Letter from Germany and Russia

Vlad Alalykin-Izvekov
During September and October 2017 I traveled to Europe and Russia, where I conducted comparative sociocultural and world-historic research in the ancient city of Trier in Germany, as well as in the cities of Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Veliky Novgorod in Russia, all renowned for their historic and cultural heritage.

As a part of this quest, I also attended a scholarly congress entitled “Globalistics - 2017” at Moscow State University on behalf of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. The congresses were organized and hosted by Lomonosov Moscow State University under the auspices of UNESCO, as they have been since 2009.

With friendly help from a local colleague, Dr. Natalya Dere, I began by exploring Trier, which traces its origins to the 4th century BCE. Considered to be the oldest city in Germany, it was known in the beginning as Augusta Treverorum. Trier was one of four capitals of the Roman Empire during the time of the Tetrarchy in the 3rd century CE.
Boasting both rich ancient and medieval background, it was also the birthplace of Karl Marx - creator of a tremendously influential, however one-sided, philosophy of history. Nothing fuels a social scholar’s imagination more than visiting historic lands and regions, and therefore time dedicated to researching Trier’s multiple landmarks and museums always makes one’s visit to this ancient city a truly remarkable experience.

In Moscow, I participated in a congress entitled “Globalistics-2017,” which ran from September 25 to September 28. I made three presentations on the scholarly legacy of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. Two of my presentations were made within the framework of the co-extensive XIIth Civilizational Forum. The first presentation highlighted the history and scholarly activities of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and the second one was on the ISCSC’s cooperation with other scholarly bodies.

I described to the attentive Forum participants a project which was recently accomplished in conjunction with the Pitirim A. Sorokin Foundation in Boston, Massachusetts. This project has resulted in a database of research on Pitirim A. Sorokin and his scholarly legacy, and it consists of scholarly portfolios of experts from all over the world, including scholars from Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States.
My third presentation was given within the framework of a symposium entitled “Big History and Global Evolution.” It was dedicated to the fundamental word-historic paradigm of Pitirim A. Sorokin. Between 1937 and the early 40s, the scholar introduced a new, fluctuational paradigm of the philosophy of history which combined the advantages of both linear and cyclical approaches. The genesis and evolution of this novel approach took decades to develop and perfect. Both arduous and lengthy, however incredibly enlightening and insightful, Sorokin’s mental process has been described in my recently published monograph *Philosophical and Historical Views of P.A. Sorokin: Genesis and Evolution* (Алалыкин-Извеков: 2017).

The cover of Dr. Alalykin-Izvekov’s recent work “Philosophical and Historical Views of Pitirim A. Sorokin: Genesis and Evolution” (2017). The work highlights the world-historic views of one of the founders of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.
The first chapter of the book highlights the genesis of the scholar’s historiography through the prism of his “sociology of mental life,” while in the second one I follow its evolution. I use materials from multiple works, published both in Russian and in English, to trace Sorokin’s unique semi-centennial career in science, as well as to propose an original chronology of the evolution of the scholar’s world-historic views. The audience at the symposium rewarded my presentation with a double round of applause and referred to it positively in discourses that followed.

During the congress I also had a chance to exchange views with several prominent scholars, including Prof. David Christian (US), Prof. Yuri Yakovets (Russia), Prof. Andrey Korotayev (Russia), and Dr. Alexander Dolgov (Russia), among others. Prof. David Christian is one of the founders of the new field of “Big History.” This multidisciplinary paradigm frames human history in terms of cosmic, geological, and biological evolution. Prof. Yuri Yakovets is the patriarch of the scholarly school of “Russian Cyclicism.” I have described the main premises of this field at some length in previous publications. (Alalykin-Izvekov: 2014).

Prof. Andrey Korotayev is known for his contributions to anthropology, comparative politics, sociology, cross-cultural studies, world-systems theory, economic history, Big History, and other fields. He is also one of the founders of the Russian “School of Globalistics.” Scholars of this line of thought are prolific authors, men and women who actively publish scholarly texts and textbooks on the topic. (Зинькина: 2016; Зинькина: 2017). In their 2012 Encyclopedic Reference Book “Globalistics” (Глобалистика: 2012) the authors Ilya V. Ilyin, Ivan I. Mazur, and Alexander N. Chumakov list among predecessors of Globalistics the comparative civilizationalist Arnold Toynbee. Surprisingly, however, they somewhat unexpectedly have omitted Pitirim A. Sorokin.

Dr. Alexander Dolgov is a Senior Scientific Associate at the Department of Sociology and Social Psychology of the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. In 2015, Dr. Dolgov defended his dissertation on the topic “The Theory of Creative Altruism of Pitirim Sorokin: Genesis and Methodological Problems.”

As a part of my program of scholarly research I also visited the city of Saint Petersburg. In the venerable Saint Petersburg University, I paid a call on the Department of Theory and History of Sociology, where I met and exchanged ideas with two local experts on Pitirim A. Sorokin’s scholarly legacy, Prof. Asalkhan Boronoev and Dr. Marina Lomonosova. A talented and prolific researcher, Dr. Lomonosova defended her dissertation, entitled “Sociology of Revolution of P.A. Sorokin,” in 2006. She is also the author of multiple scholarly publications on the history of sociology, archival research, gender studies, as well as the ethics of scientific research. At the kind suggestion of these two colleagues, I gave a presentation to graduate students.
specializing in sociology. My talk covered a wide range of issues pertaining to the scholarly legacy and life of Pitirim A. Sorokin, as well as his contemporaries. In response, the students eagerly peppered me with inquisitive questions about their great compatriot.

Vlad and Dr. Marina Lomonosova in Saint Petersburg with the historic Smolny Institute in the background. (Photo by the Author).

I also conducted research on Pitirim A. Sorokin’s scholarly works at the Saint Petersburg University’s library, located inside of the historic building known as “Twelve Collegia.” Originally, the complex housed the Russian government, which at the time of Peter the Great was divided into twelve branches, or “colleges.” The library is connected with the rest of the building by an astoundingly long corridor, which is decorated with images of famous scholars, and it contains antique books in tall glassed bookcases.
The venerable “Twelve Collegia” complex (built between from 1722 to 1744) is the main structure of the Saint Petersburg State University (founded in 1819). (Photo by the Author).

The legendary 400-meter-long corridor of the Saint Petersburg University’s main building is thought to be the longest of its kind. (Photo by the Author).

It is a relatively well-known fact that Pitirim A. Sorokin donated signed copies of his most important scholarly works to the library of his alma mater - Saint Petersburg State University. What had the scholar, who was expelled from the Soviet Russia in 1922, said in those written dedications? After some initial hesitation librarians help me to get through the byzantine procedures of the Spetskhran (Special Storage Section) to obtain these precious volumes.
Soon I was opening a pristine-looking copy of a book based on the scholar’s lectures at Harvard University, the classic work known as “Society, Culture, and Personality: Their Structure and Dynamics, A System of General Sociology.” Imagine my surprise to see on the title page a quotation in the Russian language from Alexander S. Pushkin: “Not in vain hath God appointed me for many years a witness, teaching me the art of letters.”

My next destination was the fair city of Veliky Novgorod, which has always played an important role in the history of Russia. Not only did it serve as a cradle of Russian statehood around the ninth century CE, but it subsequently, between the 12th and 15th centuries, became the center of the Novgorod Republic, which featured an early form of East Slav democratic government.

I have visited this ancient and historic town three times over recent years, taking part in several scholarly events at the university and carrying out scientific research in libraries and museums. Quite naturally, Veliky Novgorod is a germination ground for a number of local and world-renowned scholars, thinkers, and authors. One such is Dr. Konstantin Khroutski, whom society members had a chance to meet during the ISCSSC Conference at Monmouth University in 2014. Konstantin is one of the leaders of the Biocosmological Association, the editor of the electronic journal “Biocosmology – neo-Aristotelianism,” as well as a Docent at the Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University.
Dr. Victor G. Smirnov is a well-known historic author who recently launched his own website dedicated to the Civilization of Novgorod. The scholar persuasively argues that in the 12th to 15th centuries CE this land was a basis for a unique civilization featuring republican government, an internationally-connected market economy, and well-developed educational, legal, as well as credit and monetary systems, corporations, rich and flourishing culture, language, traditions, beliefs, and family relationships.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to all colleagues and friends who helped to make this scholarly program a success.
References

