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From Minsk To Vladivostok – Is it an East Slavic Civilization?

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Introduction

Civilizationalists have never agreed on how to categorize “civilizations.” They even have difficulty with defining the word. In the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC), the primary scholarly society for ongoing studies of civilizations (past, present, and future), roundtable discussions are held at annual meetings debating which cultures to include in the list of civilizations. For example, the issue was raised about where Persia/Iran falls: within “Islamic Civilization” or uniquely a civilization itself. A case was made by our Persian specialist that rather than being part of Islamic Civilization, Persia, a much older culture, is much more than Islamic and can be said to have been the shaper of Islamic Civilization, not the reverse.

Another of our members made a case for seeing Ethiopia, that most ancient culture in East Africa, as a civilization unique in the world. He convinced us.

What can one do with Jewish Civilization? Arnold Toynbee dismissed it as a fossil, but with the creation of the state of Israel, the fossil designation is patently wrong.

I am a member of this society who has made a case for American Civilization with roots in Europe, but with an increasingly independent identity. I am not alone in this; other scholars have noted this too—but the issue is not permanently resolved yet. It is still a designation in transition.

When Max Lerner in his book America as a Civilization (1957) proposed that America had created its own civilization distinct from the European, he met with resistance from macro-historian Arnold Toynbee and others. In 2007 it was 50 years since Lerner’s book was first published (it was republished in 1987 with an appendix covering the period from 1957 to 1987). I follow his lead.

How people see themselves is also part of the identification of a civilization. The thesis of this article is that there is an East Slavic Civilization that includes Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. This paper will make a case for recognizing an East Slavic civilization—which can be validated by events on the ground. The choice of the designation East Slavic is based on linguistic and cultural criteria, including religion. The West Slavic Civilization (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia) has characteristics far more in line with the Western European Civilization. Slavic is too broad a designation; I believe that it needs to be subdivided—just as America is separate in major respects from Europe.

Russia has long been a major concern of the West—and with the collapse of the USSR, the big question geopolitically is: will Russia turn West or East? Although
Russia has had a long history of wanting to be among Western powers, there are signs that it is looking to China, once an enemy but now a potential ally. Currently the West’s attention is focused on Russia and on America’s need for Russia to help in the war against radical Islam (an internal Russian problem, too). Yet, the question is: are we paying enough attention to another problem – Russia’s relationship with the other East Slavic states such as Ukraine, with attendant consequences for the United States and the rest of Europe?

Since 1991, there have been extensive changes in the borderlands of Western civilization. In this paper, Western civilization will be regarded as two civilizations with the same roots but somewhat different characteristics: American and European.

With the Soviet Union collapsing, the United States remained as the hegemon, the only superpower in the world. America has finally earned the right to be characterized as a civilization of its own. It is no longer, as Toynbee said in 1958, in an exchange with Lerner, a “tag-end” of Western civilization.

America’s vitality, ingenuity, and freedom from the constraints of hereditary rule (aristocracy) have sent it into a trajectory that differs a great deal from its ancestral roots as a British offspring.

America has always had a technological impulse. There was never an impulse toward conquest and domination. At the beginning it was an attempt, using the Monroe Doctrine, to protect a weak and growing nation. Later it shifted to preventing any other power from overshadowing or threatening its survival. Thus began the building of a position of strength, partly because of geographical and ideological separation from others by two vast oceans.

The great Polish historian Oscar Halecki (1891-1973)\(^1\) in the 1950s (Halecki: 3-12) sorted out the strange limitations of European history at the time. Western Europe was often identified with the whole continent. There remained, however, a vast terra incognita: East Central Europe between Sweden, Germany and Italy to the west and Turkey and Russia on the other side. It is impossible to use only the conventional division between Western and Eastern Europe. If an additional region is added, Central Europe, this would have to be divided so that Europe would need a division into four basic regions: Western, West Central, East Central, and Eastern.

This paper will deal with the Eastern part of Europe. East Central Europe became a borderland of European civilization to another civilization. Countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary joined European civilization in a second wave between 900 AD and 1000 AD. The civilization in the east has many names: East Slavic, Christian Orthodox, Eurasian and Russian. The great changes since 1991 in Europe makes it necessary to take a second look at the civilization to the east of European civilization.

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An Aggressive Russian Civilization

The vision of 19th century Russian Nikolai Danilevsky (1822 – 1885) was that Russia as a separate civilization must absorb and then assimilate Europe. Danilevsky was probably the chief theoretician of Panslavism; he anticipated the geopolitical thinking founded by Swedish professor and geopolitician, Rudolf Kjellén (1864 - 1922). [See Russia and Europe, (originally published in 1869 in Russian but never published in English). A translation is under preparation in the United States.] This Russian academic presented his own list of how the world was divided into civilizations that were self-contained and functioned on their own. The Slavic cultural-historical type was regarded as superior. Danilevsky wanted to reconquer Constantinople as capital of a “Byzantine Empire.” He urged Slavs to free themselves from Turkish and German domination. Russia was thus to form a great Slavic empire.

It is of interest to note that there were signs of later political thinking in Danilevsky’s Russia and Europe. He advocated a policy of strength in that Russia could fulfill its historical mission by transforming itself into a mighty empire. To do that it had to assimilate Western civilization, which was in “spiritual decay.” The national interests of Russia thus justified a policy of imperial expansionism. It deserves to be mentioned as having anticipated geopolitical thinking.

In The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (Huntington: 144) the author quoted Danilevsky several times. Europeanizing efforts distort “the people’s life and replacing its forms with alien, foreign forms,” “borrowing foreign institutions and transplanting them to Russian soil,” and “regarding both domestic and foreign relations and questions of Russian life from a foreign, European viewpoint, viewing them, as it were, through a glass fashioned to a European angle of refraction.”

An Emerging Russian Culture

Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) in his Decline of the West observed on the other hand that Russian culture had not yet emerged. Russian civilization did not emerge from Tartar domination until 1480. It was only somewhat more than 200 years after this emergence that Tsar Peter I initiated a westernization process (termed by Spengler pseudo-morphosis). In reality Peter’s westernization was a rather superficial (and often violent) affair. Later, Enlightenment and 19th century forms were, according to Spengler, forced on Russia. The true Russian attitude is a primitive kind of Christianity to which the coming millennium would belong. Unlike Toynbee (see below) Spengler did not recognize a Russia that had tried historically to express itself as a distinctive culture. The Russian “soul,” in his view, would at last in the 21st century break through. This would cause Russia to revert to a kind of rural Christianity of universal brotherhood and peasant obscurantism.
Russian Civilization: A Culture of the Past

Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) in his work *A Study of History*, saw what he called “the Orthodox Christian Offshoot in Russia” as forming around 1000 AD. In his system, he puts the Time of Troubles (not to be confused with the technical historical term for the period 1598–1613 in Russian history) starting in 1075 with the disintegration of Kyivan Rus and ending in 1478 which was also the end of Tatar overlordship. After that comes the Universal State from 1478 to 1881, the year of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Then there would be a general phase of disintegration. In stark contrast to Spengler, Toynbee sees Russian civilization wholly in the past.

Feliks Koneczny and the Turanian Civilization

The Polish historian Feliks Koneczny (1862 – 1949) wrote extensively on civilizations. His book *On the Plurality of Civilisations* was not published in English until the 1960s. Civilizations, in his view, had roots in how family is structured. Is the code monogamy or polygamy? This influences in the deepest way the whole consciousness of society. Monogamy is connected to private property; polygamy is related to clan identity. Property law and inheritance law are in turn dependent on how family law is structured.

In the systematization of civilizations, Koneczny offered seven civilizations: Latin, Jewish, Brahmin, Turanian, Byzantine, Arabic, and Chinese. Only the Latin (Western) civilization with family emancipation had a separate public law leading to a free society and emancipation of spiritual forces. The opposite pole to the West, melded by Rome, is the Turanian civilization, which had a low estimate of spiritual matters in general according to Koneczny.

The term Turanian is also used by the Russian Eurasianists. Trubetskoi, for instance, labeled the Eurasian peoples as Turan, which comprises the Finno-Ugric, Samoyed, Mongol and Manchurian peoples. Notable is also that there is a Turkish and Hungarian Turanism (in the case of Hungary related to the Huns). They form a particular psychological type. The multi-ethnicity of Eurasia was emphasized by Trubetskoi, but the Russians are mentioned as first among equals.

Russia belongs, legally and sociologically, to Turanian Civilization. Originally Russia lacked public law in the Roman sense. There was only private law originating with the ruler. Society has not been allowed any rights and has not been allowed to organize itself.

Turanian civilization is historically centralized behind a powerful and autocratic monarchy. Nations, in the Western sense, did not form in the area of Central Asia. Only conglomerates of peoples and clans developed, according to Koneczny. In his empire Genghis Khan organized conquered areas ruled by his subordinates.

Koneczny viewed Turanian civilization as reaching Muscovy through Tartar and
Mongolian influences. Military organization developed into obligatory state service under Tsar Ivan III but originated with the Khazars. With Western influence a mixed civilization developed in Russia but the Turanian influence remains.

**Samuel Huntington’s Orthodox Russian Civilization**

In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington (1927 - 2008) on a world map included all of the Balkan Peninsula (except Albania) in Orthodox civilization, including Greece, Ukraine and Belarus. He further described Russia as a “torn country” for several centuries (from around 1700). The roots in Kievan Rus and the Tatar overlordship of Russia shaped her in a way that made her very different. At the same time, although attempting to westernize Russia, Peter the Great reinforced the Asian characteristics of despotism, eliminating any possible social and political pluralism.

The Bolshevik revolution initiated a third phase of Westernization, which will be dealt with in the conclusions in this paper. Huntington believed that Communism resolved the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers in Russia. He stated what the Russian position was:

> “Russia was different from and fundamentally opposed to the West because it was more advanced than the West. It was taking the lead in the proletarian revolution which would eventually sweep across the world.” (Huntington: 141)

This new Russia had a bright Soviet future, thought the Communists. Russia could now leapfrog the West. At the same time as Russia was different from the West the revolution created close ties with the West. By using Western ideology against the West itself, it became more involved with the West than ever before. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a renewed debate in Russia over westernization.

**Eurasianism: A Turn to the East**

With the opening of public debate in 1992 in Russia about classical Eurasianism of the 1920s, the theory that Russia was a separate entity/civilization reemerged.

Among classical Eurasianists, six will be treated here: Nikolai Trubetskoi (1890 – 1938), Lev P. Karsavin (1882 – 1952), Petr Savitsky (1895 – 1968), George Vernadsky (1887 – 1973), Roman O. Jakobson (1896 – 1982) and Petr P. Suvchinsky (1892 – 1985). These men were active in the 1920s and claimed they followed in the tradition of an older Russian nationalism. The circumstances by 1917 had changed when, after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Empire had collapsed. Thus Eurasian ideas called for new arguments, moving beyond the old theory of imperial nationalism.

One could say that the main themes of Eurasianism were:

- A special Eurasian culture, which is the basis for the Russian
An ideology based on Christian Orthodox religion in a culture that is the expression of nationwide interests.

The fate of Russia decided by its geostrategic location and as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

Geographic and historic processes helped define Eurasia as a union of languages (language union). Jakobson and Trubetskoï stressed common characteristics acquired by different languages in the course of their historical existence within the Eurasian space. The Eurasianists suggested that Eurasia was an ethnographic mixture of peoples. The Russians had much in common with the Turkic peoples of Eurasia, and the nomadic "Turanians" also played an essential role in Russian state and culture.

The Eurasianists argued that the claim of unity in the Russian empire before 1917 had been geographically founded. Eurasia was a tightly cohesive landmass. The movement of peoples across this area had been shaped by geography. Furthermore Russia was not a European society. Also (shockingly), the classical authors of the movement argued that it was not even genuinely Slavic. The geographic and political unity of the area in question had created a new entity: historically, culturally, socially, linguistically, and anthropologically closely related but with some distinctions. It made Eurasia almost like a nation-state.

The Eurasianists had inherited an anti-European attitude. They warned against the Europeanization of the world as a result of "Romano-Germanic chauvinism." The countries of Western Europe that had colonies, so they argued, considered other cultures and civilizations inferior and Europeans sought to influence the rest of the world. In contrast Russia should follow its own path.

Geographically the 1920s Eurasianists divided the western region in three parts: (Western) Europe, including Poland; the Baltic states; and the Balkans. Asia consisted of the Far East, Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia. In between these two entities was a separate world of flatlands extending from the Danube estuary to the Lena river basin of Siberia. It roughly corresponded with the Russian and later Soviet empire.

Russians are closer to the non-Slavic peoples of this area than to such Slavic-speaking peoples of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, all of which are closer to Catholic Europe.

Eurasia as a geopolitical area was first realized by Genghis Khan, and his empire later morphed into the Muscovite Empire. The Orthodox Church was considered one of the pillars of Eurasia’s cultural identity. This faith was not based on individualism, as were Protestantism and Catholicism, but on brotherhood (sobornost), a concept more common to all Eurasian peoples.

Peter I introduced European ideas to Russia, which opened up the country to all kinds...
of ideas that were strange to the Eurasianist mentality: imperialism, militarism, capitalism, liberalism, parliamentarianism, and socialism/communism.

The main publication of the Eurasians was Evraziistvo (1926) and it appeared when the movement was at its height. It gradually lost influence in the 1930s but the ideas of the original Eurasianists was revived in the 20th century by Lev Gumilev (see below) with his ethnogenesis theory.

In 1980 during Soviet times, 600 years after the battle of Kulikovo, when the forces of the Golden Horde were defeated by a Russian army, attempts were made to resurrect some Eurasianist ideas.

By 1992, Eurasianist theories were fully resurrected and quickly gained influence in Russia. Lev Gumilev (1912 – 1992) who had published both before and after Gorbachev, became a leading Eurasianist. During the Soviet era, he had spent long periods in Gulag camps. Gumilev’s two major ideas were: ethnos as a fundamental structure in human history, essentially biological in nature, but unique to humans; and "passionarity."

There is according to Gumilev a human drive to expand, create, and replicate, but also a human ability to sacrifice for the sake of ideology. "Passion" is also a hereditary biological ability of the man, and "passion-filled" individuals are creators of history. For instance, Alexander the Great was one of these. Gumilev’s terminology has been widely criticized. Passion works against the basic instinct of self-preservation of individuals. Modern Eurasianists believe Eurasia is a separate civilization led by Russia that will eventually break the dominance of a declining Europe and change the political and cultural map of the world.

It is of interest to note that Kazakhstan’s president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, has established a Eurasian University in the new capital of Astana and named it after Gumilev.

Conclusions

The short overview above gives an idea of how leading civilizationists have viewed the civilization that stretches from Ukraine and Belarus in the west to Vladivostok in the east, leaping over the border between Europe and Asia, the Ural mountains. All have regarded Russia as the core of this civilization, using a variety of definitions.

Using the term “Christian Orthodox civilization” implies that it also includes Greece, a nation with a classical past that is one of the cornerstones of both European and American civilization. No doubt religion plays a vital role in civilizations, but there are many other aspects to take into account. Economic production, for example, is the basis for the expansion of a civilization, as are such aspects as group security, power relationships of a personal nature, material wealth, and psychological certainty.

In the Balkans, Bulgaria, a country formerly closely allied to Russia and with a majority composed of Orthodox Christians, is now a member of the European Union.
(EU), which should be regarded as part of European civilization. When it came to joining EU, Bulgaria was not a “torn country” in the terminology of Huntington. A majority of the Bulgarian people sought to join the union.

The term “Russian civilization” would mean that the East Slavic civilization east of Europe would be a culture that also includes Ukrainian and Belorussian cultures. Especially in the case of Ukraine, there is the question as to what the “real core” is. One could well argue that Ukraine provided the origin of the civilization in question via the princely state of Kievan Rus. Kiev was a great center when Moscow was hardly a village.

The State of Kiev, although the leading Eastern Slavic state and the largest state in the area, never managed to control neighboring states. It remained an important influence until the Tartar invasion of 1240. Rule by a series of princes of Kiev was interrupted for more than a century, but this original nucleus did not go away completely. There was always a chance that headed by a prominent prince who could add his land to Kiev, the city might once more be a symbol of unity among all the Eastern Slavs. After the disintegration of the Kievian state, two new centers of the Eastern Slavs emerged, Novgorod and Suzdal.

The use of the term “Eurasian civilization” as a name for the civilization to the east of European civilization would be similar to using the designation “Russian civilization.” It is only Russia among the Eastern Slavic states that could be said to be related to such empires and cultures as the Huns, the Khaganate of the ancient Turkic tribes, the Mongol Empire, and the Khazar Khaganate of Asia. Therefore “Eurasian civilization” would exclude Ukraine and Belarus.

The final term, East Slavic civilization, in my view, would be the most appropriate for the three cultures of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. The question today is, however, do the three want to remain part of this civilization? Presently, Belarus is firmly allied to a Russia that rejects the West. The present Russian leaders are nationalists or even Eurasianists, turning to Asia and the east.

The case of Ukraine is somewhat different. After the Orange revolution in 2005, the country has increasingly been turning west seeking EU and NATO membership. The trend to the West was slowed after the election of President Viktor Yanukovych. The demography of Ukraine with its large Russian minority on the border of Russia is complicated.

Western Ukraine has a heritage as part of the Hapsburg Empire (Galicia), while parts of that area were also in Russian hands. When the Poles revolted against Russian rule, they sought support in Ukraine. The young Taras Shevchenko, who would later become Ukraine’s national poet, had contacts with some of the Polish leaders. The revolt of the Poles in 1831 resulted, however, in the crushing of Ukrainian nationalism. Russification was intensified in Russian Ukraine, but only resulted in further rise of national consciousness.
So far, the demands of the Ukrainian leaders were only modest: cultural freedom, and autonomy in a Slavic federation. The “Brotherhood” was founded in Kiev in 1846. The name indicated some sort of Slavic solidarity, but the group was also dedicated to national freedom for Ukrainians. The society was closed down in 1847 by the Russian authorities. Shevchenko, who had played a leading role in the “Brotherhood,” was exiled to Siberia.

Later, Austrian Galicia became somewhat of a center for a national movement of both Ukrainians and Poles as the empire allowed a development of autonomy. When the Polish state was restored after World War I, parts of Galicia were included in the republic, resulting in a large Ukrainian minority in Poland. Ukrainian nationalists fought continuously against the Polish authorities during the interwar period.

When Soviet troops retook Ukraine during the Second World War, Ukrainian nationalists who had fought against Nazi occupation now turned their weapons on the returning Soviet regime. Resistance against Soviet occupation continued in Ukraine until around 1950, a struggle unsupported by the western allies.

It is therefore only natural that there is strong support for a turn to the West in the parts of Ukraine closest to the borderlands of European civilization. Much of the old animosity between Ukrainians and Poles has been forgotten. An important reason for this is that Poland strongly supported the Orange revolution in Ukraine.

Of the 46 million inhabitants of Ukraine, 77% are Ukrainians and 17% Russians (the remaining 6% are of various other nationalities). A great majority of Ukrainians thus advocate a turn to the West in some form. As always when Russians are involved, there is a risk of Moscow counteraction should Ukraine join the EU and particularly in the event of NATO membership.

A “westernization” of Ukraine could be possible even after 2010. Ukraine as an EU member country would, of course, retain its cultural and religious Slavic roots, just as the East Central European Slavs with similar roots have done. Ukraine would also be welcomed by Western Europeans. The problem is the Russian reaction and the influence of Moscow in Germany and some other EU states dependant on Russian gas.

This paper has mainly dealt with relations between European civilization and East Slavic civilization. It does not mean that the link to American civilization is weak. With the exception of the Yalta betrayal of Poland, Polish-American relations have been good and are good today. From the colonial era, for instance, there was the participation of a few Polish leaders in the American War of Independence. More important was the mass emigration of Ukrainians and Poles to America in the 19th century.

The Wilsonian era was a great breakthrough, mainly for the Poles as they were given an opportunity once more to create an independent state. During the final decade of the Cold War, Polish resistance to Communism found strong support in America and
there was also American backing for the Orange revolution in Ukraine.

The whole question of the relationship between the two Western civilizations and East Slavic civilization will most likely to be of increasing importance in the coming decades.

America has left Europe behind, but is not seeking to dominate European civilization. The future of the East Slavic civilization is not in Eurasia, as claimed by the Eurasianists of Russia. It is in closer relations with the West of the American and European civilizations. Bulgaria is already an example of the move towards the West by an Orthodox Christian nation. Another example is Ukraine, which has opened to the West, although its final course is uncertain.

Civilizational borders are historically vague and vary over time. They can even overlap. Russia and Belarus have everything to gain by cooperating with the West in the fields of economy and technology. Such links would not endanger the East Slavic cultural heritage, but would be a strategic guarantee for the survival of its Christian heritage and for a modernization that is necessary during the 21st century.

Selected Bibliography


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Endnotes

1 Halecki was a Polish historian who served as an expert at the Paris Peace Conference (1918 – 1919). From 1919 he was a professor at the University of Warsaw. Emigrating to the United States he was appointed professor at Fordham University (1944 – 1961) and also Columbia University.

2 Danilevsky, a Russian philosopher and historian, was a leading personality in the pan-Slavic movement of the nineteenth century. He was the first to describe history as a number of different civilizations. He studied at the University of St Petersburg when he became politically involved. As a result he was arrested and deported to Siberia. Returning to Russia he was involved in organizing marine expeditions.

It was his work Russia and Europe (1869) that made him famous. He believed every civilization was
influenced by its language and culture. These could not be passed to other civilizations. Danilevsky had some influence on Spengler and Toynbee.

3 Kjellén, a Swedish professor, geographer and geopolitician, created the term geopolitics (geopolitik in Swedish). He based his system on the organic view of the state influenced by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel. Kjellén’s main work was *The State as a Form of Life* (Staten som livsform, 1916). His international state system was presented in *The Great Powers* (Stormakterna, 1905, many later editions).

4 Spengler, a German philosopher and historian, published *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922). He believed that every civilization (which he termed culture) had a distinct organic form that grows, matures, and decays. Civilizations are in his view independent from external influences.

5 Toynbee, a British historian, published the multivolume work *A Study of History* (1934 – 1961; 12 volumes). He compared over twenty civilizations and found cyclical patterns of growth, maturity, and decay in all of them. They thrived best in response to challenges.

6 Koneczny was a Polish philosopher and historian. He is known as one of the founders of the comparative study of civilizations. A professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow he later moved to the University of Vilnius but in 1929 returned to Krakow.

7 Trubetskoï, N.S., (1925) 1993, “O Turanskom elemente v russki kulture”. In *Rossia mezhdu Europoi i Asiei*.

8 Huntington was an American political scientist and civilizationist. He began teaching at Harvard University in 1950. After teaching at some other universities he returned to Harvard and remained there until his death. His book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) made him famous.

9 Trubetskoï was a Russian linguist, ethnologist, and student of culture. He was also one of the founders of Eurasianism.

At first Trubetskoï studied old languages and the comparative method. He also continued his studies of non-Indo-European languages and folklore (especially Finno-Ugric and Caucasian).

In 1913 Trubetskoï graduated with a work on the expression of the future in Indo-European languages and continued his studies. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution found him in the Caucasus, and he never saw Moscow again. He migrated south with the White Army and eventually came to Constantinople. There he received an offer from the University of Sofia and spent two years as an assistant professor in Bulgaria. In Sofia in 1920, Trubetskoï published his book *Rossiia i chelovechestvo* (Russia and Mankind), which inaugurated Eurasianism.

His next book was titled (in translation) *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: A Perspective on Russian History Not from the West but from the East* (1925). Trubetskoï’s attack on European ethnocentricity found many supporters and many opponents among his contemporaries.

He later moved to the University of Vienna to become a professor of Slavic languages. He was the founder of a branch of linguistics known as phonology. His main ally in that endeavor was Roman Jakobson, another Russian exile from Moscow, who lived in Czechoslovakia.

In 1938 German troops occupied Austria and Trubetskoï was questioned by the Gestapo and his papers were impounded. He died in June the same year.

10 Karsavin, a Russian philosopher, created an original religious philosophical system, personalism. Born in St. Petersburg he graduated from the university there in 1906 and from 1915 he was professor. After the Russian revolution Karsavin was arrested but released and exiled in 1922. Spending time both in Berlin and Paris he later became professor at the University of Kaunas (Lithuania). After the
Second World War he remained in Soviet Lithuania and was arrested in 1949 and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. He died in a camp hospital.

11 Savitsky was a Russian geographer.

Vernadsky was a Russian-American historian and an author of numerous books of Russian history. He studied at the University of Moscow but had to leave in 1905 for two years in Germany. He graduated in 1910 in Moscow but later moved to St Petersburg.

A non-communist he lectured during the years of the Russian Civil War (1917–1920) for a year in Perm, then in Kiev and ultimately followed the White Army to Simferopol (Crimea), where he taught at the local university for two years. Moving to Athens later that year after the defeat of the Whites he came to settle in Prague, teaching there from 1921 to 1925 at the Russian School of Law. With Trubetskoi and Petr Savitsky he formulated Eurasianist theories.

Vernadsky was offered a position at Yale University in the United States in 1927 and served as a professor of Russian history at that university until his retirement in 1956.

Jakobson was born in Russia and studied in Moscow. In 1920 he moved to Prague and continued his linguistic studies. During the 1920s he joined the Eurasianist movement.

He escaped from Prague at the beginning of the Second World War via Berlin to Denmark, then Norway and to Sweden. Later during the war he managed to cross the Atlantic and settled in the United States lecturing from 1949 at Harvard until his retirement.

Suvchinsky, a Ukrainian philosopher and writer on music, was a leading member of the Eurasianist movement. Emigrating from Russia in 1922 he lived in Berlin and Sofia (Bulgaria). Finally he settled in Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Gumilev was during the Soviet era expelled from the University of Leningrad and spent most of his youth in the Gulag (1938 – 1956).

After Stalin had died he was employed at the Hermitage Museum and participated in several expeditions to the Volga Delta and North Caucasus. From the 1960s he lectured at the University of Leningrad and presented a doctoral thesis on ancient Turkish peoples. Employed later at the Geography Institute he defended a new doctoral thesis this time in geography. Most of his later monographs were banned from publication and his ideas were rejected in the Soviet Union.

16 For more on Eurasianism see the vast literature on the subject in Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire by Marlene Laruelle (2008). The author shows how in recent years Russian politicians including Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have begun to support a geopolitical strategy that puts Russia in the center. The book by Laruelle examines the political and growing intellectual impact of Eurasianism, a movement that promotes the ideology of Russian-Asian greatness. This greatness can only, according to Eurasianists, be expressed in an empire. The author is currently a research fellow at the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at the Johns Hopkins University.


A notable development during the beginning of the twenty-first century is an interest in Iran and Turkey in Russian thinking in the field. See “Russian Eurasianism: Model for Iran and Turkey?” by Professor B. Ersanli et al. in Turkish Review of Eurasian Studies, 2004, No. 4.