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Source: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 369-383

Published by: [Sage Publications, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/261026>

Accessed: 23/05/2014 19:50

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Serhii Plokhy

The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology

The demise of world empires and the loss of colonies by the west European states is often viewed by students of nationalism ‘as a central feature of the post-war Western European experience’.¹ The end of the Cold War resulted in the disintegration of the multinational Russian/Soviet empire and two ‘pan-Slavic’ states, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In the case of Russia, the loss of empire was accompanied not only by loss of access to raw materials and markets and great damage to its prestige, as had been the case with the west European colonial powers, but also by military conflicts both beyond and within the Russian Federation.

At the core of the differences between Russia and the west in dealing with the loss of empire lies the specific character of Russian imperialism, whose peculiarities have been strongly manifested over the last two centuries. John Dunlop, who has written extensively on the ‘loss’ and ‘fall’ of the Soviet empire,² has also questioned the usage of the term ‘empire’ in regard to the tsarist state and the USSR. He writes that ‘imprecise use of terminology serves to skew and to distort the position of Russians under both the Tsars and the Soviets’.³ Richard Pipes, for his part, believes that the Russian empire acquired special characteristics owing to the fact that in Russia ‘the rise of the national state and the empire occurred concurrently, and not, as in the case of the Western powers, in sequence’.⁴

A number of specific characteristics distinguish Russian imperialism from the classical imperialisms of countries like Britain and France. These characteristics include the absence of Russian colonies overseas, active incorporation of the élites of the conquered borderlands into the Russian imperial élite, prevalence of empire-building tendencies over nation-building ones, employment of a federal façade for the highly centralized state of the Soviet period, etc.⁵

1 See Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge 1981), 165–7.

2 John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of Soviet Empire* (Princeton 1993); idem, ‘Russia: Confronting Loss of Empire’ in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge 1993), 43–72.

3 Dunlop, ‘Russia: Confronting Loss of Empire’, op. cit., 45–6.

4 Richard Pipes, ‘Weight of the Past: Russian Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective’, *Harvard International Review*, 19, 1 (Winter 1996/97), 56.

5 For a comparative analysis of imperial Russian history, see the collection of articles in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds), *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, NY; London, UK 1997) (= *The International Politics of Eurasia*, vol. 9).

It can also be argued that the very concept of 'Russianness' that replaced the old Muscovite identity in eighteenth-century Russia was constructed not so much by the Great Russians as by the Little Russians/Ukrainians, who were aggressively recruited by the court into the imperial ruling élite and were looking for ways to formulate their new empire-oriented identity.⁶ As a result, 'Russian', as opposed to 'Muscovite', meant not Great Russian, but all-Russian or East Slavic. During the following centuries, all-Russian (imperial) and particular Russian (ethnic) identity became almost indistinguishable in the consciousness of the average Russian. Soviet experience certainly strengthened this tendency, making the term 'Soviet' synonymous with the term 'Russian', both in the eyes of the outside world and to Russians themselves. That led inevitably to a situation in which, in the words of John Breuilly, 'the fusion of Russian with Soviet institutions has meant that any sense of Russian superiority has been associated with the maintenance of the USSR, not the creation of an independent Russia'.⁷

The 'conflict of borders', in which political boundaries cut across ethnic and cultural ones, is one of the inevitable consequences of the demise of any empire. Although in most cases it is the colonial and not the imperial peoples who suffer the most, in the case of the disintegration of the USSR it has been the Russians who have claimed to be most victimized, with millions of their brethren effectively cut off from the Russian state by the new state borders. The old imperial tradition of Russian national identity and the feeling of being victimized by the demise of the USSR account for many characteristics of contemporary Russian nationalism.

If indeed, in the words of Geoffrey Hosking, western powers like Britain *had* empires but Russia *was* an empire, the dissolution of the USSR has meant for Russia not only the loss of imperial possessions, but also the loss of its very being. In no other area has this been as obvious as in the realm of national identity. The 'sacred space' of the empire, the cultural and historical map created by the Russian imperial nationalists of the nineteenth century and Russian proletarian internationalists of the Soviet era was torn apart by the events of 1991. Numerous sacred symbols of old imperial Russia (e.g., Kiev and Narva) and twentieth-century Soviet Russia (e.g. the Baikonur Cosmodrome and the Brest fortress) were displaced beyond the borders of the Russian Federation almost overnight. The new Russian state includes instead a number of Muslim-populated republics, foreign to Russia both ethnically and culturally, which have had hardly any place on the historical and cultural map of the nation.

When the independent Ukraine left the USSR, it effectively took a number of the major imperial 'sacred places' prominently present on the Russian cultural map. They included traditional 'all-Russian' places of religious worship

6 See Serhii Plokhy, 'The Symbol of Little Russia: The Pokrova Icon and Early Modern Ukrainian Political Ideology', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 17, 1–2 (Summer–Winter 1992), 171–4.

7 John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edn (Chicago 1993), 350.

and pilgrimage, such as the Caves Monastery and St Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, and places associated with the history of the Russian empire during its 'golden age' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like Poltava and Sevastopol. Kiev, Odesa and Sevastopol also served as places of new government-sponsored pilgrimages in the Soviet era as the Soviet authorities awarded them the status of 'hero-cities' to commemorate the heroism of their defenders during the second world war.

The border question was raised to a level of special importance in relations between Russia and Ukraine a few months prior to the final demise of the USSR, in the aftermath of the failed coup of August 1991. The problem came to light after the proclamation of Ukrainian independence. On 29 August a spokesman for the Russian President, Pavel Voshchanov, announced that if Ukraine seceded from the USSR, Russia would reserve the right to revise its borders with Ukraine.⁸ In fact, the new Russian authorities claimed Russia's right to the eastern and southern oblasts of Ukraine, areas that had undergone a high degree of Russification during the communist regime, and to the Crimean peninsula, a region transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954.

Since the results of the December 1991 referendum in Ukraine demonstrated overwhelming popular support for the idea of Ukrainian independence (more than 90 per cent of the voters who took part in the referendum voted for independence), the nationalist factions in the Russian leadership were forced to abandon previous Russian claims to the eastern Ukrainian oblasts and concentrate specifically on the issue of the Crimea, the only region in Ukraine where the Russians constitute the majority of the population.

Nevertheless, even in the Crimea the referendum vote was 54 per cent in favour of independence, signalling a serious threat to Russian interests in the area. This was especially the case in Sevastopol, the home of the Soviet Black Sea fleet. Support for independence in Sevastopol was slightly higher than that in other areas of the Crimea: 57 per cent in favour. There was also another indication that voters in Sevastopol were more pro-independence than those in other parts of the peninsula. Viacheslav Chornovil, a nationalistically-oriented candidate for the presidency and former dissident, received more votes in Sevastopol (10.93 per cent) than a representative of the highly Russified city of Kharkiv, the ethnic Russian Vladimir Griniov (8.38 per cent).⁹

The possibility of Sevastopol and the Crimea allying themselves with Kiev and leaving the USSR to become part of Ukraine caused an alarmed Russian leadership to intensify its efforts to maintain the Black Sea fleet under Moscow's unilateral control.¹⁰ Since 1992, the issue of the Crimea, Sevastopol

8 See the statement made by Pavel Voshchanov in *Izvestiia*, 29 August 1991.

9 On the results of the referendum on independence in Ukraine, see Peter J. Potichnyj, 'The Referendum and Presidential Elections in Ukraine', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 32, 2 (June 1991), 122–38.

10 See quotations from the internal memorandum on the Crimea prepared by Vladimir Lukin,

and the Black Sea fleet has constantly remained at the centre of Russian-Ukrainian relations. The issue was raised anew every time the political struggle in the Kremlin intensified. From Rutskoï to Lebed, every 'strong man' in the Kremlin would exploit the issue of Sevastopol, thereby appealing to the nationalistically-oriented electorate.¹¹ Only growing contacts of the Ukrainian military with NATO and the expansion of the block into eastern Europe forced the Russian leadership to abandon its claims to Crimea and sign a comprehensive treaty with Ukraine that confirms its current borders as those of May 1997.

The cornerstone of all Russian claims to the Crimea and Sevastopol is a myth of Sevastopol as an exclusively Russian city, the 'city of Russian glory', the symbol of the Russian fleet and Russia's glorious past. For many Russian politicians the history of the Russian presence in the Crimea is closely connected to the history of the fleet and hence to the history of its main base in the Crimea, Sevastopol. The former commander of the fleet, Admiral Igor Kasatonov (recalled from Sevastopol to Moscow in December 1992), stressed in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossiia* that Russia in any form cannot be imagined without its glorious Black Sea fleet. To deprive Russia of the Black Sea fleet and its naval bases in the Crimea and Black Sea region would mean setting it back three centuries to the times before Peter I.¹²

In autumn 1996, when the status of Sevastopol was once again under discussion in the Russian parliament, Russian newspapers published an appeal from A.P. Nakhimov, G.V. Kornilov and A.P. Istomin — allegedly descendants of Sevastopol heroes — to the President, government and parliament of Russia. The appeal called on the authorities to put Sevastopol under Russian control.¹³ The names of Admirals Nakhimov, Kornilov and Istomin — the commanders of the fleet and defenders of Sevastopol during the Crimean War

then chairman of the Committee on International Affairs of the Russian parliament (*Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 22 January 1991), and interview with Sergei Baburin and Nikolai Pavlov, members of a Russian parliamentary group that visited the Crimea in December 1991 (*Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 31 January 1992).

11 In autumn 1996, Georgii Tikhonov, Chairman of the Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, echoing numerous declarations of the presidential hopeful, Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov, publicly stated that Sevastopol 'was, is and will be Russian'. See 'Ukraine-Russia differences continue', *Ukrainian News*, 9–27 October 1996, 5; 'Duma Passes Law Barring Division of Black Sea Fleet', *OMRI Daily Digest*, 24 October 1996; 'Russian Duma Enacts Black Sea Fleet Bill', *Monitor Report*, 24 October 1996.

Even Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, usually much more responsible in his public statements, went on record as saying at the OSCE summit in Lisbon at the end of 1996 that 'Sevastopol is a Russian city; all the soil there is covered with the bones of Russian sailors'. See *Den*, 10 December 1996.

12 See *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 8 January 1993.

13 See 'Obrashchenie potomkov geroev Sevastopolia k Prezidentu, pravitelstvu i Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossii', *Krymskoe vremia*, no. 116, 1996. One of the many ironies of the appeal lies in the fact that Admiral Nakhimov was never married and had no children. See his biography by Iu. Davydov, *Nakhimov* (Moscow 1970).

of 1853–56 — perhaps symbolize better than anything else the core of the Sevastopol myth as it exists in contemporary Russia.

This article seeks the explanation of the Sevastopol phenomenon in the history of the Russian empire and the USSR. The two principal concepts that it employs for this purpose are the idea of the ‘territorialization of memory’ and the concept of historical myth as an important element of national memory. The study takes as its point of departure Antony Smith’s definition of the territorialization of memory as ‘a process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former ethnic landscapes (or ethnoscapas) and the latter become historic homelands’,¹⁴ and John A. Armstrong’s definition of myth as ‘the integrating phenomenon through which symbols of national identity acquire a coherent meaning’.¹⁵

At the centre of this study is the development of the Sevastopol myth (the complex of historical interpretations related to the defence of the city during the Crimean War), which is examined in its relation to the history of Russian national identity. The major purpose of this article is not to define whether the Sevastopol myth is ‘true’ or ‘false’, but to determine how the myth was created and how it has been transformed to meet the challenge of changing political circumstances.

Modern Russian national mythology began to take shape at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the growth of national awareness and the formulation by Count Uvarov of the ‘theory of official nationality’, the three-component formula of autocracy, Orthodoxy and nationality.¹⁶ The veneration of Ivan Susanin, the central figure of the first Russian national opera by Mikhail Glinka, ‘A Life for the Tsar’ (1836), probably represents one of the first examples of a new kind of national myth-making.¹⁷

In the nineteenth-century Russian empire, the major battlefields of the imperial army were effectively turned into places of national veneration and served as important components of the new national mythology. From that perspective, Russia was not an exception to the general rule, as it simply followed the universal pattern of the territorialization of memory and national myth-making. According to Anthony Smith, battlefields historically have played an

14 Anthony D. Smith, ‘Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism’, *International Affairs*, 72, 3 (July 1996), 453–4.

15 John A. Armstrong, ‘Myth and History in the Evolution of Ukrainian Consciousness’, *Ukraine and Russia in their Historical Encounter* (Edmonton 1992), 133.

16 On the theory of official nationality, see S.V. Utechin, *Russian Political Thought. A Concise History* (New York and London 1963), 71–7; Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969).

17 The historical foundations of the myth were challenged in the mid-nineteenth century by Mykola Kostomarov. See his ‘Ivan Susanin: istoricheskoe issledovanie’ in N. Kostomarov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, bk. 1 (vols 1–3) (St Petersburg 1903), 265–80. See also Sergei Solov’ev’s response to Kostomarov’s critique of the myth: ‘O state g. Kostomarova “Ivan Susanin”’ in S.M. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, bk. 5 (vols 9–10) (Moscow 1961), 355–62.

important role in the process of territorialization of national memory, as they 'marked critical turning-points in the fortunes of the community, be they victories like Marathon, Lake Peipus, Bannockburn or Blood River or defeats like Kosovo, Avaryar, Karbala, or the fall of Jerusalem or Constantinople'.¹⁸

The Borodino myth in Russia serves as a good example of the 'battlefield' variant of mythology. The myth arose from the account of the decisive battle of Napoleon's campaign of 1812 in Russia. The trick with the Borodino myth is that the battle could hardly be named a Russian victory, even though it cost the French a great many casualties. After Borodino, the Russian imperial army continued its retreat and surrendered Moscow to Napoleon.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Borodino battle site was established as one of the most venerated 'sacred places' on the cultural map of Russia.

The Sevastopol myth that was formed in the second half of the nineteenth century in many ways resembles the myth of Borodino. This myth, as it exists in contemporary Russia, is based predominantly on the events of the Crimean War, which resulted from international conflict over the partition of the Ottoman Empire. In 1853, St Petersburg began a successful campaign against the Turkish protectorates of Moldavia and Wallachia, but very soon the Ottomans received crucial support from the two powerful west European states, Britain and France. Neither of these powers wanted Russia to strengthen her position in the Balkans or to take control over the Black Sea straits. With the entry of Britain and France into the war, the centre of the conflict moved to the territory of the Russian empire.

In 1854 the allies invaded the Crimea and besieged Sevastopol, the main base of the imperial Black Sea fleet. This turn of events came as a major surprise to the Russian government, which, forty years after its victories over Napoleon, still believed that the Russian army and fleet were the most powerful in Europe. As was shown by the events of the war, that was not the case at all, and the only enemy against whom the imperial army and fleet could launch successful campaigns were the armed forces of the declining Ottoman empire.

The Russian fleet could not stand against the fleet of the allies and was forced to retreat to the Sevastopol harbour. The only factor that helped the Russian empire in the war and rescued it from immediate defeat was the heroism of the defenders of Sevastopol. The siege cost the allies thousands of killed and wounded soldiers and officers, and humiliated the élite forces of the two colonial powers. Nevertheless, in 1855, after a long and exhausting siege, the imperial army had no choice but to leave Sevastopol. The war was over. Russia was forced to sign the humiliating Paris peace treaty with the allies that did not allow her to maintain a Black Sea fleet or to have fortresses on the shores of the Black Sea.²⁰ This military defeat, the first on such a scale since the

18 Smith, 'Culture, Community and Territory', op. cit., 454.

19 See an account of the Borodino battle in the standard Soviet history of the USSR: *Istoriia SSSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, vol. 4 (Moscow 1967), 125–32.

20 On the history of the Crimean War, there exists a rich literature both in English and Russian. For an account of the events of the war, see A.J. Barker, *The Vainglorious War, 1854–56* (London

Muscovite-Polish wars of the seventeenth century, created the atmosphere in which the Sevastopol myth came into existence.

The tradition of venerating the victims of the Crimean War was influenced by one of the main trends of Russian political thought, pan-Slavism. Such pan-Slavs as Mikhail Pogodin supported government policy toward the Ottoman empire to the extent that it reflected their own agenda of taking control of Constantinople and liberating the Orthodox Slavs under the Ottoman yoke.²¹ The Russian public at large viewed the siege of Sevastopol as a symbol of the heroism of the Russian people, which had saved Russia from foreign invasion, despite the inefficiency and corruption of the tsarist administration.²²

The veneration of the heroes of Sevastopol began on the initiative of participants in the Sevastopol defence, apparently with no support from the government. It was thanks to donations from the sailors of the Black Sea fleet that the first monument to Admiral Lazarev (who died before the outbreak of the war) and Admirals Kornilov, Istomin and Nakhimov (all three killed during the siege) was erected in August 1856. In 1869, it was again on private initiative that a committee for the organization of a Sevastopol military museum was established in St Petersburg. The court apparently became involved in the creation of the new sacred place only in connection with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, which was launched by the government under pan-Slavic slogans.²³

Benedict Anderson regards ‘official nationalisms’ of the European states in the nineteenth century as a ‘willed merger of nation and dynastic empire’ and stresses that ‘it developed *after* and *in reaction* to the popular national movements proliferating in Europe since the 1820s’.²⁴ The history of the formation of the Sevastopol myth in imperial Russia helps to explain the problems that the court encountered, ‘taking’, in Benedict Anderson’s words, ‘to the streets’.

While reluctantly participating in the creation of the Sevastopol myth, the court wanted to stress the role played in the defence of Sevastopol by such government-appointed officials as the commander of the Russian army in the

1970). On the diplomatic consequences of the war for Russia, see L.I. Narochitskaia, *Rossia i otmena neutralizatsii Chernogo moria, 1856–1871* (Moscow 1989).

21 See Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, op. cit., 165–7.

22 This approach to the history of the Crimean War was inherited by Soviet historiography and can be found in almost all of the Soviet publications on the history of the war. See, for example, *Istoriia SSSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, vol. 4 (Moscow 1967), 517–68.

23 On the eve of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8 there appeared a number of publications in Russia that were devoted to the history of the Crimean War and the defence of Sevastopol. See E. Totleben (ed.), *Opisanie oborony goroda Sevastopolia*, 2 vols (St Petersburg 1871); *Sbornik rukopisei, predstavlennykh E.I.V. gosudariu nasledniku tsesarevichu o Sevastopolskoi oborone sevastopoltsami*, 3 vols (St Petersburg 1872–73); N. Dubrovin (ed.), *Materialy dlia istorii Krymskoi voiny i oborony Sevastopolia*, 5 vols (St Petersburg 1871–75). See also publications that came out at the time of the war: M.I. Bogdanovich, *Vostochnaia voina*, parts 3–4 (St Petersburg 1877); N. Dubrovin, *Vostochnaia voina 1853–1856 godov. Obzor sobytii po povodu sochineniia M.I. Bogdanovicha* (St Petersburg 1878).

24 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York 1995), 86–7.

Crimea, Prince Mikhail Gorchakov. The Russian public, on the contrary, came up with a hero of its own, Admiral Pavel Nakhimov. Nakhimov, a hero of Sinope (a successful naval battle against the Turks in autumn 1853), in fact played a secondary role in the defence of Sevastopol. He was clearly demoralized by the allied control of the Black Sea and, according to numerous accounts, sought death on the fortifications of Sevastopol. Apart from that, he was never in charge of the defence, and only in 1855 was he appointed to serve as commandant of the port.²⁵ The rules of myth-making nevertheless required that Nakhimov be transformed from the hero of the successful attack on Sinope into the hero of the defence of the motherland.

During and after the defence of Sevastopol, Nakhimov became known to the general public through newspapers and journals as 'the soul of the defence of Sevastopol' and a friend of the common people. Nakhimov, reprimanded by his superiors early in his career for brutality toward sailors, became extremely popular among his subordinates by the end of his life because of his genuine attention to their needs. More important for this study is that, given the general atmosphere in Russian society after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the growing influence of the populists, the new hero of the Russian public was almost fated to be a 'friend of the people', and the young Nakhimov's harsh treatment of sailors, recruited by the authorities predominantly from peasant serfs, was rarely mentioned.²⁶

A strong 'populist' element was also introduced into the Sevastopol myth by its best-known propagandist, Count Leo Tolstoy. In his 'Sevastopol Sketches', Tolstoy presented the defence of Sevastopol as a story of the suffering, sacrifice and heroism of the common people — rank-and-file sailors, soldiers and civilians.²⁷ The 'Sevastopol Sketches' became very popular in the Russian empire, surviving even the collapse of the empire. Thanks to Bolshevik populist rhetoric, Tolstoy's sketches made their way onto the Russian literature curriculum in Soviet schools.

By the turn of the twentieth century Sevastopol had become one of the most venerated places of the empire. In the 1890s, monuments to admirals Kornilov and Nakhimov were erected, and the new building of the Sevastopol military museum was opened. This was, in fact, the first step toward the creation of a new imperial sacred place, the first on the recently-conquered territory to rank with St Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev. The ritual complex that was developed in Sevastopol through joint efforts of the public, the court and the Black Sea fleet played an important role in the creation of the new historical tradition, shared by both the throne and the emerging Russian civil society. This complex also propagated the idea of the 'official nationality', which was first formulated by Count Uvarov in 1832, but acquired attributes of official policy only at the time of Emperor Alexander III (1881–94).

It was probably not accidental that the veneration of the heroes of

25 See Davydov, *Nakhimov*, op. cit., 141, 162–6.

26 Ibid., op. cit., 51–2, 83–7.

27 See Leo Tolstoy, *The Sevastopol Sketches* (New York 1986).

Sevastopol reached its peak when Russia became involved in a new imperialist conflict, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary, numerous monuments to the defenders of Sevastopol were erected in the city, and the unique museum (panorama), ‘The Defence of Sevastopol, 1854–55’, was opened.²⁸ The Russian government was still at pains to present its own version of the defence, as opposed to the populist one, in the panoramic painting. Court officials demanded that the artists remove the figure of Admiral Nakhimov and replace it with the figure of Prince Gorchakov. As a result, Nakhimov never made it to the largest and most elaborate painting depicting the defence of Sevastopol.

Despite the many similarities between the Sevastopol myth and the equally populist myths of Borodino and Ivan Susanin (which also made it through the collapse of the empire to the civil religion of the new Bolshevik regime), there is an important difference between them. Even though all three can be called the ‘defence of the motherland’ myths, the Sevastopol myth was the first to be based on the events of a war conducted on previously non-Russian territory, which had been annexed to the empire only 70 years before the outbreak of the Crimean War. From that perspective, the Sevastopol myth presents a new type of Russian mythology, one that justified and glorified the defence of new imperial possessions acquired by the tsars during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The new imperialist Russo-Japanese war and defeat gave rise to a new imperial myth — that of the heroic defence of Port Arthur, which in many ways resembled the old Sevastopol myth. Port Arthur served as the base of the imperial fleet in the Far East and was besieged by the Japanese army. Eventually, after a long siege, it was surrendered by the Russian imperial army and fell to the Japanese. The popular Port Arthur myth, like that of Sevastopol, condemned the inefficiency and corruption of the Tsar’s generals and praised the heroism of Russian soldiers. Like the Sevastopol myth, the myth of the heroic defence of Port Arthur came into existence in an atmosphere of defeat and national humiliation.²⁹

The pre-revolutionary Sevastopol myth praised the heroism of the Russian people, who, according to the official view, were divided into three branches: the Great Russians, the Little Russians and the Belarusians, who formed the core of the Russian imperial army. This concept of a tripartite Russian people did not survive the events of the 1917 revolution. The new Bolshevik authorities were forced to recognize the existence of three separate peoples — the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. What remained almost intact after the revolution was the myth of Sevastopol. It continued to be centred on the heroism of the Russian people, now understood not as the heroism of a tripartite nation but as that of the Great Russians alone.

28 See *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoi RSR. Krymska oblast* (Kiev 1974), 163–4.

29 The Soviet interpretation of the defence of Port Arthur included many elements of the Port Arthur mythology. See *Istoriia SSSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, vol. 6 (Moscow 1968), 100–10.

The first years after the Bolshevik takeover brought predominantly negative attitudes toward imperial Russian history. Lenin's view of tsarist Russia as a prison of nations was developed in the writings of the leading Soviet historian of that time, Mikhail Pokrovsky, and his school. The consolidation of power by Stalin in the early 1930s resulted in a dramatic change of official attitudes toward the Russian past. Not only were the old negative approaches to imperial Russian history abandoned, but the followers of Pokrovsky were persecuted and often sent to the Gulag. The national revival then taking its first steps in the non-Russian Union republics was crushed by the authorities, and Russian nationalism was employed by Stalin to extend the power base of his oppressive regime. Russian nationalism was also viewed as a means of mobilizing Soviet society on the eve of the second world war.³⁰

The atmosphere of preparation for war set the stage for recalling images of the imperial past and the come-back of the Sevastopol myth. Soviet aggression against Finland, whose allies were Britain and France (Russian adversaries in the Crimean War), also helped to create an appropriate atmosphere for the myth's re-emergence. The first major Soviet historical work on the siege of Sevastopol was published in 1939, coinciding with the outbreak of the second world war and the Soviet invasions of Poland and Finland.³¹

German aggression against the USSR and the outbreak of the Soviet-German war accelerated the reorientation of the Soviet propaganda machine toward heroic images of the Russian imperial past. The war was officially called the Great Patriotic War, a designation based on the official name of the Russian war against Napoleon in 1812. New myths based on the events of the war came into existence, and old ones made their come-back in a big way. One of them was the myth of Sevastopol, the re-emergence of which was of special significance for the war effort, as Sevastopol was again besieged in 1941–42, this time by the Germans, and the defenders of the city again displayed true heroism.³²

Admiral Nakhimov, a participant in the first defence of Sevastopol, was elevated to the status of national hero by Soviet propagandists. In 1944, an order and a medal named after Nakhimov were introduced to decorate Soviet naval officers and rank-and-file sailors. In the same year, special cadet schools for the training of naval officers, also named after Nakhimov, were established.³³ He was thus transformed into an icon in the newly-created Soviet

30 On national bolshevism in Russia, see Utechin, *Russian Political Thought*, op. cit., 253–6. On Mikhail Pokrovsky, see Roman Szporluk's introduction in M.N. Pokrovsky, *Russia in World History. Selected Essays*, ed. Roman Szporluk (Ann Arbor 1970). Interaction between politics and history writing in the USSR is discussed in Nancy Whittier Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA 1971).

31 See E. Berkov, *Krymskaia kampaniia* (Moscow 1939); A. Lagovskii, *Oborona Sevastopolia. Krymskaia voina 1854–1855 gg.* (Moscow 1939).

32 On the defence of Sevastopol in 1941–42, see *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoi RSR. Krymska oblast*, 178–86. *Istoriia goroda-geroia Sevastopolia, 1917–1957* (Kiev 1958), 199–257.

33 See *Radianska entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy*, vol. 3 (Kiev 1971), 214.

Russian iconostasis, taking his place next to Aleksandr Nevsky, Aleksandr Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov.

The new wave of Sevastopol veneration came in 1955 with the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the Crimean War and the defence of Sevastopol. The commemorations were held in the atmosphere of the Cold War, in which the old Sevastopol enemies, Great Britain, France and Turkey, were NATO members and adversaries of the USSR. Dozens of books and hundreds of articles dealing with the history of the Sevastopol siege of 1854–55 were published between 1945 and 1960. Around the same time, the standard Soviet work on the Sevastopol siege was written by a well-known Soviet historian of the Stalin era, Evgenii Tarle. It was entitled *The City of Russian Glory: Sevastopol in 1854–55*, and was published in 1954 by the publishing house of the USSR Defence Ministry.³⁴ The book was based on Tarle's earlier two-volume study, *The Crimean War*, and was addressed to the general public.

Tarle began working on the history of the Crimean War in the late 1930s, as Soviet relations with Britain and France were deteriorating. The authorities gave him exclusive access to otherwise inaccessible Russian foreign-policy archival files. The first volume, published in 1941, was awarded the Stalin Prize. The second volume appeared in 1943. In his introduction to the fourth edition of the book in 1959, Nikolai Druzhinin praised Tarle for his successful refutation of the concepts of Mikhail Pokrovsky and his school. According to Druzhinin, Pokrovsky had failed in his writings on the Crimean War to reveal the aggressive character of French and British imperialism, exaggerated the superiority of west European technology and military training over their Russian counterparts, and neglected to distinguish between popular and official Russian patriotism. In Druzhinin's opinion, Tarle had managed to correct all these mistakes of his predecessor.³⁵

In the title of his new book, *The City of Russian Glory*, Tarle coined the currently popular designation of Sevastopol, based on its Greek name, which means 'city of glory'. Tarle's general approach to the history of the Crimean War is a mixture of criticism of the imperialist character of the war (a tribute paid to the works of Marx and Engels) and glorification of the Russian people. The book begins with the statement that the Crimean War introduced a glorious page into the history of the Russian people. That statement is followed by an attack on 'British imperialism'.³⁶ In another passage, Tarle compares the siege of 1854–55 to the defence of Sevastopol in 1941–42 and attacks the 'heirs' of Hitler and Hitlerism in Washington and West Germany.³⁷

34 See E. Tarle, *Gorod russkoi slavy. Sevastopol v 1854–1855 gg.* (Moscow 1954). In 1955 the same publishing house released a book by L. Gorev, *Voina 1853–1856 gg. i oborona Sevastopolia* (Moscow 1955).

35 See N. Druzhinin, 'Ot redaktora' in E.V. Tarle, *Krymskaia voina (=Sochineniia, vol. 8)* (Moscow 1959), 5–8. In the late 1940s Evgenii Tarle also authored a book about Admiral Nakhimov: *Nakhimov* (Moscow 1948).

36 Tarle, *Gorod russkoi slavy*, op. cit., 3.

37 Ibid., 16.

Disregarding the writings of Marx and Engels, Tarle often blamed imperial Russia, not for its own imperialist ambitions, but for its weakness and backwardness, which prevented the empire from winning the war. The Crimean War was presented by Tarle to the Soviet reader as a war launched by the western states 'against our Motherland'.³⁸ According to Tarle, in 1854–55 the defenders of Sevastopol not only fought for the city, but also defended 'the annexations made by the Russian state and the Russian people in the times of Peter I and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.³⁹

The title of Tarle's book, *The City of Russian Glory*, reflected one of the work's main characteristics: Tarle wrote about Russian glory and Russian heroism in a context in which 'Russian' was viewed exclusively as Great Russian. There was no attempt to interpret 'Russian' in a broader manner. The campaign against 'cosmopolitans' in the late 1940s and early 1950s brought to the fore the practice of glorification of ethnic Russians and denial of any attention to historical figures of non-Russian origin. One of the most venerated historical figures in Stalin's USSR was a participant in the Crimean War, the brilliant Russian surgeon Nikolai Pirogov. A special feature film was produced at that time to glorify Pirogov, whose achievements were supposed to prove the superiority of Russian science and scholarship over those of the west. It is not surprising that Pirogov was among the most venerated heroes of the Crimean War, and Tarle's book was no exception.⁴⁰ At the same time, the names of generals and officers who played an important role in the defence of Sevastopol, but were of non-Russian background, were barely mentioned in the book.

An example of Tarle's approach is the case of the military engineer, Eduard Totleben, who was in charge of the fortifications at the time of the siege and whose talent and activity contributed immensely to the success of the imperial army. Totleben, who had received a great deal of attention in Tarle's earlier books on the Crimean War, was randomly mentioned in *The City of Russian Glory*. Tarle now accused Totleben of depriving officers with Russian surnames of the glory they had earned during the war.⁴¹ Instead, Tarle devoted many pages of his book to the glorification of Admiral Nakhimov. The official version of the history of the Sevastopol siege, employed by Tarle, was written along Russian populist lines and claimed that after the death of Admiral Kornilov, who was killed during the very first attack on the city, Admiral Nakhimov became the 'soul' of the defence.⁴²

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 See Tarle, *Gorod russkoi slavy*. On Nikolai Pirogov's participation in the defence of Sevastopol, see the publication of his letters and memoirs in N.I. Pirogov, *Sevastopolskie pisma i vospominaniia* (Moscow and Leningrad 1950).

41 See Tarle, *Gorod russkoi slavy*, op. cit., 114–15.

42 Ibid., 75–167. Nakhimov was presented in the same way in the numerous Russian publications on his life and activities. Cf. A.B. Aslanbegov, *Admiral P.S. Nakhimov* (St Petersburg 1898); P.I. Belavenets, *Admiral Pavel Stepanovich Nakhimov* (Sevastopol 1902); N.V. Novikov, *Admiral Nakhimov* (Moscow 1944); E. Tarle, *Nakhimov* (Moscow 1948); *Admiral Nakhimov. Stati i*

Tarle's book, which became probably the most popular Soviet publication about the Sevastopol siege and contributed immensely to the creation of the image of Sevastopol as a city of Russian glory, in fact popularized the symbiosis of Marxist phraseology and ideas of Russian nationalism that formed the ideological base of Stalin's policies from the 1930s to the 1950s. In the 1960s, owing to the change in the Soviet ideological approach under Nikita Khrushchev and the transfer of the Crimea to Ukraine, the glorification of Russian heroism in the Sevastopol siege of 1854–55 was overshadowed by the glorification of the heroism of the Soviet people in the Sevastopol siege of 1941–42. Sevastopol's heroic defence against the invading Germans served as one of the sources of a new mythology, that of the 'Great Patriotic War'. In the 1960s Sevastopol, along with Moscow, Leningrad, Odesa and a number of other cities, was awarded the Golden Star of Hero of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, the principal focus of historical literature devoted to the Crimea and Sevastopol shifted to the history of the Soviet period.⁴³

Around the same time, the exclusively Russian character of the Sevastopol myth was effectively challenged by the glorification of Sevastopol heroes of non-Russian origin. The heroism of the ethnic Ukrainian, Petro Kishka (in Russian transcription, Petr Koshka), was highly praised in all the books about the Sevastopol siege published in Ukraine.⁴⁴ In the 1980s, a book by A. Blizniuk devoted to the heroism of Belarusians in the Sevastopol siege was published in two editions in Belarus. (The most prominent of the ethnic Belarusians who fought at Sevastopol during the Crimean War was Aleksandr Kozarsky.)⁴⁵ The process of reclaiming parts of the Sevastopol myth by Ukrainians and Belarusians continued until the dissolution of the USSR, but was never able to change the exclusively Great Russian character that the myth had acquired in the Soviet Union between the 1930s and the 1950s.

The fate of the Sevastopol myth in post-Soviet Russia offers a striking example of a sharp conflict between cultural and state boundaries on the territory of the former USSR. The territorialization of Russian national memory that took place within the boundaries first of the Russian empire and then of the Russian-led USSR currently faces the challenge of the new shrunken Russian territory. The confusion of the Russian public at large in regard to the new

ocherki (Moscow 1954); P.S. Nakhimov. *Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow 1954); V.D. Polikarpov, *Pavel Stepanovich Nakhimov* (Moscow 1950); Davydov, *Nakhimov*, op. cit.

43 See, for example, the chapter on the history of Sevastopol in *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoi RSR. Krymska oblast*, 142–205, and *Istoriia goroda-geroia Sevastopolia, 1917–1957*. The latter book is presented as a second volume of the two-volume history of Sevastopol. The first volume never appeared.

44 See *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoi RSR. Krymska oblast*, 151; *Radianska entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy*, vol. 2 (Kiev 1970), 391.

45 See A.M. Blizniuk, *Na bastionakh Sevastopolia* (Minsk 1989).

state boundaries is profoundly expressed in the words of a poem by A. Nikolaev:

On the ruins of our superpower
There is a major paradox of history:
Sevastopol — the city of Russian glory —
Is . . . outside Russian territory.⁴⁶

The Sevastopol myth, though restructured and reshaped after the fall of the USSR, is alive and well in contemporary Russia, and constitutes an important part of current nationalist discourse. One of the best examples of the modification of the Sevastopol myth in contemporary Russia is presented by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the patriarch of Russian liberal nationalism, in his latest pamphlet, *'The Russian Question' at the End of the Twentieth Century*. For Solzhenitsyn, Russia's appropriation of the Crimea marked the attainment of her 'natural southern boundary'.⁴⁷ He refuses to attribute responsibility for defeat in the Crimean War to Russia's backwardness and instead sides with the nineteenth-century Russian historian, Sergei Solovev, who in 1856 advocated the continuation of the war.⁴⁸ Solzhenitsyn also attacks the west for interfering in the Russo-Ukrainian debate over Sevastopol. He wrote in that regard: 'The American ambassador in Kiev, Popadiuk, had the gall to declare that Sevastopol rightly belongs to Ukraine. Based on what historical erudition or relying on what legal foundations did he pronounce this learned judgement?'⁴⁹

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's view of the history of the Russian presence in the Crimea is not an isolated phenomenon, and in many respects follows the current trend in Russian historiography toward rewriting Soviet-era Russian history along neo-imperialist lines. In his comments on the Crimea, Solzhenitsyn simply follows the logic of a student of Russian foreign policy who also refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the post-Soviet borders and poses a rhetorical question in that regard: 'Why in the case of Crimea do we follow the borders of 1954, in the case of the Baltic region those of 1939, and in the case of the Kurile Islands those of 1855?'⁵⁰

No nationalistically oriented Russian politicians make use of Sevastopol mythology while arguing for the restoration of the former empire/Soviet Union or the creation of a common Slavic state. One such politician is the leader of

46 На осколках нашей Сверхдержавы
Величайший парадокс истории:
Севастополь — город русской славы,
Но . . . не на Российской территории.
(*Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 8 January 1993)

47 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *'The Russian Question' at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York 1995), 30.

48 *Ibid.*, 48–50.

49 *Ibid.*, 96.

50 *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 21 August 1992.

the Russian communists, Gennadii Ziuganov. His views on the future of the 'Russian question' are greatly influenced by the ideas of Solzhenitsyn, especially by the latter's proposal for the creation of a Russian-led east Slavic state on the territory of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and parts of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, unlike Solzhenitsyn, Ziuganov, at least in his numerous writings and interviews, refuses to play the 'Sevastopol card' in his attempts to recreate east Slavic unity. The reason is to be found in one of his statements to the effect that the worst-case scenario for Russia would be a conflict with Ukraine over the Crimea.⁵¹ Ziuganov's silence on the Sevastopol issue demonstrates that the current brand of Sevastopol mythology does not suit the needs of all trends of contemporary Russian nationalism.

The contemporary myth of Sevastopol as the city of Russian glory makes use of the pre-revolutionary mythology of the Crimean War and largely dismisses the Soviet-era mythology of the second world war. The most likely explanation of the current modification of the Sevastopol myth lies in the different relation of the two Sevastopol myths to the Russian national myth in general. The Soviet-era component of the Sevastopol myth, based predominantly on the events of the second world war, appears quite limited in its ability to provide a basis for the mobilization of Russian nationalism in its dispute with the Slavic Ukraine over Crimea and Sevastopol. The Crimean War mythology that represents the heroism of the Russian imperial army exclusively as the heroism of the Russian people, on the other hand, provides such a base.

There is little doubt that the current modification of the Sevastopol myth exemplifies some important trends in the development of Russian national identity in the post-communist era. Such trends include nostalgia for the lost empire, confusion over the issue of Russianness (whether it includes Ukrainian and Belorussian components), and growing anti-western sentiments among the contemporary Russian élites.

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51 Gennadii Ziuganov, *Uroki zhizni* (Moscow 1997), 268.