of Russia into Central Asia was the completion of the process of unification into one state—first under the khans, then under the tsars—of the continuous plain that extends over this part of the world.*⁷⁶

But for the Eurasianists, the Soviet practice of “territorializing ethnicity,” whereby in a number of cases “nations” would be artificially created, assigned a clearly delineated “homeland,” and given certain status within the complex hierarchy of the “Soviet peoples,” was much worse than the most brazen imperial policy. Instead of disarming the nationalists, the Eurasianists argued, the Bolsheviks were encouraging them, and in doing so were undermining the indivisibility of the former imperial space.⁷⁷

In their treatment of the “empire vs. nation” problem, the Eurasianists were striving to build a theoretical model that would somehow manage to reconcile their desire to preserve the integrity of the former imperial space with full recognition of the multiethnic character of the populations residing in its lands. This left the Eurasianist thinkers with few options. The imperial model seemed to be discredited both because it was rejected by the peoples of the former Russian empire and, more important, because it was associated with European colonial practices. The classical national state appeared to be too narrow a framework for such a vast territory with ethnically diverse populations. The only way out, the Eurasianists argued, would be to refashion the former Russian Empire as a *sui generis* supranational entity. Thus, Russia would become “Eurasia.”

Two Eurasianist concepts are particularly relevant here. The first, advanced by Petr Savitsky,

who was a geographer, was the vision of Eurasia—whose borders, incidentally, roughly coincide with those of the Russian Empire—as a highly cohesive landmass. The integrity of this vast geo-massif, Savitsky argued, was an objective fact of physical geography, as it was based on the region’s specific natural “structure:” the correlation between the horizontally shaped ecological zones and vertically shaped river systems.⁷⁸ “Eurasia is indivisible,” Savitsky asserted. Being a “special geographic world,” it served as a natural *mestorazvitie* (developmental space) for the numerous peoples residing in Eurasia.⁷⁹ The Eurasianists held that an organic connection existed among a geographic territory, the peoples (ethnic groups) residing in that territory, and the character of cultural development. Environment and culture constantly interacted, experiencing mutual influences and tensions. So *mestorazvitie*, a key Eurasianist category, was coined specifically to embody this complex process of interaction among various types of natural and sociohistorical milieus. “For us,” Savitsky asserted, “a sociohistorical milieu and its territory should merge into a single unified whole—into a geographical individual or a landscape.”⁸⁰ The Eurasianists argued that this “geographical individual,” as it was supposedly born of the intimate interaction between culture/history and territory, was in fact a live organism—a “symphonic personality.”

Clearly, by inventing the concept of *mestorazvitie*, Savitsky meant to put a respectable scientific facade on what sounded rather like a mystical connection between Eurasia as a geographic entity and the culture of its diverse peoples. Incidentally, in a letter to Jakobson dated July 28, 1921, Nikolai Trubetskoi conceded that in the Eurasianists’ view there was a “strong dose of mysticism—a trait characteristic of all of us.”⁸¹ As one student of Eurasianism wittingly notes, the term *mestorazvitie* was likely introduced to compensate for the repressed word “empire.”⁸²

The other crucial concept—the idea of Eurasian nationalism—was advanced by Trubetskoi. A brilliant linguist and ethnographer, he took the Eurasianist reconceptualization of “nation” one step further and suggested—in an almost Gellnerian manner—that a “peculiar” Eurasian nation might, in fact, be created. He developed his arguments most fully

in a short essay, “Pan-Eurasian Nationalism.”⁸³ The revolution and the collapse of the Russian Empire, Trubetskoi asserted, radically changed the position of the Russians within the former imperial space. Borderland peoples had attained new broad rights that they would never give up voluntarily, while Russians appeared to have forever lost their role as the “master race” within the realm. At the same time, the political upheaval that followed the revolution and imperial implosion caused only the temporary fragmentation of the Eurasian space, and its unity was quickly restored—a fact that, according to Trubetskoi, should serve as yet another proof that “Eurasia constitutes a geographical, economic, and historical whole.” But here is a dilemma: “There is no return to the situation in which Russians were the sole owners of the state territory, and, clearly, no other people can play such a role.” Trubetskoi boldly resolves this conundrum in a famous passage. “Consequently,” he asserted, “the national substratum of the state formerly known as the Russian Empire and now known as the USSR can only be the totality of peoples inhabiting that state, taken as a peculiar multiethnic nation and as such possessed of its own nationalism. We call that nation Eurasian, its territory Eurasia, and its nationalism Eurasianism.”⁸⁴

To prevent the rise among the borderland peoples of political nationalism (i.e., separatism), Trubetskoi suggested that all ethnic groups residing in Eurasia should develop a hierarchy of loyalties that would be interconnected and complementary. Every individual people in Eurasia should combine its own local nationalism with the overarching Eurasian nationalism. By the same token, “all citizens of the Eurasian state” should be conscious of and take pride in the fact that they simultaneously belonged both to a given people and the Eurasian nation.

Trubetskoi conceded, though, that this “Eurasian nation” was still a work in progress, as an understanding of the common destiny of the Eurasian peoples had yet to become a “significant part of their consciousness.” As an astute analyst of nationalism, Trubetskoi fully appreciated the need to “reeducate national self-awareness with a view toward establishing the symphonic (choral) unity of the multiethnic nation of Eurasia.”⁸⁵ In this sense, historical scholarship was, of course, an indispensable

instrument. Furthermore, the Eurasianists were aware that they were engaged in a kind of “race against time,” as intellectuals from borderland nations were busy advancing their own, “nationalist,” narratives meant to challenge the discourse that highlighted “Eurasian unity.”⁸⁶ The need to intellectually rebuff “separatists” was a constant motif in the Eurasianist correspondence. “I somehow cannot reconcile myself with an idea of self-determination that includes the right of complete secession—either of Ukraine, or the Caucasus, or Turkestan, etc.,” wrote Vasily Petrovich Nikitin, the renowned Middle East specialist and active contributor to Eurasianist publications in the 1920s, in one of his letters to George Vernadsky. “The reading of the separatists’ journals—[and their assertions such as] ‘We don’t have anything in common with Russia,’ ‘We belong to the Mediterranean culture’—drive me up the wall. All this is utterly ridiculous. Should we really throw our entire historiography into a wastebasket? Had it or had it not its own logic? Isn’t this logic valid also today?”⁸⁷

The elaboration of an Eurasianist interpretation of Russian history that would uphold the idea of the historical unity of Eurasia was thus in order. “It is necessary to reexamine a number of disciplines from the point of view of the unity of the multiethnic Eurasian nation, and to construct new scientific systems to replace old and antiquated ones,” Trubetskoi forcefully argued. “In particular, *one needs a new history of the Eurasian peoples including the history of the Russians.*”⁸⁸

GEORGE VERNADSKY AND THE HISTORY OF RUSSIA-EURASIA

In the mid-1920s, the Eurasianist theorists were looking for a good Russian historian, a true specialist (*spets* was the word they liked to use—the same shorthand that had wide currency in the Soviet Union) who would complete the crafting of the concept of Eurasia by adding historical dimension to the geographic-cultural construct. At the same time, George Vernadsky, a trained historian of Russia, was looking for a new theoretical framework to help him reconceptualize Russian history. The paths of the theorists and the historian finally crossed in Prague.

On April 28, 1926, Nikolai Trubetskoi argued in a letter to Eurasianist colleague Petr Suvchinsky, a gifted musicologist and intellectual living in Paris, that the Eurasianist doctrine had been developed well enough to serve as a foundation for serious specialized work in substantive fields, particularly history. "Our geographical-historiosophic schemes," Trubetskoi noted, "are polished to such an extent that, were a historian to mount them, he would automatically roll, as if on the rails, precisely in the direction we need him to proceed." In this same letter, Trubetskoi shared with Suvchinsky his impressions from the recent visit to Prague and mentioned, among other things, that "one of the most interesting and rewarding moments" was his meeting with George Vernadsky. "He is working fully in accordance with our schemes but at the same time retains all the seriousness of a good *spets* as well as his ability to carry out original and independent research," Trubetskoi noted approvingly. He expressed the hope that Vernadsky would write a good book (the Eurasianists had just commissioned him to do *Outline of Russian History*), and added that the Eurasianists were particularly lucky to have Vernadsky as collaborator, as he was a "mature and talented scholar."⁸⁹

But George Vernadsky, too, had likely viewed the beginning of his cooperation with the Eurasianist thinkers as a mutually beneficial relationship. The Eurasianist vision of the former imperial space as the geographic, economic, and historical whole, as well as the idea of an overarching Eurasian nationalism, obviously appealed to him. These concepts appear to have neatly resolved—at least on a theoretical level—the Russian-Ukrainian dilemma that was troubling him. Within the Eurasianist paradigm, there could not be any such Russian-Ukrainian problem at all. As Eurasia was indivisible from the geographic-historical point of view, Ukraine, being a component part of it (along with, for that matter, any other parts of this "special world"), *objectively* belonged to the Eurasian space, while the cultivation of the overarching Eurasian nationalism (along with the nationalisms of the individual peoples residing in Eurasia) would provide the Ukrainians, Tatars, or Georgians with the *subjective* feeling of belonging to a "multiethnic nation." Thus, for a Ukrainian, it would be possible to retain

a local Ukrainian loyalty, self-identify as part of the broader Russian (East Slavic) unity, and have an affinity with a still-larger Eurasian entity, all at the same time. This arrangement suited Vernadsky perfectly.

But for history writing, the concept of "Russia-Eurasia" clearly presented both advantages and problems. To be sure, the Eurasianist approach significantly broadened the geographic horizon of research and boldly shifted the perspective, challenging the well-established Eurocentric interpretation of Russian history that presented Russia as a "Europeanizing" country, undergoing the same evolutionary process as other European nations, though delayed by Russian peculiarities.

The originality and innovative character of the Eurasianist vision was quickly noticed by a scholar of the older generation, the outstanding historian Mikhail Rostovtsev, who wrote a courteous preface to Vernadsky's first American book, *A History of Russia*. Vernadsky, in Rostovtsev's words, discarded the *Vulgata* of Russian 19th-century historiography that dwelled mostly on Russia's connection to Europe, and pointed instead to the ties Russia had had from time immemorial with the East—in particular, to the fact that during the early centuries of Russia's history its territories were incorporated into the huge Iranian and Mongolian empires. True, Russia interacted intensively with West and Central Europe, but it also expanded for thousands of kilometers to the east, actively engaging the numerous peoples in Siberia and Central Asia in the process of its colonization of the Eurasian hinterland. "No doubt Russia succeeded in partly absorbing, partly Europeanizing many Asiatic tribes," Rostovtsev noted. "However, the question arises, how large was the contribution of these tribes to the peculiar development of Russia?"⁹⁰ Vernadsky would discuss this issue in his studies over the next couple of decades.

But the very term "Russia-Eurasia," while widening the boundaries of historical exploration, has also obscured the object of research, for in this category Russia and Eurasia found themselves inseparably merged, with the distinction between them completely blurred. A brief analysis of the methodological foundations of Vernadsky's historical writing dem-

onstrates how he grappled with this problem, trying to delineate the histories of Russia and Eurasia and at the same time preserve the opaque situation in which they would remain virtually indistinguishable.

In *Outline of Russian History*, his first major Eurasianist work, Vernadsky presents the Russian historical process as the expansion of the Russian state across the Eurasian landmass. “The history of the expansion of the Russian state is to a significant extent the history of [the] adapting of the Russian people to its *mestorazvitie*—Eurasia; it is also the history of the adapting of the entire territory of Eurasia to the historical-economic needs of the Russian people.”⁹¹ Thus, the history of the Russian people was basically identified with the history of the state and included in the general history of Eurasia. In turn, the history of Eurasia was understood as a series of persistent attempts by various peoples to form a Eurasia-wide state—starting with the Scythians, Huns, and Mongols. The book seems to imply, though, that as soon as the Russians completed their expansion across Eurasia and formed *their* pan-Eurasian state, the history of Russia and the history of Eurasia became identical.

Vernadsky tried to refine his thesis in a number of subsequent works,⁹² and finally arrived at a formula that was included in a short memo titled “A Concise Exposition of the Eurasianist View on Russian History” (1938).⁹³ While he reasserted the Eurasianists’ main credo that Eurasia as a whole constituted the historical *mestorazvitie* of the Russian people, there was also one important nuance: “The history of the Russian people, however, doesn’t incorporate in its narrative the histories of other Eurasian peoples which during the long period of time both cooperated with the Russian people and competed with it,” he noted. “Thus, if Russian history is increasingly merging with the history of all of Eurasia geographically as we are approaching the contemporary epoch, this does not exclude the other approach to the history of Eurasia [seen] as the history of all the peoples of Eurasia, including the Russian people.” Remarkably, though, in this programmatic text Vernadsky subsumed the histories of the East Slavs (the Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians) under the rubric of “Russian history.” In his concluding passage,

he wrote, “Russian history is, consequently, the history of the peoples of the entire East Slavic (Russian) family... seen against the backdrop of the history of their relations with other peoples of Eurasia and [developing] on the geographical basis of all of Eurasia as the Russian historical *mestorazvitie*.”

This formula was a big step forward since Vernadsky, in a first for Russian historiographic tradition, fully appreciated the multiethnic character of “Eurasia” and its complex interaction with “Russia,”⁹⁴ a process that was steadily leading to a new conceptualization, that of “Russia-Eurasia.” But his approach remained ambiguous, given that he began largely to disregard the multiethnic factor when the merger between “Russia” and “Eurasia” became fully realized. As the Russians reached, in their eastward thrust, the “end of the earth” on the Pacific, multiethnic Eurasia somehow dissolved into the pan-Eurasian Russian state. This state, Vernadsky asserted, was a “gigantic historical-cultural organism” and “a world power.” The inclusion in this Russian state of the “individual regions and peoples gave them invaluable economic and cultural benefits” and made them “co-participants in world history.”⁹⁵

Vernadsky’s ultimate reluctance—all his theoretical maneuverings notwithstanding—to decouple “Russia” and “Eurasia” and clearly distinguish Russian history from that of the Eurasian peoples is highly symptomatic, in that it reveals the Eurasianist agenda: to preserve the unity of the former imperial space at all costs.⁹⁶ This task presupposed the strategy of avoiding any description of the pre-revolutionary Russia that might invite unwelcome comparisons with the European colonial empires. To write a truly comprehensive “history of Russia” in its interrelation with the history of the peoples of Eurasia, one would have to pose the questions that Vernadsky paid little attention to or ignored: What methods were used to facilitate Russian expansion in Eurasia? What policies were employed to incorporate the territories with ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse populations? How did the subjugated peoples and their elites react to the Russian advance? How did Russian rule affect the local government, social structure, economic life, and culture of the peoples that were drawn into

the orbit of the Russian state? While discussing these issues, one would have to treat borderland peoples not as mere objects of government policies but as actors who to a large extent defined the course of history.

But to write such an analysis would mean to write the history of Russia as a multiethnic *empire*—an objective Vernadsky definitely did not pursue. He and his Eurasianist friends had witnessed the power of ethnic nationalism and sincerely hoped that the new Eurasian identity they had fashioned in their bitter exile would help them preserve the integrity of “historical Russia” (be it the pre-1917 Romanov empire or the Soviet Union) in an age when empires seemed out of place. Their reasoning was indeed original if somewhat utopian: “If the Russian empire were a symphonic unity of people—more than that, if there were no Russian empire at all but only organic Eurasia—the issue of separatism would lose its meaning.”⁹⁷

However, George Vernadsky was not a mere ideologue but a serious scholar. Unlike all his great 19th-century predecessors beginning with Nikolay Karamzin and ending with his teachers Vasily Kliuchevsky and Sergey Platonov, who were treating Russian history as a *national* history, Vernadsky clearly saw the Russian Empire’s *multiethnicity* and tried to analyze the complex interplay between the “history of the Russian people” and the “history of the peoples of Eurasia.” Vernadsky’s Eurasianist approach to Russian history appears to have been one of the possible ways out of the tangled historiographic dilemma formulated by Mark von Hagen: “The dilemma, which, on the one hand ignores the multinational character of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and chooses thereby to treat the Russian past as the history of a nation-state, or, on the other hand, highlights the multinational character of those two state formations only to condemn them, in the name of national liberation and nationalism, as anachronistic and thereby inevitably fated to collapse as such.”⁹⁸ It is precisely this search for an alternative vision “between, or beyond, em-

pire and nation-state”⁹⁹ that Vernadsky and his fellow Eurasianists referred to as their attempts at building a “true” theory of nationalism.¹⁰⁰

Yet another aspect of Vernadsky’s intellectual legacy merits attention—namely, how his writings influenced the study of Russian history in North America and Europe. Within this context, it would be interesting to compare his impact on the field with that of his close friend Mikhail Karpovich,¹⁰¹ as both émigré scholars began teaching courses in Russian history simultaneously, in 1927, at two prestigious American universities: Vernadsky at Yale and Karpovich at Harvard. “Though fast and lifelong friends,” notes Richard Pipes, who was enrolled in Karpovich’s 1946 seminar, “Vernadsky and Karpovich differed in their views of Russia and its future.”¹⁰² Unlike his friend’s unorthodox Eurasianist outlook, Karpovich’s view on Russia’s past and present was that of the classic Russian liberal and “Westerner.” Specifically, on Russia’s “national question,” this view, so widespread among former members of the Constitutional Democratic Party (the “Kadets”), tended to present Russia’s history as one of a nation-state in the making, thus basically ignoring the multinational character of the Russian Empire. This “Kadet” and Eurocentric interpretation of the Russian historical process has proven congenial to the younger generation of liberal-minded Russian historians in the West who have come to espouse what some contemporary scholars call the “Karpovich-shaped consensus.”¹⁰³ But, as Pipes had to concede, Vernadsky’s vision of Russia’s historical development, including his acute sense of the country’s non-European connections as well as its multiethnic nature, “proved closer to the truth.”¹⁰⁴ So it is probably not accidental that Vernadsky’s works, as well as those of two other Russian émigrés, Boris Nolde¹⁰⁵ and Georg von Rauch,¹⁰⁶ published in the 1950s laid the scholarly foundation for the booming research on the Russian Empire and Russian nationalism that started in the 1990s.¹⁰⁷

ENDNOTES

1. *A History of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929): 4.
2. Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1981): 68.
3. *Ibid.*, 23–24 (emphasis added).
4. See M. M. Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessansa* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965); and Pam Morris, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov* (London; New York: E. Arnold, 1994).
5. Mark von Hagen, in his stimulating article “Writing the History of Russia as Empire: The Perspective of Federalism,” in Catherine Evtuhov et al., eds., *Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg: Multiple Faces of the Russian Empire* (Moscow: O.G.I., 1997), appears to be the first to have pointed to the intriguing intellectual parallels between Eurasianism and the ideas espoused by the Bakhtin Circle. For thoughtful discussion of the interplay between Eurasianist concepts and those advanced by Bakhtin, see Galin Tihanov, “Cultural Emancipation and the Novelistic: Trubetskoy, Savitsky, Bakhtin,” in Barry Brown et al., eds., *Bakhtin and the Nation* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2000); *idem*, “When Eurasianism Met Formalism: An Episode From the History of Russian Intellectual Life in the 1920s,” *Welt der Slaven* 48:2 (2003). Bakhtin's position within the intellectual tradition of the early 20th century is tackled in Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukacs, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford, 2000).
6. The literature on Eurasianism is voluminous. For the works written before 2000, see *O Evrazii i evraziitsakh (bibliograficheskii ukazatel')* (Petrozavodsk, 2000). Among the recent publications, four are particularly useful: Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed. *Russia Between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Marlène Laruelle, *Ideologiiia russkogo evraziistva ili mysl' o velichii imperii* (Moscow: Natalis, 2004); Laruelle's work first appeared in French in 1999 as *L'ideologie eurasiiste russe ou comment penser l'empire*; Aleksandr Antoshchenko, *'Evraziia ili 'Sviataia Rus'? Rossiiskie emigranty v poiskakh samosoznaniia na putiakh istorii* (Petrozavodsk, 2003); and Marc Bassin, “Classical Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003). V.G. Makarov, “‘Pax Rossica’. Istoriia evraziiskogo dvizheniia i sud'by evraziitsev,” *Voprosy filosofii* 9 (2006): 102–117; V.M. Khachaturian, “Istoki i rozhdenie evraziiskoi idei,” *Tsivilizatsii* 6 (2004): 187–201; I.N. Ionov, “Puti razvitiia tsivilizatsionnogo soznaniia v Evrazii i problema evraziistva,” *Tsivilizatsii* 6 (2004): 158–187.
7. Mark von Hagen, “Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era,” *American Historical Review* 109 (April 2004): 445–468. For a critique of “the Eurasia anti-paradigm” see Glennys Young, “Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism,” *Russian Review* 66 (January 2007): 95–122.
8. G. S. Smith, *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life 1890-1939* (Oxford, 2000): 138.
9. Sergei Glebov, “Granitsy imperii kak granitsy moderna: Antikolonial'naia ritorika i teoriia kul'turnykh tipov v evraziistve,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003); David Chioni Moore, “Colonialism, Eurasianism, Orientalism: N. S. Trubetskoy's Russian Vision,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 41:2 (1997): 321–340.
10. A useful discussion of Eurasianist views on the national question can be found in the exchange between V. Shnirel'man and V. Karlov: V. A. Shnirel'man, “Evraziiskaia ideia i teoriia kul'tury,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 4 (1996): 3–16; V. V. Karlov, “Evraziiskaia ideia i russkii natsionalizm: Po povodu stat'i; V. A. Shnirel'man ‘Evraziiskaia ideia i teoriia kul'tury,’” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 1 (1997): 1–13; V. A. Shnirel'man, “Evraziistvo i natsional'nyi vopros. Vmesto otveta; V. V. Karlovu,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 2 (1997): 112–125; and V. V. Karlov, “O evraziistve, natsionalizme i priemakh nauchnoi polemiki,” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 2 (1997): 125–132. See also Viktor Shnirel'man, “The Fate of Empires and Eurasian Federalism: A Discussion Between the Eurasianists and Their Opponents in the 1920s,” *Inner Asia* 3 (2001): 153–173. Shnirel'man's main conclusion, however, is that Eurasianism did not have too much original to offer and was basically an intellectual continuation of Russian imperial nationalism and “Great Power chauvinism.” On Eurasianism as an ideological response to the concepts of pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism, see Stephan Wiederkkehr, “Eurasianism as a Reaction to Pan-Turkism,” in Dmitry Shlapentokh, ed. *Russia Between East and West*, 39–60. A study by M. G. Vandalkovskaia, *Istoricheskaia nauka rossiiskoi emigratsii: 'Evraziiskii soblazn'* (Moscow, 1997), focuses mainly on the Russian émigré thinkers' critique of the Eurasianists' historical concept.
11. A list of works on Vernadsky published in the 1990s can be found in *O Evrazii i evraziitsakh*. The two recent biographical studies are by Nikolai Bolkhovitinov: “Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' G. V. Vernadskogo (1887–1973) i ego arkhiv,” *Slavic Research Center Occasional Papers* 82 (2002); *Russkie uchenye-emigranty (G. V. Vernadsky, M. M. Karpovich, M. T. Florinsky) i stanovlenie rusistiki v SShA* (Moscow, 2005). The short biographical essay by S.V. Rybakov, “Istoriik-evraziets Georgii Vernadsky,” *Voprosy istorii* 11 (2006): 157–164, is too descriptive and mainly restates the well-known facts.
12. See *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7:2 (Spring 2006): 386.
13. Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, “Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' G. V. Vernadskogo,” 47.
14. The Ukrainian-Canadian historian Serhii Plokhy, for example, bluntly calls Vernadsky “the scion of the Russian imperial historiographic school.” Plokhy notes, though, that “in his Russian history courses Vernadsky paid unprecedented attention to the history of Ukraine.” See Serhii Plokhy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, 2005): 151.
15. Georgii Vernadsky, *Russkaia istoriografia* (Moscow: AGRAF, 1998): 439.
16. On the relationship between Aleksandra Golshtein and the Vernadskys, see A. Sergeev, A.

Tiurin, "Istoriia poluvekovoi družby," *Minuvshee: Istoricheskii almanakh* 18 (Moscow-St. Petersburg, 1995): 353–425.

17. George Vernadsky's interest in Drahomanov was likely generated by both his family ties—his father befriended Drahomanov in the late 1880s in Paris—and the Eurasianists' interest in federalist theories.

18. Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University [hereafter BAR]. George Vernadsky Collection.

19. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 96. These two documents were recently published in *Ab Imperio* 4 (2006).

20. See Charles J. Halperin, "Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism," *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte* 36 (1985): 55–194.

21. Literary historians have demonstrated the fruitfulness of research that explores the links between discordant national identity and an author's creativity. In her recent study of Nikolai Gogol's internally contradictory (Ukrainian-Russian) identity, Edyta Bojanowska observes how the two different halves of Gogol's self evolved in his writing, and traces the relationship between them. See Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

22. See Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, "Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' G.V. Vernadskogo (1887–1973) i ego arkhiv," *Slavic Research Center Occasional Papers* 82 (2002).

23. N. N. Alebras, "G. V. Vernadsky and P. N. Savitsky: Istoki evraziiskoi kontseptsii," *Rossiya i Vostok: problemy vzaimodeistviia / Tezisy dokl. i soobshch. k mezhdunar. nauch. konf.* (Cheliabinsk, 1995) 1: 121–124; idem, "Nachala evraziiskoi kontseptsii v rannem tvorchestve G. V. Vernadskogo i P. N. Savitskogo," *Vestnik Evrazii* 1 (1996): 5–17.

24. See G. V. Vernadsky, "O dvizhenii russkikh na vostok," *Nauchno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 2 (1914); idem, "Protiv solntsa: Rasprostranenie russkogo gosudarstva k vostoku," *Russkaia mysl* 1 (1914); idem, "Gosudarevye sluzhilye i promyshlennye liudi v Vostochnoi Sibiri XVII veka," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 4 (1915); P. N. Savitsky, "Bor'ba za imperiiu. Imperializm v politike i ekonomike," *Russkaia mysl* 1–2 (1915).

25. True, before the Russian Revolution, Vernadsky displayed a keen interest in certain features of Russian colonialism. But "even if some of the Eurasian ideas had their genesis before 1917, it was the experience of the Revolution and Civil War that caused these ideas to be taken up by the Russian émigrés." See Catherine Andreyev and Ivan Savitsky, *Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 141.

26. Charles J. Halperin, "George Vernadsky, Eurasianism, the Mongols, and Russia," *Slavic Review* 41:3 (1982): 483. See also Charles J. Halperin, "Russia and the Steppe: George Vernadsky and Eurasianism," *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte* 36 (1985): 55–194.

27. Nicholas Riasanovsky, "The Emergence of Eurasianism," *California Slavic Studies* 4 (1967): 39–72.

28. Sergei Glebov briefly discusses the Ukrainian origins of the leading Eurasianists in Glebov, "Granitsy imperii kak granitsy moderna."

29. For information on Savitsky's life and work, see Sergei Glebov, "A Life With Imperial Dreams: Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky, Eurasianism, and the Invention of 'Structuralist' Geography," *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2005); V.G. Makarov, A.M. Matveeva, "Geosofia P.N. Savitskogo: mezhdru ideologii i naukoi," *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (2007): 123–135.

30. See A. Bretanitskaia, ed., *Petr Suvchinsky i ego vremia* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1999); John Malmstad, "K istorii 'evraziistva': M. Gorky and P. P. Suvchinsky," *Diaspora: Novye materialy* (Paris; St. Petersburg: Athenaeum-Feniks, 2001) 1: 327–347.

31. Georgii Florovsky had already distanced himself from Eurasianism by the mid-1920s. See his critique of the movement's cultural-philosophical tenets in "Evraziiskii soblazn," *Sovremennye zapiski* 34 (1928): 312–346.

32. See V. N. Toporov, "Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoi – ucheny, myslitel', chelovek" in *Pis'ma i zametki N. S. Trubetskogo* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004); N. I. Tolstoy, "N. S. Trubetskoi i evraziistvo" in N. S. Trubetskoi, *Istoriia. Kul'tura. Iazyk* (Moscow: Progress, 1995); Anatoly Liberman, "N. S. Trubetzkoy and His Works on History and Culture" in N. S. Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1991).

33. George Vernadsky, "Kn. Trubetskoi i ukrainskii vopros," BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 96.

34. On the Russian White movement and the Ukrainian question during the civil war, see Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army During the Civil War* (Edmonton and Toronto, 1995). For a more general discussion of the nationality question within Russian émigré communities in interwar Europe, see A. I. Doronchenkov, *Emigratsiia 'pervoi volny' o natsional'nykh problemakh i sud'be Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 2001). It is symptomatic that Pavel Milyukov, the Russian liberal politician who arguably was the most sympathetic toward "national minorities" accepted the possibility of a "federal solution" only by the end of 1920, when it was obviously too late. At the same time, the views of the legal scholar and liberal imperial administrator Baron Boris Nolde (who, like Milyukov, was a member of the Kadets) seem representative of the prevailing perspective of Russian émigrés on the nationality question. "In Russia," Nolde asserted, "the nationality question will be decided either by the non-Russians [*inorodtsy*] cutting our throats, or us cutting theirs... Once the revolutionary wave recedes, Russia will again become a unified state, so long as it does not break apart into its component parts and cease being Russia." Nolde specifically noted that there could be no compromise with the Ukrainians: "Either Ukraine will devour Great Russia, or we will uproot Ukrainian separatism." Nolde, however, greatly admired the way the Russian Empire was ruled for centuries prior to the "unfortunate" advent of the age of nationalism; specifically, he referred to the peculiar imperial system of informal "federalism" that had preserved

local autonomy in the borderlands. For a detailed and thoughtful discussion of Nolde's views, see Peter Holquist, "Dilemmas of a Progressive Administrator: Baron Boris Nolde," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7:2 (Spring 2006): 241-273. Nolde's quote is on p. 252.

35. Some important parts of his reminiscences, however—an account of his life in Athens during 1921-1922 and his description of the crucial Prague period, 1922-1927—still remain unpublished.

36. George Vernadsky, "O rode Vernadskikh," BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 98.

37. V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevniki. 1917-1921. Okriabr' 1917-ianvar' 1920* (Kyiv, 1994); idem, *Dnevniki. 1917-1921. Ianvar' 1920-mart 1921* (Kyiv, 1997); idem, *Dnevniki. Mart 1921 – avgust 1925* (Moscow, 1998); idem, *Dnevniki. 1926-1934* (Moscow, 2001); idem, *Dnevniki. 1935-1941* (Moscow, 2006).

38. Geoffrey A. Hosking, "First Through Kiev," *Times Literary Supplement*, June 1, 2007.

39. For a stimulating discussion on loyalties and identities in the Russian Empire, see the forum conducted by the journal *Ab Imperio*, "Alfavit, iazyk i natsional'naia identichnost' v Rossiiskoi imperii," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2005): 123-319, as well as its continuation in *Ab Imperio* 1 (2006).

40. Aleksei Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm* (Moscow: NLO, 2006); idem, "Ukrainskii vopros' v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii (vtoraia polovina XIX v.)" (St. Petersburg, 2000).

41. See the discussion of the issue of identities in pre-revolutionary Ukraine in Aleksei Miller, "Dualizm identichnostei na Ukraine," *Otechestvennye zapiski* 1 (2007).

42. Ernest Gidel, "Ob 'ukrainofil'stve' Georgiia Vernadskogo, ili variatsiia na temu natsional'nykh i gosudarstvennykh loial'nostei," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2006).

43. In several diary entries from September 1924, Vladimir Vernadsky described this "Ukrainophile" atmosphere that was characteristic of his Kharkiv milieu. "Ukrainian tendencies," Vernadsky reminisced, "were undoubtedly strong in many families—not just in the families belonging to the ancient [Ukrainian] clans that took part in historical life during the recent centuries, but also in such families belonging to the local intelligentsia as our family.... Deep in his heart, [my father] always remained a Ukrainian and sharply distinguished between Ukrainians and Russians. Both he and my mother had a very strong sense of Ukrainian nationality, and my father was conscious of the deep differences between the Ukrainian people [and the Russians].... In my childhood years, I got from him a different perspective on [Hetman] Mazepa than the one that had been predominant within Russian society. He held that Mazepa was right, not Peter [the Great]. From him I learned about [Taras] Shevchenko; he told me that St. Petersburg had been built on the bones of the [Ukrainian] Cossacks.... In our household there were Ukrainian books, but they were kept in a disorganized way. In Kharkov (Kharkiv), due to the hard times [in the 1870s, thanks to the anti-Ukrainian imperial legislation], there were no Ukrainian books. My father received everything to which he could subscribe, through the main

post office, from Galicia [in Austria-Hungary].... During my trip to foreign lands in 1873-1876, my father told me not only about the Slavs (Prague) but also about Lvov (Lviv) and Galicia and about the freedom that Ukrainian literature enjoyed there.... He tremendously loved Ukrainian songs, and my mother sang them beautifully. At night parties in Kharkov (Kharkiv), in our big house—my father was the manager of the [state] bank's [Kharkiv] branch—she would organize choirs: the windows would be opened and the Ukrainian songs would flow.... As though in a dream, I also remember Ukrainian plays and Ukrainian poems being discussed in Kharkov (Kharkiv)." See V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevniki. Mart 1921 – avgust 1925* (Moscow, 1998): 176-177.

44. Before Vladimir Vernadsky decided to take up a professorship at Moscow University, he was thinking of settling down in Ukraine. On July 15, 1941, he reminisced in his diary that upon the completion of his two-year-long research trip in Europe in 1890, he "returned from Paris... and was going to move to one of the Ukrainian universities—in Kyiv or in Kharkiv." See V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevniki. 1935-1941*. In 2 vol. (Moscow, 2006) 2:268.

45. See Kendall E. Bailes, *Science and Russian Culture in the Age of Revolutions: V. I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Bailes's is the only comprehensive biography of Vladimir Vernadsky in English.

46. BAR, Aleksandra Golshtein Collection, Box 3.

47. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 97.

48. Ibid., Box 141.

49. See G. Katkov, "Masaryk's Guests," in M. Glenny and N. Stone, eds. *The Other Russia* (London, 1990); E. Chinyaeva, "Ruska emigrace v Ceskoslovensku: vyvoj ruske pomocne akce," *Slovansky prehled* 1 (1993); Z. Sladek, "Prag: Das 'russische Oxford'" in Karl Schlogel, ed. *Der Grosse Exodus. Die russische Emigration und ihre Zentren 1917 bis 1941* (Munich, 1994).

50. Vladimir Vernadsky's personal experiences in Ukraine during the turbulent times of the civil war—in particular, in his capacity as founder and first president of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, serving from 1918 to 1919—appeared to confirm both his sense of Ukrainian identity and his understanding of how crucially important the "Ukrainian question" was. Upon his return from the Crimea to Moscow in March 1921, he noted in his diary that he was "consciously raising everywhere the Ukrainian issue." He was dismayed at how "here [in Russia] its significance was so poorly understood: deep in their hearts many people believe that this is a kind of transitory phenomenon, which is destined to disappear quite soon!" See V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevniki. Mart 1921 – avgust 1925* (Moscow, 1998): 15. On April 20, 1921, Vladimir Vernadsky wrote, in a letter to a friend, the Ukrainian academician N. P. Vasilenko, "You know how precious Ukraine is for me and how deeply the Ukrainian rebirth is penetrating my entire national and personal *Weltanschauung*.... Russian culture should become a Russian-Ukrainian culture." See *Iz epistolarnogo nasledia V. I. Vernadskogo: Pis'ma ukrainskim akademikam N. P. Vasilenko i A.*

A. Bogomol'tsu (Kyiv, 1991): 13–14. On Vladimir Vernadsky's ties with Ukraine and Ukrainian scholars, see K. M. Sytnik, S. M. Stoiko, E. M. Apanovich, V. I. Vernadsky: *Zhizn' i diatel'nost' na Ukraine* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1984).

51. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 103.

52. Ibid., Box 98.

53. Ibid. Vladimir Vernadsky was acutely interested in the genealogical roots of the Vernadsky family. "In connection with the 'biological' studies of my own genealogy and that of my children," he wrote in one of his diary entries, "I did research on the families" with which Vernadskys were connected. This research gave Vernadsky a "strange impression: all were Ukrainians... [There were] no Great Russians at all." See V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevnik. 1935–1941*. In 2 vol. (Moscow, 2006) 2:132.

54. V. I. Vernadsky, *Dnevnik. Mart 1921 – avgust 1925* (Moscow, 1998): 176.

55. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 50.

56. In a characteristic passage from the article titled "The Ukrainian Question and Russian Society" (1916), Vladimir Vernadsky basically put Russian and Ukrainian ethnic nationalisms on equal footing in terms of how negatively both nationalisms affected the cause of Russian-Ukrainian unity. "The government policy at that time [1870s–1880s]," Vernadsky noted, "was striving to achieve a certain goal—namely, to bring about the full merger of Ukrainians with the ruling [Russian] nationality and eliminate the awareness of national distinctiveness within the Ukrainian population[, which was] perceived as being dangerous for the Great Russians. In its essence, this policy of Great Russian national centralism was, consequently, no less separatist than the Ukrainian movement, which had always been suspected of separatism. Only the official separatism was Great Russian in its nature and sought to transform the enormous multilingual and multicultural state into a country fashioned according to the Great Russian model. [Such transformation would amount to turning] Great Russia into *Velikorossiya* [an ethnic Russian state]." See V. I. Vernadsky, *Publitsisticheskie stat'i* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996): 214.

57. There is a growing literature on Russian émigrés in Prague in general and on the Prague Eurasianist circle in particular. See Catherine Andreyev and Ivan Savicky, *Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Ivan Savicky, *Praga i zarubezhnaia Rossiia* (Prague, 2002); Elena Chinyaeva, *Russians Outside Russia: The Émigré Community in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938* (Munich, 2001); E. P. Serapionova, *Rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Chekhoslovatskoi respublike (20–30 gody)* (Moscow, 1995). Also useful is the conference symposium *Russkaia, ukrainskaia i belorusskaia emigratsiia v Chekhoslovatskii mezhdu dvumia mirovymi voynami. Rezul'taty i perspektivy issledovani. Fondy Slavianskoi biblioteki i prazhskikh arkhivov* (Prague: Narodni knihovna CR, 1995).

58. N. S. Trubetzkoy's *Letters and Notes*. Prepared for publication by Roman Jakobson. (The Hague, 1975): 12.

59. Ladis K. D. Kristof, "The Russian Image of Russia: An Applied Study in Geopolitical

Methodology," in Charles A. Fisher, ed., *Essays in Political Geography* (London, 1968).

60. Ibid., 374.

61. V. V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Thinkers and Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1953): 106.

62. When an older contemporary of the Eurasianists, Pavel Nikolayevich Milyukov, turned in his Parisian exile to the systematic study of modern nationalism, he specifically stressed the "powerful impetus which the latest war [of 1914–18] gave to the development of the national question." Having compared the state of Russia's "national problem" before and after the upheavals caused by the war and revolution, Milyukov devised an analysis in a scholarly essay: "Not long ago, Russia could be compared with the ethnographical museum where the remnants of the nationalities that took part in the historical process in the East European plain—they number around 100—were conserved, fully assimilated, or fading out. But now one can rather speak about the sociological laboratory where massive and systematic tests are being conducted using experimental methods that aim at reviving, resurrecting, and waking up national consciousness even within the nationalities that were fading out—to say nothing of those in which the internal process of national self-awareness had already been developing." See P. N. Milyukov, *Natsional'nyi vopros (Proiskhozhdenie natsional'nosti i natsional'nye voprosy v Rossii [1925])* (Moscow, 2005):119. See also Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

63. Sergei Glebov, "A Life With Imperial Dreams: Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky, Eurasianism, and the Invention of 'Structuralist' Geography," *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2005).

64. N. S. Trubetzkoy's *Letters and Notes*, 3–4.

65. To be sure, the Eurasianists themselves dwelled at length on the "catastrophic nature" of events unleashed by the Russian Revolution. As early as their first collections of articles, *Exodus to the East*, they argued that the Russian people, including Russian émigrés in Europe, had found themselves in the "midst of a cataclysm that could be compared with the greatest upheavals known in human history." See *Iskhod k Vostoku* (Sofia, 1921): iv.

66. N. S. Trubetskoi, *Evropa i chelovechestvo* (Sofia, 1920); P. N. Savitsky, "Evropa i Evraziia. (Po povodu broshiury kn. N. S. Trubetskogo 'Evropa i chelovechestvo,'" *Russkaia mysl*: 2 (1921).

67. N. S. Trubetzkoy's *Letters and Notes*, 14. Some contemporary commentators quickly noticed that nationalist discourse lay at the very heart of Eurasianism. One reviewer for the Berlin-based émigré paper *Rul'*, while criticizing *Exodus to the East* for being too vague and general, admitted that Eurasianism was "one of the most interesting trends within Russian neo-nationalism." See Robert C. Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany, 1881–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 260.

68. See Sergei Glebov, "Mezhdu imperiiami: Iz perepiski uchastnikov evraziiskogo dvizheniia," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003).

69. For a comprehensive analysis of the Russian Empire's failure to create a multinational Russian nation by elaborating "an identity distinct from a religious (Orthodox), imperial, state, or narrowly ethnic identity," see Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, 'National' Identity, and Theories of Empire," in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 23–66.

70. See Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm*.

71. Peter A. Blitstein, "Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917–1953," *Ab Imperio* 1 (2006).

72. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 8.

73. Trubetskoi wrote that, for him, " 'national self-determination' as it is understood by the former [U.S.] president [Woodrow] Wilson and various separatists—the Georgians, Estonians, Latvians, etc.—is a typical example of false nationalism." See N. S. Trubetskoy's *Letters and Notes*, 14.

74. See Charlotte Alston, "'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic': Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia, and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919," *History* 1 (2006).

75. See a detailed analysis of how the victorious Bolsheviks addressed the imperial legacy in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001).

76. G. V. Chicherin, "Rossiia i aziatskie narody," *Vestnik N.K.I.D.* 2 (August 13, 1919): 1–2 (emphasis added).

77. Nikolai Alekseev, the Paris-based Eurasianist and legal thinker, noted that an ethno-territorial federation coupled with the principle of self-determination, having gained wide currency, aroused "nationalist ghosts" inimical to the Soviet state and the proclaimed principle of internationalism. The Bolsheviks, Alekseev wrote, created "numerous national republics for peoples who never bothered to even think of any autonomy in the past." "It would seem," he continued, "that communist policy goes out of its way to make possible what now seems unthinkable—namely, the ruin of both Russia and internationalism by individual peoples currently contained within Russia." See N. N. Alekseev, *Russkii narod i gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Agraf, 1998): 368.

78. For an excellent discussion of Savitsky's "structuralist" geography, see Glebov, "A Life With Imperial Dreams." It was none other than Roman Jakobson who, not long before his death, called Petr Savitsky "a highly gifted intellectual precursor of structuralist geography." See R. Jakobson, K. Pomorska, *Besedy* (Jerusalem, 1982): 68.

79. Peter N. Savitsky, *Rossiia – osobyi geograficheskii mir* (Prague, 1927).

80. It is noteworthy that Savitsky advanced the idea of Eurasia's cultural uniqueness very early on—even before the first formal Eurasianist collection of articles was published in 1922. As early as 1921, in his review of Trubetskoi's *Europe and Mankind*, Savitsky contended that the type of relations that existed between the Russian nation and other nations of Eurasia differed radically from those that "existed in the parts of the world involved in the sphere of

European colonial policies." For him, Eurasia was "a region where there is certain equality and certain brotherhood between nations—the phenomena that don't have any analogies in international relations [within] colonial empires." Furthermore, according to Savitsky, over the millennia of close and usually friendly interaction, the Eurasian peoples shaped what could be called a common culture: "One can posit the existence of an Eurasian culture, which, to a certain extent, is a common product and common asset of the peoples of Eurasia." See P. N. Savitsky, "Evropa i Evraziia. (Po povodu broshyury kn. N.S. Trubetskogo 'Evropa i Chelovechestvo,'" *Russkaia mysl* 2 (1921): 135.

81. N. S. Trubetskoy's *Letters and Notes*, 22.

82. Igor S. Martynyuk, "Toward Understanding the Art of Modern Diasporic Ideology Making: The Eurasianist Mind-Mapping of the Imperial Homeland (1921–1934)," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3:1 (April 2006): 106.

83. Nikolai S. Trubetskoi, "Obshcheevraziiskii natsionalizm," *Evrasiiskaia khronika* 9 (1927): 24–31. An English translation of this article can be found in Nikolai S. Trubetskoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Anne Arbor, 1991): 233–244.

84. Trubetskoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 239.

85. *Ibid.*, 243.

86. On Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky's crucial role in nationalizing the past of what was previously seen as a part of a larger whole into a separate "Ukrainian history" and thereby "unmaking Imperial Russia," see Serhii Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, 2005). In the 1920s, Ukrainian émigré intellectuals challenged Eurasianism's attempt to reconceptualize "empire" and "nation." For a Ukrainian critique, see D. I. Doroshenko, "'K ukrainskoi probleme.' Po povodu stat'i kn. N. S. Trubetskogo," *Evrasiiskaia khronika* 10 (Paris, 1928): 41–51; O Mytsiuk, *Evrasiistvo* (Prague, 1930).

87. BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 51. Nikitin's letter from which the quotation is taken dates from 1952, but it neatly reflects the positions the Eurasianists firmly held in the 1920s.

88. Trubetskoi, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 243 (emphasis added).

89. "Iz perepiski evraziitsev," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003). The correspondence between Trubetskoi and Suvchinsky, in particular the letters pertaining to Trubetskoi's 1925 essay *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, revealed just how badly the Eurasianists needed the solid expertise of a professional historian. When Trubetskoi was writing his reinterpretation of Russian history, he was perfectly aware that the scheme of Russian history he had advanced was not exactly a scientific one but, rather, pursued certain political aims. In a letter to Suvchinsky dated March 15, 1925, he was candidly self-critical: the way the study had been crafted, he wrote, might well result in a "certain propagandistic success, but could also seriously damage our cause. History is treated in it in a purposefully unceremonious and tendentious manner—so for a serious historical critique it presents a rather convenient field and may become an easily

vulnerable target.” In another letter, from March 28, 1925, Trubetskoi returned to this issue and suggested that the essay be published under a pseudonym: “I am somewhat reluctant to put my name under this work, which is clearly demagogical and, from the scientific point of view, rather frivolous.” See Trubetskoi, *Istoriia. Kul'tura. Iazyk*, 772. *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* was indeed published under a pseudonym, I. R., as *Nasledie Chingiskhana. Vzgljad na russkuiu istoriiu ne s Zapada, a s Vostoka* (Berlin, 1925).

90. George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929): xi–xii.

91. G. V. Vernadsky, *Nachertanie russkoi istorii*. (Prague, 1927) I: 9.

92. See, for example, G. V. Vernadsky, *Opyt istorii Evrazii* (Berlin, 1934).

93. George Vernadsky, “Kratkoe izlozhenie evraziiskoi tochki zreniia na russkuiu istoriiu,” BAR, George Vernadsky Collection, Box 96.

94. “Even now,” Vernadsky noted, “the notion ‘history of Eurasia’ doesn’t fully coincide with the notion ‘Russian history,’ as today in Eurasia there live, besides the Russian people, many other peoples whose [historical] development has been closely connected with the development of the Russian people but who are not identical with the Russians.” See Vernadsky, *Opyt*, 5.

95. Vernadsky, *Nachertanie*, 231.

96. At one point Vernadsky would concede that a “separate,” “national” history of the Russian people did have the right to exist. “Russian history,” he wrote, “is [just] a subdivision of the [general] history of the Eurasian peoples.” But, he immediately added, “Russian history had, *nolens volens*, to include in its field of vision geopolitically ever-broader expanses as the Russian people, in its historical development, increasingly spread over [its] Eurasian *mestorazvitie*.” See Vernadsky, *Opyt*, 8.

97. Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford University Press, 2005): 234–235.

98. See von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire,” 397.

99. *Ibid.*, 397–398.

100. The left-wing Eurasianist Prince Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii praised Eurasianism, because “despite inherent nationalist temptation, from the very outset it showed the way toward overcoming Russian nationalism [and] underscored the supranational character of its task by its very name.” See Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii, “Natsional’nosti SSSR,” *Evraziia* 22 (Paris, 1929).

101. On Karpovich’s historical scholarship, see Alla Zeide, “Creating a Space of Freedom: Mikhail Mikhailovich Karpovich and Studies of Russian History in the U.S.,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2007).

102. See *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7:2 (Spring 2006): 387.

103. Von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire,” 396, 397. For a general overview of the field of Russian studies in America, see Horace G. Lunt, “On the History of Slavic Studies in the United States,” *Slavic Review* 46:2 (1987): 294–301; Terence Emmons, “Russia Then and Now in the Pages of the *American Historical Review* and ‘Elsewhere: A Few Centennial Notes,’ *American Historical Review* 100:4 (1995): 1136–1148; Martin Malia, “Clio in Tauris: American Historiography on Russia,” in Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, eds., *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, 1998): 415–433; A. Rieber, “Izuchenie istorii Rossii v SSHA,” *Istoricheskie zapiski* 3:21 (2000): 65–105.

104. See *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7: 2 (Spring 2006): 387.

105. Boris Nolde, *La formation de l’Empire russe. Études, notes et documents*. Vol. 1–2 (Paris, 1952–1953).

106. Georg von Rauch, *Rußland: Staatliche Einheit und nationale Vielfalt. Föderalistische Kräfte und Ideen in der russischen Geschichte* (München, 1953).

107. It is noteworthy that Andreas Kappeler, who wrote a pioneering study, *Russland als Vielvoelkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich, 1992), which was translated into Russian, French, and English, acknowledges the significant influence of George Vernadsky’s research on his own understanding of Russian history. Kappeler also mentioned the importance of Nolde and von Rauch’s work.

