

REMAINS IN REVOLUTION

Death and burial in France (1789-99) and Russia (1917-27)

Anastasia Papushina

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Dissertation supervisor: Marsha Siefert

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Technical notes

Transliteration of Russian Cyrillic in the dissertation is according to the simplified Library of Congress transliteration system. Well-known names, however, are transliterated in their more familiar form, for instance, ‘Trotsky’ instead of ‘Trotskii’.

Some Russian and French words and expressions are given in transliteration along with translation, where it was meaningful to point to the original (as with the terms *nation* and *patrie*) or where the expressive power of the original surpassed that of the translation (as with such words as *peregib*, *bessovestnyj* or *zazorno*).

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Abstract

This dissertation explores how, in a sphere as fundamental and resistant to change as death and burials, cultural initiatives guided by big ideas were adjusted and adapted at the everyday level in two highly volatile socio-political contexts: the French revolution of 1789 and the Russian revolution of 1917. Drawing on a wide range of sources, from administrative documents and the press to personal testimonies, the author traces the transformations of death and funerals during the first post-revolutionary decade. The need for change in this sphere was spurred as much by growing urbanization and the quest for social equality as by the influence of secular ideologies and discontent with traditional Christianity. Revolutionary governments proposed innovations in death-related administration, practices, and rituals, but implementing these innovations was complicated. The suggested novelties, often divorced from reality, had to find their way among the unfavorable political and economic circumstances and clash with traditional customs that proved remarkably resilient.

The four chapters of this work address the influence of the French experience on the early Soviet practices (means of transmission, the limits of knowledge and its importance in a number of contexts); administrative and practical innovations in the registration of the dead, the management of cemeteries and the organization of the funeral industry during the post-revolutionary crisis in both countries; the aesthetics and symbolism of "revolutionary funerals" and the development of new rituals appropriate to the new, more secular regime; and variations in early Soviet death and funerals for the proponents and the adversaries of the new regime.

The author argues that despite their extensive knowledge of French revolutionary history, and despite the claimed revolutionary continuity, the Bolsheviks and their followers had little recourse to the experience of revolutionary France in addressing the cultural and social challenges

they faced. Despite the commonality of several problems and the similarity of some solutions, the development of death-related practices in early Soviet Russia was much more deeply rooted in the Russian revolutionary and cultural tradition than in the world tradition, the culminating achievement of which the Bolsheviks claimed the October revolution to be. The author exposes the limits of the revolutionary succession mythology constructed in the Soviet official narratives after the October revolution.

This study is a contribution to the comparative history of revolutions, more specifically, to the train of research that is interested in "scripts" and "scenarios" rather than sociopolitical or structural similarities and differences of the two contexts in question. The present work is a multi-level comparison in the spheres that have not been studied comparatively before: everyday life and death-related practices. It brings together evidence from two grand revolutions and shows the limits of myths the revolutionaries constructed about themselves.

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The first outline of this research was conceived in Moscow in the early 2010s. Then, for several years, my address was in the street named after twenty-six Baku commissars – Bolshevik and Left Socialist Revolutionary members of the Baku Commune, executed in 1918 on a charge of surrendering the city. The awkward name of the street – *ulitsa Dvadtsati shesti bakinskikh komissarov* – the utterly confusing nature of the commissars' feat, the contradictory stories of their execution, and, consequently, unclear reasons for their immortalization lingered, eventually raising some of the questions that are addressed in this dissertation.

I first approached the topic during my time at Collège Universitaire Français de Moscou in 2011-2013. My CUF professors of French history and language have my lasting gratitude. Nadezhda V. Buntman taught me most of the French I know (all mistakes remain mine, of course). Sylvain Dufraisie first brought the issue of French-Soviet relations to my attention. Lyudmila Pimenova acquainted me with French *ancien régime* history while being incredibly kind and patient. Without the support and encouragement from Juliette Denis, I would not even dare to attempt continuing my studies. It was her who, perhaps unbeknownst to herself, prompted me to cling to the idea of a sizeable French-Russian comparison. The topic was too vast for a Master's thesis, she said.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved grandmother Irina Urvantsova.

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Introduction

This dissertation is about death in revolutionary times. It focuses on the aftermath of 1917 in Soviet Russia and cites analogies and parallels from the era of the 1789 French revolution that provided the Bolsheviks and their contemporaries with a set of cultural references. The object of the study is intrinsically connected to the period in question: excessive deaths are the most immediate and noticeable products of revolutions, or at least such revolutions which, according to Hannah Arendt, "are not even conceivable outside the domain of violence" – a feature that sets them, along with wars, "apart from all other political phenomena."¹

Death is extremely individual and physical, and at the same time, deeply embedded in culture and easy to politicize. The physical nature of death and its inevitability directly concerns everybody, making it perhaps the most fundamental and emotionally loaded phenomenon in human culture.² Pragmatic and material aspects of funerals and burials expose the economic life of a society and, at the same time, give an insight into the principles, norms, and beliefs behind the decisions made and actions taken. The political use of death – especially death for a common cause, especially death happening in tense moments of sociopolitical crisis such as revolution – mobilizes and motivates the population, justifies regimes, and gives rise to new cultural phenomena and forms. And the combination of these factors – enormous emotional force, deep embeddedness into the culture, and a high potential for political use – makes death a suitable foundation for mythologization.

¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books, 2006), 8.

² Thomas Laqueur believed that there was a "fundamental reason why our species lives with, and cares for, its dead, materially and imaginatively: such attention is *a*, if not *the*, sign of our emergence from the order of nature into culture." Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead. A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 8. See also Peter Metcalf, Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual. Second edition* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

I use the terms "mythologization" and "myths" in the sense suggested by Roland Barthes. According to him, "myth today" functions as a secondary semiological system where the signified, or the "concept," is made of "yielding, shapeless associations," "formless, unstable, nebulous condensation" which, despite its formlessness, aims at being perceived as something perfectly natural. "For the myth-reader... everything happens as if the picture *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified."³ I find these terms useful for the study of the early Soviet culture, as during the foundational decade of the 1920s, in a situation of the attempted renewal and reconstruction of all areas of life, new concepts that did not yet trigger automatic, established associations were being reinvented and reimagined to be perceived, in the decades to follow, as something natural.

In this study, I turn to the early years of the Soviet system to describe and analyze the circumstances in which myths about Soviet death formed, and trace factual developments of death-related practices over the first ten years of revolutionary rule. I show how, during the formative decade of the 1920s, the Bolsheviks worked systematically towards transforming the death-related sphere, creating a host of Communist "great men" and suggesting new death-related practices. Furthermore, I analyze the collisions of death-related projects and post-revolutionary reality to show how proclaimed ideology diverged from actions, how some heroes lost their place in the national pantheon to others, and how politically undesirables gradually disappeared from the story. Analyzing practices related to death during and after the revolution gives us a deeper understanding of the revolution itself and the stories that its progenitors wanted to tell.

The French context works as a prism through which to look at the early Soviet death-related practices and the story the Bolsheviks were telling about themselves and the revolution. The

³ Roland Barthes, "Myth today," in *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 109–164: 128–129.

French revolution of 1789 had a special place in the Russian culture even before October 1917. In the early twentieth century, it was constantly brought up by representatives of all political currents in allusions, references, juxtapositions, and parallels; its leading figures and key moments were cited in public and private narratives as if without much thought.⁴ After the 1917 turnover, episodes and personages of the French revolutionary era were, furthermore, quite consciously evoked by the leftist forces and specifically the Bolsheviks during the process of constructing a mythologized revolutionary lineage, along with other historical episodes, such as the Decembrist Revolt of 1825 or the Parisian Commune of 1871, and personages, such as Emelyan Pugachev, Sten'ka Razin, or even Spartacus. The Bolsheviks were constructing a line of historical succession that was supposed to eventually culminate in the October revolution, and the French revolution was a major link in this long chain.

Russian revolutionary authorities had reasons to look back for models and examples: as their predecessors before them, they also faced the gigantic task of reorganizing life in a post-revolutionary country. In arranging death-related sphere, managing cemeteries, and suggesting novelties around burial practices, policymakers in Soviet Russia sometimes arrived at solutions similar to those the French revolutionaries proposed in similar situations, as I demonstrate below.

Yet, despite these similarities and the proclaimed succession – and despite everything Russian revolutionaries knew about 1789 – I show that not much was actually "borrowed" from the French experience. Instead, the solidifying Bolshevik government referred to the French revolutionary history rather vaguely and hardly ever based its decisions upon the experience of its foreign predecessors. To demonstrate that, I trace and juxtapose measures taken by the French and early Soviet governments in the sphere of death. The comparison between contexts close enough

⁴ The more detailed account is given in Chapter 1.

structurally yet distant chronologically, geographically, and culturally allows me to highlight the specificity of decisions made in the Soviet case and the driving forces behind them and outline the limits of the succession mythology.

The success of the early Soviet death-related novelties was half-legged at best. Legislators and ideologues proved unable to predict the economic vicissitudes, changes of political course, and resilience of older traditions, all of which had their impact on death-related innovations they tried to introduce. By the end of the decade, the radical experiments and bold suggestions largely receded. The experiment could be considered successful only where aesthetics and its symbolism dominated – in the highly politicized sphere of state funerals. Still, much of what was tested in that decade then became part of the subsequent myth about Soviet life and death.

The myth diverged from the facts that gave birth to it. In Russian-language literature, that will be addressed in detail in Chapter 1, early Soviet death has long been treated one-sidedly. During the retrospective Bolshevization of the October revolution and subsequent events in Soviet history writing, many aspects were angled or omitted, many voices silenced, and many victims forgotten. Non-dominant socialist and Marxist currents were gradually marginalized and pushed out of the story, and victims of the revolution were made to look like regrettable but inevitable – and therefore neglectable – casualties of the turbulent transitory times in the hopeful narrative of historical progress that would sooner or later bring humankind to communist utopia. Yet, the revolution and subsequent fighting cost eight to eighteen million lives.⁵ Of those, only a few

⁵ Estimates of population loss in Russia in 1914-1922 vary greatly. The estimate of eight million deaths is given in *Grazhdanskaya voyna i inostrannaya interventsia v SSSR* [Civil war and foreign intervention in the USSR] (Moscow, Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1983), 14. Boris Uralis believed that in 1917–1920, the number of deaths accounted for 10–11 million (Boris Uralis, "Dinamika naseleniya SSSR za 50 let" ["Dynamics of the USSR population in 50 years"], in: *Naselenie i narodnoe blagosostoyanie* [Population and national welfare] (Moscow, MESI, 1968), 20–43: 26). Similarly, Christopher Read estimated the number of casualties of the post-1914 decade as roughly ten million lives (Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-1921* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 134, 158–160). According to Sergey Maksudov, between 1913 and 1922, the Russian population lost about 15.5 million people, including those dead from 1921 famine (Sergej Maksudov, *Poteri naseleniya SSSR* [Population loss in USSR]

hundred were honored by any public commemoration. Thousands and thousands of others were moved out of focus as revolutionary history was transformed into the account of the Bolshevik triumph. How did this happen, and how did the Soviet leadership and people deal with the revolutionary dead immediately after the revolution? What was in store for those who could not be associated with the Bolshevik heroes? In what follows, I suggest some answers to these questions.

I approach death and related practices from several perspectives. Balancing stories of the selected few with destiny that awaited millions, I cover a few "extraordinary" cases – deaths and funerals of revolutionary heroes and Bolshevik leaders, executions of high-profile enemies of the revolution – and the more mundane business such as legislative novelties, reorganization of cemeteries, and experimenting with funeral practices. Comparison is at the core of each chapter, but in different ways. Unlike classic comparative studies that juxtapose two or three cases and aim to cover similar aspects of each case, this dissertation focuses deliberately on the Soviet case against the background of the French story rather than exploring the two stories in parallel.

Chapter One is devoted to the problems of comparison and Franco-Russian/Franco-Soviet interaction. It covers methodological questions of comparative history and addresses specificities of the French cultural influence over Russia and the early Soviet policymakers. The idea behind this chapter is to demonstrate that French history and, especially, the history of the 1789 revolution had immense political importance in Russia – to the extent that thinking about the two contexts in parallel was a cliché already in 1917. Moreover, the two revolutions did indeed have a few similar structural traits and shared many similar aspirations. Yet French history did not provide ready-

(Benson, Vermont: Chalidze Publ., 1989), 187). Vadim Erlikhman, summarizing losses from the First World War, the Civil War, political terror, epidemics, and emigration, concluded that "direct population losses in 1914–1922 account for 18,5 million people." (Vadim Erlikhman, *Poteri narodonaseleniya v XX veke: spravochnik* [Population losses in the twentieth century: A reference book], (Moscow: Russkaya Panorama, 2004), 12).

made examples to reproduce or scenarios to put on the Soviet stage without adaptation: rather, it was retroactively mythologized by Bolshevik history writing.

Chapter Two investigates administrative, legal, and practical innovations in the sphere of death and burial that were introduced and pushed forward by the revolutionary regimes, and addresses such questions as cemetery administration, concerns about individual and communal burials, and the invention of new funeral practices, reflecting the spread of ideas about public hygiene, citizens' equality in the face of death (and the state), and secularization. This chapter uses officially produced sources: legislation, reports, interdepartmental letters, debates regarding the implementation of new death-related practices, – along with evidence from the specialized press. It aims to demonstrate how, in comparable situations of declining religiosity, militarized national crisis, and state centralization, the French and Soviet revolutionary authorities often arrived at solutions showing similar thinking.

Chapter Three focuses on the aesthetic aspects of grand revolutionary funerals in France and Russia and the ritualistic innovations that policymakers in the two countries sought to implement for the larger population. I analyze practices and symbols that marked the new regime's death and burials and distinguished them from non-revolutionary or counterrevolutionary cases. I describe how the new forms of the state funeral ritual transformed and solidified over the first post-revolutionary decade and what innovations did not take root. I also show how little influence the French context had on the Soviet one in this respect. Instead of referring to the distant foreign symbolism, Soviet decision-makers took over the Russian tradition formed in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. This chapter aims to highlight the differences, rather than similarities, between the French and the Soviet response to the challenge of the new death aesthetics.

Chapter Four looks at the variations of early Soviet death. By comparing female and male, Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik funerals, and the treatment of bodies of heroes and enemies of the regime, I show how the Soviet decision-makers and those who resisted them shaped the basis of the new norm for the decades to come. This chapter does not make references to the French experience. Here, my goal is to show how the phenomena, whose development and interactions were addressed in the previous chapters in comparison with the French story, unfolded on their own in the context of the early Soviet culture.

Chronologically, the study focuses on the first decade after the revolution, i.e., 1917–1927 for Soviet Russia and 1789–1799 for France. In France, the coup of 18 Brumaire Year VIII (November 9, 1799) brought Napoleon to power; presenting the new constitution a month later, the Consuls proclaimed the revolution completed.⁶ In the Soviet Union, celebrating the revolution's first big jubilee in 1927 was a moment to reflect on what was done and what is to be done next in a state passing from the developing to the developed stage of the revolution. At the same time, for Stalin, who by 1927 was firmly in the lead, adherence to earlier revolutionary models and their symbolic significance meant less than the modernization agenda that lay ahead. The first five-year plan was implemented in 1928, marking the decisive turn towards industrialization and Stalin's Big Style; symptomatically, the same year, the Day of the Paris Commune (March 18) was eliminated from the Soviet calendar as a day of rest.⁷ For the population, especially peasants, collectivization became a gulf that divided their lives perhaps even more profoundly than the

⁶ "Citoyens, la révolution est fixée aux principes qui l'ont commencée ; elle est finie." Proclamation des Consuls de la République, 24 Frimaire an VIII, <https://bibliotheque-numerique.citedulivre-aix.com/viewer/15680>, accessed on June 11, 2023.

⁷ Jay Bergman, "The Paris Commune in Bolshevik Mythology," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1412–41: 1439; Irina Shilova, "Building the Bolshevik Calendar through *Pravda* and *Investee*", *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* no. 19 (Winter 2007), <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/19/shilova19.shtml>, accessed on June 7, 2023.

revolution itself, or at least it was so in their recollections.⁸ A ten-year period is relatively short for transforming such a complex area of life as death-related practices. Yet, it allows for tracing subtle changes of what was considered "revolutionary" death when the meaning of revolution was subject to discussion and change.

Geographically, talking about the Soviet case, I use examples from Petrograd and Moscow along with provincial evidence. Central archival holdings are known to scholars, and studies of the revolutionary era are often situated in regions other than the capitals.⁹ But only a few studies of death-related practices use regional archives, although they often provide informative counterexamples of the situation in the capital.¹⁰ I present original research from two smaller towns of Central Russia, Ivanovo (Ivanovo-Voznesensk at the era) and Yaroslavl, chosen so that the religious and cultural context remained relatively homogenous. As in Petrograd and Moscow, ethnically and culturally, most of the population in the region was Russian and Orthodox. I also

⁸ See Irina Koznova's commentary in: Irina Koznova, *XX vek v sotsial'noj pamyati rossijskogo krestyanstva* [The twentieth century in social memory of Russian peasants] (Moscow, Izdatel'stvo IF RAN, 2000), esp. Chapter 3.

⁹ Thus, for example, Donald Raleigh focused on Saratov (*Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Cornell University Press, 1986)), Liudmila Novikova wrote about Arkhangel'sk (Liudmila G. Novikova, *Provintsial'naya "Kontrrevolutsiya": Beloe Dvizhenie i Grazhdanskaya vojna na Russkom Severe, 1917-1920* [Provincial "counterrevolution": The White movement and the Civil war in the Russian North, 1917-1920] Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2011). In the collective volume edited by Novikova, Sarah Badcock, and Aaron Retish, the regions studied include Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan', Voronezh, Izhevsk, Kiev, and Penza, to name a few. See Sarah Badcock, A. Retish, and L. G. Novikova (eds.), *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective* (Bloomsburg, 2015).

¹⁰ Svetlana Malysheva and Anna Sokolova widely refer to the Moscow archives in: Svetlana Malysheva, *Na miru krasna: Instrumentalizatsiya smerti v Sovetskoj Rossii* [Better Together: Instrumentalization of death in Soviet Russia] (Moscow: Novyj Khronograf, 2019); Anna Sokolova, "Soviet Funeral Services: From Moral Economy to Social Welfare and Back," *Revolutionary Russia* 32 no. 2 (2019), 251–271. Some works specifically concerning provincial funeral industries and necropolises: Alexey Panin, "Gorodskaya povsednevnost' posle 1917 goda po materialam Tul'skogo nekropol'ya" [Urban everyday life after 1917 based on the materials of the Tula necropolis], *Istoriya. Istoriki. Istochniki* no. 2 (2017), 48–65; Elena Mironova, "Arkhangel'skoe kladbische Kazani: opyt istoricheskogo issledovaniya" [Kazan' Arkhangel'skoe cemetery: an essay in history], *Istoricheskaya etnologiya* 3 no. 1 (2018), 137–148; Ekaterina Krasil'nikova, "Istoricheskij nekropol' Novosibirska: preemstvennost' traditsij i politika pamyati Sovetskoj vlasti (konets 1919 – nachalo 1941 g.)" [Novosibirsk historical necropolis: continuity of traditions and Soviet memory politics (late 1919 – early 1941)], *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* no. 380 (2014), 80–91.

cite further provincial examples mentioned in the recent Russian-language literature, perhaps less known to the Western reader. As for the French case, I use mostly evidence from Paris.

Throughout the study, the use of primary and secondary sources for the French and the Soviet/Russian parts is not symmetrical. While referring to some archival holdings, the French side of the story draws extensively on the digitally available press materials and secondary literature. The Soviet story lies at the core and is widely supported by primary sources from archives and libraries in Moscow, Ivanovo, and Yaroslavl. The source base includes internal reports and letter exchanges of various organs, institutions, and commissions, collections of official documents and pieces of legislation, publications of national and specialized press, brochures, memorial albums, and books. Visual sources and physical evidence (such as analysis of architecture or monuments), while being very rich and suggestive during the revolutionary period in France and Russia, are largely excluded from the story. For the current research, I was more interested in the sources that contributed to the creation of what I refer to as death-related narratives, that is, public or private stories that relate to how people die and are buried.

A rich supporting source for the study was constituted by ego documents – diaries of the contemporaries of the revolutionary events, written as the events unfolded, and memoirs about the era written and published years later. Ego documents as a source require special care. One problem is that they tend to misrepresent facts, on purpose or by faults of memory; another is their almost non-generalizability. Still, with some reservations, they can add valuable details to our picture of the past. Diaries in particular serve as illustrative molds of a moment or an emotion, and their private character allows a historian to hope for a certain degree of sincerity.¹¹

¹¹ On the specificities of diary as a genre see for example: Anna Zaliznyak, "Dnevnik: k opredeleniyu zhanra" [Diary: Notes towards definition of a genre], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 6 (2010), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2010/6/dnevnik-k-opredeleniyu-zhanra.html>, accessed on May 29, 2023.

To differentiate and balance the source base, the documents I engaged were authored by rural and urban citizens, intelligentsia and peasants, men and women, young people and old, and supporters and non-supporters of the revolutionary regime. Ego documents produced by workers and peasants surviving to this day are very few, which is why I also used letters to the authorities and other similar sources.¹² Most diaries and memoirs I quote were consulted not in original form but in print: they were made available as parts of various collections and publications. Some were published online. The most useful for me was the online corpus of personal journals *Prozhito* (<https://corpus.prozhito.org>). The collection includes original first-time publications of texts produced by "everyday people" and electronic versions of the previously published and well-known diaries of poets, artists, military men, and politicians. This heterogeneity was the main benefit of the corpus: it allowed me to analyze sources originating from different backgrounds and present a more balanced picture.

In Western academia, studying death as a subject of historical anthropology began in the 1980s and continues to this day. French historians were especially prominent: the works of Jacques le Goff, Philippe Ariès, and Michel Vovelle were major contributions to the field.¹³ These *longue*

¹² There are several reasons for the scarcity of peasants' and, to a lesser degree, workers' diaries and memoirs. For different population strata, keeping a diary was a different project. While for many members of nobility and intelligentsia, journals were closer to self-reflective literature written with consideration for posterity, peasants tended to keep informative notes for further reference (see more on that, for example, in: Irina Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004), 561–73.) There were also different strategies for keeping such records. Literature-centric educated circles valued written evidence of the past; in traditional communities, "memory of historical past ... [was] transferred orally in most cases" (Elena Levkievskaya, "Istoricheskaya pamyat' kak trauma v krestyanskikh avtobiograficheskikh narrativakh," [Historical memory as trauma in peasants' autobiographical narratives] *Przeglad Rusycystyczny* no. 4 (172) (2020), 122–133: 122). Moreover, when it came to diaries of the first third of the twentieth century, the most vulnerable strata might choose not to preserve them for a reason: "Under certain conditions, they might become culpable evidence, and they were deliberately destroyed" (Gleb V. Markelov, "Krestyanskie arkhivy v Drevlekhranilische Pushkinskogo Doma," [Peasants' archives in the Pushkinskij Dom Old Manuscripts collection] *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoj literatury* 46 (Leningrad, 1993), 495–502: 500. <http://odrl.pushkinskijdom.ru/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=oWPSXXJMifc%3D&tabid=2292>, accessed on June 11, 2023).

¹³ Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance Du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (Penguin Books, 1983); Michel Vovelle, *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). See also Aron Gurevich, "Smert' kak problema istoricheskoi antropologii" [Death as a problem of historical anthropology], *Odissej* (1989), 114–35.

durée studies focusing on the medieval and early modern periods were soon complemented by more specialized research. John McManners and George Armstrong Kelly discussed "mortal politics" in eighteenth-century France; more recently, this work was continued by Joseph Clarke and Anne Byrne, in their ways, and a collection edited by Michel Biard, Jean-Numa Ducange, and Jean-Yves Frétygné specifically addressed the unnatural deaths of the French revolutionaries in the eighteenth to the twentieth century.¹⁴ Jay Winter and Mark Connelly explored how European societies dealt with the trauma of the First World War, and Katherine Verdery and Maria Bucur analyzed politicized practices surrounding death in socialist countries throughout the twentieth century.¹⁵

In the Russian/Soviet academic context, studies of early Soviet death arrived later. Catherine Merridale, in the early 2000s, started work in this area, but it was not until the 2010s that the field began developing exponentially.¹⁶ The contributions of Svetlana Malysheva, Anna Sokolova, and Sergei Mokhov have been particularly significant.¹⁷ Malysheva focused on the

¹⁴ John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981); George Armstrong Kelly, *Mortal Politics in Eighteenth-Century France* (University of Waterloo Press, 1986); Joseph Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead in Revolutionary France: Revolution and Remembrance, 1789-1799* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Anne Byrne, *Death and the Crown: Ritual and politics in France before the Revolution* (Manchester University Press, 2020); Michel Biard, Jean-Numa Ducange, Jean-Yves Frétygné (eds.), *Mourir en révolutionnaire (XVIIIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris, Société des études robespierristes, 2022).

¹⁵ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916–1939* (London: The Royal Historical Society, 2002); Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1999); Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth Century Romania* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth Century Russia* (New York: Viking, 2001); "Revolution among the dead: cemeteries in twentieth-Century Russia," *Mortality* 8, no. 2 (2003), 176–88.

¹⁷ Apart from the already mentioned works by Malysheva and Sokolova, one might point to: Anna Sokolova, "Funerals without a Body: Transformation of the Traditional Funeral Rite," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 7 (2012), 231–46; "'Nel'z'ya, nel'z'ya novykh lyudej khoronit' po-staromu!' Evolyutsiya pokhoronnogo obryada v Sovetskoj Rossii" ['No, one cannot bury the new men the old way!'] Evolution of the funeral rite in Soviet Russia], *Otechestvennye zapiski* 5 (2013), <https://magazines.gorky.media/oz/2013/5/nelzya-nelzya-novyh-lyudej-horonit-po-staromu.html> (accessed on June 11, 2023); Sergei Mokhov and Anna Sokolova, "Broken Infrastructure and Soviet Modernity: The Funeral Market in Russia," *Mortality* 25, no. 2 (2020), 232–48; Svetlana Malysheva, "Vrezano v kamen', vrezano v pamiat': (vos)proizvodstvo sovetskoj identichnosti v prostranstvakh smerti" [Set in stone, set in memory: (re)production of the Soviet identity in the spaces of death], *Dialog so Vremenem* no. 54 (2016), 181–206; "Krasnyj Tanatos:

broader implications of the abundant deaths for the subsequent developments of the Soviet culture while Sokolova and Mokhov were more interested in the technical, pragmatic, and materialistic aspects of the "new death" and new burials. In 2015-2019, Mokhov also published an open-access journal *Arkheologia russkoj smerti* [Archeology of Russian death], which served as a forum for discussing death studies in the Russian language.¹⁸ The periodical presented original research and translated classics to bring the Russian reader up to date with the latest developments in the field. In 2022, new books by Sokolova and Mokhov appeared, summarizing the last decade of their work.¹⁹ Mokhov's study, while referring to historical developments, is more interested in the contemporary legal and economic specificities of the Russian funeral market. Sokolova's research addresses the material and symbolic dimensions of death and the funeral of the average Soviet citizen in order to understand better who the "new Soviet man" proclaimed by the revolution was or should have been.

These and other studies of the early Soviet death tend to describe the Soviet developments in near-isolation or, at best, juxtapose them with contemporary European contexts.²⁰ The positioning is valid, of course, because Soviet Russia existed in its contemporaneity and faced the same questions of modernization, industrialization, and progress as other countries of post-World War I Europe. At the same time, Soviet Russia was different in the sense that its foundational event was a revolution, and its leaders understood this perfectly well. The Bolsheviks and their followers

Nekrosimvolizm sovetskoj kul'tury" [Red Thanatos: Necrosymbolism of the Soviet culture], *Arkheologia russkoj smerti* 2 (2016), 23–46. Sergei Mokhov, *Rozhdeniye i smert' pokhoronnoj industrii: Ot srednevekovykh pogostov do tsifrovogo bessmertiya* [Birth and death of the funeral industry: From the churchyards of the Middle Ages to digital immortality], (Moscow: Common place, 2018).

¹⁸ *Arkheologia russkoj smerti* is available online at: <https://vk.com/necrosociology> (accessed on June 11, 2023).

¹⁹ Anna Sokolova, *Novomu cheloveku – novaya smert'? Pokhoronnaya kul'tura rannego SSSR* [A new death for the new man? Funeral culture of the early USSR] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Studia Religiosa, 2022). Sergei Mokhov, *Death and Funeral Practices in Russia* (Routledge, 2022).

²⁰ On some limitations of contemporary Russian historiography of the Soviet death see: Anastasia Papushina, "Svetlana Malysheva, *Na miru krasna* (review)," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2019), 231–237.

placed themselves in a context of (imagined and constructed) revolutionary succession, and it is from this angle that I look at the early Soviet death-related practices. Using comparison and references to French history, I hope to demonstrate the limits of innovation and revolutionary-ness in the sphere of death.

Chapter 1. 1789 and 1917: Revolutions, comparisons, connections

Introduction

In Russia, the centenary of the October revolution in 2017 came amidst profound confusion: "nobody quite knew what to do with the occasion and how to celebrate it."¹ The anniversary did not go entirely unnoticed. Various media launched historical educational projects for broad audiences throughout the year, and scholars reflected on the actual event and its repercussions in professional publications.² But the authorities' reaction to the anniversary was bleak and evasive. There was no official celebration to match the revolution's significance, and the official doctrine supported by Vladimir Medinsky, then minister of culture, and President Vladimir Putin was that of "reconciliation" with the thorny past.

The reason for such a halfway solution was that the anniversary was "too big to ignore, but potentially dangerous politically" for the Russian authorities.³ Historians contextualized these dangers differently. Matthew Rendle and Anna Lively pointed to the Arab Spring and "color revolutions" that made revolutionary associations particularly unwanted. Mark Edele believed that parallels with the 2014 Ukrainian Euromaidan were to be avoided. Sheila Fitzpatrick reminded

¹ Boris Kagarlitsky, "Revolutsia kak vyzov istorii," [Revolution as history challenge] *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* no. 6 (2017), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2017/6/revolyuciya-kak-vyzov-istorii.html>, accessed on October 17, 2022.

² To name just a few, state media agency TASS and leading business newspaper Vedomosti each published a series of articles for the occasion (<https://1917.tass.ru/>, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/story/1917>). The popular education website Arzamas.academy prepared a course on revolutionary history featuring Professor Boris Kolonitsky, one of the leading experts on the topic (<https://arzamas.academy/courses/42/1>). Two projects aimed to reconstruct the revolutionary year day by day based on press and ego documents: <https://1917daily.ru/>, <https://project1917.ru>, accessed on October 17, 2022). Lecture courses, book selections, and various revolution-themed multimedia were published consistently throughout the year. Among scholarly publications, the anticipatory issue of *Kritika* (16, no. 4, Fall 2015), two issues of *Revolutionary Russia* (30, nos. 1 and 2, 2017) and the special issue of *Historical Research* (90, no. 247, February 2017), as well as numerous individual projects, treated the subject.

³ Matthew Rendle, Anna Lively, "Inspiring a 'fourth revolution'? The modern revolutionary tradition and the problems surrounding the commemoration of 1917 in 2017 in Russia," *Historical Research* 90, no. 247 (February 2017), 230-249: 230.

readers of Putin's home policy and his government's close ties to the Orthodox Church – one of the primary victims of Bolshevik rule.⁴ Whatever the immediate cause, the ambiguity of relations between Russia and the Soviet Union lay at the core of the problem. While claiming to be the successor of the Soviet state, contemporary Russia had a hard time embracing its founding event – the revolution.

Difficulties Vladimir Medinsky and his cohort faced trying to develop a consistent historical narrative of the Soviet legacy were, paradoxically, part of that legacy.⁵ What the Russian authorities tried to do was to separate revolution from the state that emerged from it. But "the Bolshevik" and "the revolutionary" started to merge already in the 1920s. Contemporary institutions specializing in official memory politics and history-writing worked to link the history of the revolution, from February through July to October 1917, and the activities of the Bolshevik party.⁶ This process culminated in 1938 with the publication of *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which Stalin helped write and edit. With its overwhelming dissemination – during Stalin's time, it was the most published book in Soviet Russia – *The Short Course* tightly bound "the Bolshevik" and "the revolutionary" for many years.⁷

The merger was not automatic, however, and neither was it inevitable. Over the course of the early 1920s, Soviet Russia was in the process of figuring out what would become an accepted understanding of revolution and its attributed traits. Positioning themselves against other socialist

⁴ Mark Edele, "Putin, memory wars and the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolution," *The Conversation*, February 9, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-putin-memory-wars-and-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-russian-revolution-72477>, accessed on June 13, 2023; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Celebrating (or not) the Russian revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 4 (October 2017), 816–831: 827.

⁵ In the articles quoted above, Mark Edele, Matthew Rendle and Anna Lively thoroughly reconstructed the official narrative about 1917 revolutions in the 2010s Russia.

⁶ Important aspects of this process are covered in Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁷ On the dissemination of *The Short Course*, see for example: Kees Boterbloem, *Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896-1948* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2004), 176; Thomas P. Bernstein, Hua-Yu Li, *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 113.

movements and radical sociopolitical transformations, not just the Bolshevik governing elite but rank-and-file members of society were contributing to the forging of this understanding.

In this chapter, my goal is to discuss the relationships between the Russian revolution and historical precedents, their touch points as perceived by contemporaries, and structural similarities in the areas relevant to my study, thus setting the stage for turning to the discussion of death-related practices in subsequent chapters. Here, I address three main areas. I begin with discussing the academic traditions of studying revolutions in comparison, focusing on the relations between the French and Soviet historians and historiographies. Then, I talk about the forms that the idea of the French revolution took in the aftermath of the revolution in Russia, paying particular attention to public and private narratives and, more rarely, actions taken with regard to the French revolution in the era of 1917 and hypothesizing about the strategies behind them. Finally, I discuss the facets of lethal violence in the two revolutions to draw the background against which the revolutionary innovations related to death were (or were not) implemented.

Revolutions and comparison(s): notes on methodology and literature

Revolution is at the heart of this study, but, like any grand concept, it is not easy to define. While everybody may have a general understanding of what is referred to as "the French revolution" or "the Russian revolution," giving a definition of revolution or pinpointing its precise characteristics has long been a source of debates, in history as well as other disciplines. Angles from which to approach it vary greatly. Is revolution primarily a political event, and if yes, how is it different from a revolt or a coup? Can a group of actors "make" a revolution, or does it "happen"? When does a revolution end, and under which conditions can it be considered successful? Can non-violent but rapid and profound social and political changes be considered revolutions, and if

not, what degree of violence is sufficient? How profound and lasting should the changes in society be for the turmoil to count as revolution?

Each of these questions has engendered a line of thought, if not a school. In the end, many academics, Peter Holquist and Dan Edelstein among them, admitted complications of finding "one true definition of revolution," which, especially in political settings, meant excluding alternative conceptualizations and limiting the richness of meanings the term can convey.⁸ It is also not to be forgotten that these meanings are not limited to politics, social life, or history of unrest. The term "revolution" and its derivatives are widely used in a metaphorical sense to describe radical and rapid innovations that bring about profound change, in historical concepts such as "industrial revolution" or "cultural revolution," but also routinely, when referring to a breakthrough or a transformation that drastically changes the ways of life.

These connotations were not inherent to the word, however. At least in the European context, the term changed its meaning drastically, as Hannah Arendt argued:

The word 'revolution' was originally as astronomical term which gained increasing importance in the natural sciences through Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. In this scientific usage, it retained its precise Latin meaning, designating the regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars ... Nothing could be farther removed from the original meaning of the word 'revolution' than the idea of which all revolutionary actors have been possessed and obsessed, namely, that they are agents in a process which spells the definite end of an old order and brings about the birth of a new world.⁹

The change occurred around the time of the French revolution, as argued both by Arendt and Alain Rey, who devoted his historical-linguistic study to the twists and turns of the word. Rey demonstrated how, during the revolutionary decade 1789-1799, the semantics of the term were

⁸ Peter Holquist, "What's so Revolutionary about the Russian Revolution? State Practices and the New-Style Politics, 1914-21," in David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (eds.) *Russian Modernity: Politics. Knowledge. Practices*, (Macmillan, 2000), 87–111: 90; Dan Edelstein, "Red Leviathan: Authority and violence in revolutionary political culture," *History and Theory* 56, no. 4 (2017), 76–96: 77.

⁹ Arendt, *On revolution*, 32.

recharged and fixated, leaning towards the range of political associations it has since assumed.¹⁰ Arendt went on to assert that it was the French revolution of 1789 and not any other grand sociopolitical event (such as, for example, the Glorious Revolution in England or the American revolution) that has become a reference point for all subsequent violent upheavals.¹¹ This hypothesis can be supported by Keith Baker's observation that the participants in the 1789 French revolution were the first to self-identify as 'revolutionnaires.'¹²

Arendt describes the revolutions that aim to change the world and start anew on a fairer, freer, and more equal footing, to renounce the past and begin from scratch. My study finds itself within this line of thinking, which was initiated by the revolutionaries themselves and supported by subsequent academic and philosophical literature. However, it is not my goal to focus on the peripeties of the power game, political tensions, or messianic ideologies *per se*. For the purposes of this study, the two revolutions are eras of profound political and social change, historical situations in which multiple actors felt empowered to put forward their projects of dramatically changing social relations and challenging established traditions in order to improve society and bring humanity to a better future.

I use several meanings of "revolution" and "revolutionary" as lenses through which to look at death-related practices in the two contexts. One sense of "revolutionary" would be belonging to the imagined successive line of world resistance movements that, according to the Bolshevik myth, culminated with the October revolution. As shown below in more detail, although the Bolsheviks took an ambivalent stand towards their 1789 predecessors politically, they could not omit the

¹⁰ Alain Rey, "Révolution." *Histoire d'un mot* (Paris : Gallimard, 1989). See also Marie-France Piguet, "Alain Rey, « Révolution ». Histoire d'un mot [compte-rendu]," *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 24 (1990), 122–124.

¹¹ Arendt, *On revolution*, 40.

¹² Keith Michael Baker, "Revolution I.O," *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire Européenne Contemporaine* 11, no. 2 (2013), 187–219.

French experience in their search for legitimacy and revolutionary legacy. What did they focus on, sifting and selecting historical information about the French revolution? Did they learn from their predecessors? If yes, were these lessons applicable to death-related practices?

Another approach would treat the notion of revolution and revolutionary as synonymous with radical innovation. William Rosenberg observed that the post-October period "represented essentially a radical extension, rather than revolutionary break, with the past."¹³ To what extent was this observation accurate for cultural practices in early Soviet Russia, and what novelties did the post-1917 government bring to the sphere of the everyday? How did the Soviet administration of death differ from that of tsarist times? What new practices suggested by party ideologists and propagandists did (or did not) take root?

Finally, one further meaning of "revolutionary" is political, distinguishing between the supporters and the adversaries of the new regime. What was the difference between revolutionary and pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and non-revolutionary, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary deaths and burials? Winning parties in 1917 were careful to distinguish "our" and "their" dead and propose new ways to manifest belonging to a political side. How did they do it? What symbols, rituals, and actions helped organizers and audiences avoid misunderstanding what they arranged and witnessed? And what was in store for those who found themselves in another camp?

These questions structure the present research. Their presentation is comparative, juxtaposing the Russian and the French, the old and the new, the supporters and the opponents of the new regimes. Comparison runs through this study, and comparative history was never the most unproblematic of methods. The usual critiques against it, beginning with Marc Bloch's

¹³ William Rosenberg, "Social mediation and state construction(s)," *Social History* 19 no. 2 (1994), 169–188: 188.

foundational study, included questions such as: What would be the intellectual purchase of comparing two cases distant in space and time?¹⁴ Is it possible to analyze two (or more) cases evenly and equally, given that the author is usually more knowledgeable in only one context and not the other(s)?¹⁵ How can one familiarize oneself with primary sources and academic literature in more than one language, and how to factor in the inevitable misunderstandings that arise at the intersection of linguistic worlds? With the seemingly fixed, ahistorical results comparative studies usually produce, how to account for the individual dynamics of the research cases? And how does one compare in the domain of culture when the most potent comparative tradition tends to sociology rather than history, anthropology, or culture studies?

Some of the common criticisms can be mitigated in application to the present study. Comparisons I have in mind do not pretend to be even or equal, and cases are not taken independently to be juxtaposed or equated with each other for making conclusions about "revolution" or "death" in general. With the focus on the Soviet case, close familiarity with the post-Soviet culture and being a native Russian speaker can be as much an asset as it can be a disadvantage. And looking at short, ten-year-long periods in each comparative case may perhaps not allow for bold generalizations but will not overshadow their inner dynamics either.

Nevertheless, limitations of the method can partially account for the marginal status of comparative studies among other historical disciplines and explain why, across several countries, historians studying the French and Russian revolutions were relatively reluctant to engage in them. In France, the academic tradition of studying the 1789 revolution was exceptionally rich, but the close attention paid to this period throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was

¹⁴ Marc Bloch, "Toward a Comparative History of European Societies," in: Fredric C. Lane and Jelle C. Riemersma, eds., *Enterprise and Secular Change* (Homewood, Ill., 1953), 494–521. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 30–50.

¹⁵ Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites de comparatisme en histoire culturelle," *Genèses* no. 17 (1994), 112–121.

counterbalanced by a virtual absence of comparative studies. Except for Mathiez's 1920 *Le bolchevisme et le jacobinisme*, the closest one could get to aligning the French revolution with other similar instances was perhaps the concept of the Atlantic revolution, pioneered by Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot in the mid-1950s.¹⁶ Palmer and Godechot placed the French revolution in line with other late eighteenth-century revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic, regarding it not as a unique event but as one case in a long row of other instances associated with Enlightenment philosophy. Sixty years on, this approach remains popular, even though filiation between the founding fathers and the newer generation was a reason for debate and self-reflection.¹⁷ David Armitage, Lynn Hunt, and Alan Forrest, among others, analyzed the French revolution in a broader context.¹⁸

Studies of the Russian revolution attracted little interest in French academic circles. Only a few authors were interested in the history of October (Marc Ferro being perhaps the most dedicated), and most publications on the subject that appeared in French were composed in

¹⁶ Albert Mathiez, *Le bolchevisme et le jacobinisme* (Paris, Librairie du Parti Socialiste et de l'Humanité, 1920). Jacques Godechot, Robert R. Palmer, "Le problème de l'Atlantique du XVIII^{ème} au XX^{ème} siècle," *Comitato internazionale di scienze storiche. X8 Congresso internazionale di Scienze storiche, Roma 4–11 Settembre 1955. Relazioni 5 (Storia contemporanea)* (Florence, 1955), 175–239. Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolutions. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*. 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1959–1964). Jacques Godechot, *France and the Atlantic revolution of the eighteenth century, 1770–1799* (Trans. by Herbert H. Rowen. New York: Free Press, 1965).

¹⁷ On the problem of filiation, see the debate between Lynn Hunt, Paul Cheney, Alan Forrest, and Matthias Middell in *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 374 (2013), 157–185. <https://journals.openedition.org/ahrf/12988>, accessed on October 23, 2022.

¹⁸ David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.) *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cornell University Press, 2013); Alan Forrest, Matthias Middell (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History* (Routledge, 2014). See also works of Jean-Numa Ducange on reverberations of the French revolution elsewhere: Jean-Numa Ducange, *La Révolution française et la social-démocratie. Transmissions et usages politiques de l'histoire en Allemagne et Autriche (1889–1934)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012) ; " Les références au passé révolutionnaire : une matrice de 'l'homme nouveau' dans la social-démocratie d'avant 1914 ? ", *La Révolution française. Cahiers de l'IHRF* no. 6 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/1116>, accessed on October 23, 2022.

Moscow.¹⁹ Even the 2017 centenary only sparked limited interest among French specialists.²⁰ Peter Holquist presented the French academic audience with an overview of recent Anglophone works in the area, bridging the three historiographies.²¹

Even though for some contemporaries, especially journalists and politicians, French history remained an explanatory paradigm to understand the events in Russia, no solid comparison between the French and the Russian revolution had emerged from the French historical school throughout the century.²² When historians of the two countries began to engage in personal contact, their interaction, as a rule, focused on the French revolution. Its Russian reverberations played little to no role in the debate despite mutual interest, personal connections, and even shared political convictions (a substantial part of the French academic establishment working on revolutionary topics was leftist).²³

¹⁹ See f. e.: Marc Ferro, *La Révolution de 1917* (Paris : Aubier, 1967, 2 vols.) ; Marc Ferro (ed.), *1917. Les hommes de la révolution : Témoignages et documents* (Paris : Omnibus, 2011); Antonino de Francesco, " D'une révolution à l'autre : Alphonse Aulard face aux événements russes de 1917, " *La Révolution française. Cahiers de l'IHRF* no. 5 (2013) <https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/986>, accessed on June 13, 2023; Eric Aunoble, *La révolution russe, une histoire française : lectures et représentations depuis 1917* (Paris, La Fabrique, 2016).

²⁰ Alexandre Sumpf, *1917. La Russie et les Russes en révolution* (Paris, Perrin, 2017) ; Nicolas Werth, *Les révolutions russes* (Paris, Que sais-je ? 2017); articles by Alexandre Tchoudinov, Varoujean Poghosyan, Alexandre Gordon, Dmitry Bovykine in *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 387 (2017). See also a critical remark by Alexandre Sumpf on the 2017 French reeditions of Steve A. Smith and Richard Pipes: Alexandre Sumpf, "Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames. War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914–1921*. Steve A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution. An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*. David Stevenson, *1917. War, Peace and Revolution* ", *Cahiers du monde russe* 59 no. 4 (2018), 631–635. <https://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/10687>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

²¹ Peter Holquist, "The Russian Revolution as Continuum and Context and Yes, - as Revolution: Reflections on Recent Anglophone Scholarship of the Russian Revolution," *Cahiers du monde russe* 58, no. 1–2 (2017), 79–94.

²² On Frenchmen using the French revolution as a tool to understand Russia, see for example: Ioannis Sinanoglou, "Frenchmen, their revolutionary heritage, and the Russian revolution," *The International History Review* 2 no. 4 (October 1980), 566–584.

²³ For more details on the Marxist influence over the French school of history, see Claude Mazauric, *La révolution française et la pensée marxiste* (Paris, Presses Universitaires Françaises 2009). On interactions between French and Soviet historians see for example: Varoujean Poghosyan, " La correspondance de Boris Porchnev et d'Albert Soboul. Un témoignage de l'amitié entre historiens soviétiques et français, " *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 376 (2014), 163–177, " Sur la polémique entre Albert Mathiez et les historiens soviétiques, " *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 387 (2017), 31–54. See also Carla Hesse, "Revolutionary Historiography after the Cold War: Arno Mayer's 'Furies' in the French Context," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (2001), 897–907.

Perhaps the most noticeable contribution to the comparative history of the French and Russian revolutions was published in English. In the first third of the twentieth century, such studies tended to employ the apparatus of sociology and adhere to stage theory (all revolutions of a particular type go through certain stages in a predefined order). Works of Pitirim Sorokin (*The Sociology of Revolution*, 1925) and Crane Brinton (*Anatomy of Revolution*, 1938) provide illustrative examples of both.²⁴ Brinton's book set the stage for studying comparative revolutions in the English-speaking world for almost thirty years, establishing "the area of study, the methodology for investigation and the basic working premises."²⁵

By the 1970s, social and political scientists put forward another approach that shattered the stage theory's dominance. Structuralists, such as Theda Skocpol, sought to stress "objective relationships and conflicts among variously situated groups and nations rather than the interests, outlooks, or ideologies of particular actors in revolutions" and pointed to structural vulnerabilities of regimes as causes for revolutions.²⁶ Structuralism became the new mainstream paradigm, perhaps best fit for parallel static comparisons of political and social situations in the countries in question. However, the method did not account for historical dynamics, cultural and ideological factors, or human agency, thus bringing us back to where this discussion started. What use is a parallel comparison, how to abstain from too huge generalizations, how to make comparisons in the area of culture, and can one hope for an even and equal distribution of attention across cases?

²⁴ Pitirim Sorokin. *The Sociology of Revolution* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1925); Crane Brinton. *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1938).

²⁵ William E. Lipsky, "Comparative approaches to the study of revolution: A historiographic essay," *The Review of Politics* 38, no. 4 (1976), 494–509: 499. The stage approach, though criticized throughout the second half of the twentieth century, has not entirely lost its explanatory force and attractiveness. A recent continuation to the tradition was given in: Bailey Stone, *The Anatomy of Revolution Revisited: A Comparative Analysis of England, France, and Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁶ Theda Skocpol. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 291.

The "fourth generation" of revolution scholars addressed some of these issues in the 1990s. Instead of focusing only on the "great revolutions," historians began to consider "collapsed states in Africa ... transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe and elsewhere ... movements of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East ... and guerilla warfare in Latin America. Moreover, in addition to identifying key causal factors and outcomes, scholars now s[ought] to explain the micro-processes of revolutionary mobilization and leadership."²⁷

One solid example of history writing that looks at the process of revolutionary mobilization is the 2008 volume by Stephen A. Smith, comparing Russia and China.²⁸ For the comparative studies of the French and Russian revolutions, the current change fostered such works as Arno Mayer's *The Furies* – a definitive comparative study of violence in late eighteenth-century France and early twentieth-century Russia – or a more recent volume on religion in revolutionary times.²⁹ Still, as Jean-Clément Martin rightly observed, both works provided parallel descriptions of the two cases rather than deep analysis, and methodological issues traditionally associated with comparative history remained untouched.³⁰

Over the last decade, a new approach has been developed by English-language authors. Instead of juxtaposing two cases in parallel, several scholars shifted their attention to the awareness of the latter revolutionaries of their predecessors. In his massive 2019 volume, Jay Bergman paid particular attention to the political thought of twentieth-century politicians, closely following the

²⁷ Jack A. Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001), 139–87.

²⁸ Stephen A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Arno Mayer, *The Furies. Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 2002); Daniel Schönflug, Martin Schulze Wessel, *Redefining the Sacred. Religion in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Frankfurt/Main, Peter Lang, 2012).

³⁰ Jean-Clément Martin, "Daniel Schönflug et Martin Schulzewessel, *Redefining the Sacred. Religion in the French and Russian Revolutions*," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 374 (2013), 224–225, <https://journals.openedition.org/ahrf/13013>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

curves of Lenin's proclaimed attitude towards Jacobins, Girondins, and different stages of the French revolution.³¹ Bergman demonstrated how, in topical discussions regarding Russian Marxism, the current political situation, and related emotional tensions, Bolsheviks and their friends and enemies referred to French precedents to support their positions. In this polemic, such terms as "Jacobins and Girondins," "Thermidor," and "bourgeoisie" lost not only their precise historical meaning but any stable meaning at all, being applied by all participants of discussion to different phenomena and actors of Russian political life depending on the moment.

Bergman's book illustrates a profound twist that had long lay at the core of the Russian attitude to the French revolution. While maintaining a high status in historiographic and political discussions, historical terms, concepts, and realities from 1789-95 were deprived of their specific meaning and became politically charged metaphors. This phenomenon, along with elucidating processes of myth construction, supports the suggestion that for Russian political actors in the early twentieth century, the French revolution remained a matrix or a script against which to position oneself in search for revolutionary legitimacy.

The notion of "script" was applied to the French revolution seen from the Russian perspective already in the late 1980s: Dmitry Shlapentokh mentioned it several times, albeit without giving it a clear definition. He used it as a self-evident metaphor rather than a term. More recently, in 2015, Keith Baker and Dan Edelstein admitted the vagueness and metaphorical nature of the term in their edited volume *Scripting Revolution*.³² Instead of following one clear-cut definition, each contributor to the book applied it differently, and the outcomes were varied. Still,

³¹ Jay Bergman, *The French Revolutionary Tradition in Russian and Soviet Politics, Political Thought, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

³² Keith Michael Baker, Dan Edelstein (eds.) *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

this flexibility allowed them to expand the domain of study and incorporate new geographical areas and new actors to comparative historical sociology *à la* 1970s-1980s.

Two aspects seem crucial in the approach put forward by Baker and Edelstein. Not only did they single out revolutionary scripts as "repertoires (as opposed to any fixed sequences – a.p.) of situations, subject positions, political opinions, historical narratives, and social logics invoked and enacted," they also highlight "self-conscious awareness with which revolutionaries model their actions on those of revolutions past."³³ This approach seems very relevant to Russian revolutionaries and the French revolutionary legacy. In this study, I consider what later revolutionaries knew and valued about their predecessors, thus alleviating the problem of juxtaposing historical events so distant in space and time as 1789 and 1917.

It is illustrative that the Soviet authors, like their French colleagues, have not produced a proper comparative study of the two revolutions. The study of October was a prerogative of several selected institutions – only the most tested and reliable comrades were allowed to write about revolutions, in Russia or elsewhere – and the approved conception of the French revolution "took shape in the 1930s and was fixed in a comprehensive volume, *The French bourgeois revolution 1789-1794* published in 1941. This conception lasted up to the beginning of *perestroika* virtually without modifications."³⁴ Isolation also did not help: Soviet historians long existed in an enclosed scholarly universe, separated from the Western debates. They could rarely access the European archives because of restrictions on foreign travel, and the fact that they published in Russian made their research hardly accessible to foreign colleagues.

³³ Baker and Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution*, 4.

³⁴ Dmitry Bovykin, "O sovremennoj rossijskoj istoriografii Frantsuzskoj revoliutsii XVIII veka (polemicheskie zametki) ["On the current state of Russian historiography of the eighteenth-century French revolution (polemical notes)], *Novaya i novejšaya istoriya* no. 1 (2007), http://annuaire-fr.narod.ru/bibliotheque/statji-Bovykine/IstoriographiaFR-Bovykine.html#_ftn3, accessed on June 13, 2023.

The change came in the late 1980s when historians of the younger generation – some of them had made foreign archival trips – called for revising and catching up with foreign historiographies.³⁵ But it was not before 2007 that in the post-Soviet studies of the French revolution, "diversity of views and opinions" definitively "came to replace a highly ideologized Marxist-Leninist historiography."³⁶ The emergence of new topics and reconceptualization of crucial notions such as the "feudal absolutist regime" (*feodal'no-absolutistskij stroj*) and the "bourgeois revolution" were major achievements of the new wave of historiography.³⁷

But for the Soviet historians, it was never about historiography alone: the study of revolutions was always highly politicized, and, thinking about the Russian revolution, Soviet historians always kept France in mind.³⁸ Behind this relentless attention were constant, even if indirect or implicit, analogies drawn between the long-gone past and the current situation in the Soviet Union. According to Alexander Chudinov, these analogies explained the heated debate about the Jacobin dictatorship as late as 1966-1970.³⁹ Even on the eve of the French revolution

³⁵ Efim Chernyak (ed.), *Aktual'nye problemy izucheniya istorii Velikoj frantsuzskoj revolutsii (materialy 'kruglogo stola', 19-20 sentyabrya 1988)* [Current problems in studying history of the Great French revolution. Roundtable materials, September 19-20, 1988] (Moscow, 1989).

³⁶ Bovykin, "On the current state of Russian historiography." On the post-Soviet historiography of the French revolution, see also Vladislav Smirnov, "L'image de la Révolution française dans l'historiographie post-soviétique," *Pour la Révolution française. En hommage à Claude Mazauric. Recueil d'études* (Rouen, 1998), 541–545. The Russian translation for *Frantsuzskij ezhegodnik* is available at: <http://annuaire-fr.narod.ru/bibliotheque/Smirnov-FR-istor.html>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

³⁷ Alexander Chudinov, "Smena vekh. 200-letie Revolutsii i rossijskaya istoriografija" ["Change of landmarks. Bicentenary of the Revolution and the Russian historiography"], *Frantsuzskij ezhegodnik 2000* (Moscow, Editorial URSS, 2000), 5–23, <http://annuaire-fr.narod.ru/statji/Tchoudinov-Smena-veh.html>, accessed on June 13, 2023. See also Bovykin, "On the current state of Russian historiography"; Alexander Chudinov, "Na ruinakh pamyati. O novejsikh rossijskikh izdaniyakh po istorii Frantsuzskoj revolutsii XVIII v." ["On the ruins of memory. About the newest Russian publications on the history of the eighteenth-century French revolution"], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 86 (2007), 395–409, <http://annuaire-fr.narod.ru/bibliotheque/Na-ruinah-pamiati.html>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

³⁸ On the establishment of the Soviet school of study of the French revolution, see for example: Alexander Chudinov, "Istoriik voyuyuschij: N. M. Lukin" ["N. M. Lukin, the belligerent historian"], in Alexey Tsamutali (ed.), *Istoriik i vlast': Sovetskie istoriki stalinskoj epokhi* [Historian and power: The Soviet historians of the Stalin era] (Saratov: Nauka, 2006), 199–250.

³⁹ Alexander Chudinov, "Frantsiya pishem, Rossiya v ume. O skrytykh smyslakh diskussii po probleme yakobinskoy diktatury, (1960-1980e gody) [We write 'France', but we mean 'Russia': On implications of the debate around the

bicentenary in 1989, the subject maintained "supreme ideological importance": "the necessity to ramp up research work in this domain was motivated exclusively by the need to 'participate effectively' in the ideological struggle that was 'bitter enough already' but promising to intensify because of the upcoming bicentenary of the Revolution."⁴⁰

While the Soviet system lasted, the topic remained underresearched but politically acute. With the change of ideological current, the importance of studying the French revolution seemed to have been lost. In Dmitry Bovykin's words, "its relevance for society as a whole, or, should we say, for the Russian mass reader, is far less evident now than it was in the Soviet era"; the subject, as he put it, "went out of fashion."⁴¹ And while several specialists continued their research on the French revolution, none demonstrated interest in a comparative study. Symmetrically, a recent overview of comparative history as a method, a rare publication of this sort coming from Russian academia, does not refer specifically to revolutions as comparative cases.⁴²

A more fruitful trend was accounting for the influence of the previous historical precedent over the subsequent one. The Russian public has paid systematic attention to the events in France since 1789 – attention so close that some called it a cult.⁴³ Historians have long argued that the history of the French revolution, or rather its romanticized image, has not only fascinated Russian

problem of Jacobin dictatorship, 1960s-1980s], *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* 55 no. 5 (2007), 22–32. <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2007/5/francziya-pishem-rossiya-v-ume.html>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

⁴⁰ Alexander Chudinov, "Nakanune 'smeny vekh'. Sovetskaya istoriografiya frantsuzskoj revolutsii v nachale 1980kh" ["On the Eve of the 'change of landmarks.' The Soviet historiography of the French revolution in the early 1980s"], *Rossiya i mir: Panorama istoricheskogo razvitiya. Sbornik nauchnykh statej, posvyaschennyj 70-letiyu istoricheskogo fakul'teta Ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A. M. Gor'kogo* [Russia and the world: Panorama of historical development. Collection of articles for the 70th anniversary of the History department at the A. M. Gorky Ural State University] (Ekaterinburg: Ural University Press, 2008), 112–127, <http://annuaire-fr.narod.ru/bibliotheque/Tchoudinov-Nakanune-SmenyVeh.html>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

⁴¹ Dmitry Bovykin, "Esche raz o Frantsuzskoj revolutsii, ili Nekruglyj yubilej" ["Once again on the French revolution, or An odd jubilee"], *Frantsuzskij ezhegodnik* (2015), 5–14: 7.

⁴² Mikhail Krom, *An Introduction to Historical Comparison*. Trans. by Elizabeth Guyatt (Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2021).

⁴³ Alexandre V. Tchoudinov, "Le culte russe de la Révolution française," *Cahiers du monde russe* 48 no. 2–3 "Les résonances de 1905" (2007), 485–498.

intelligentsia but influenced their political decisions. In 1968, John Keep described how the French revolutionary myth, the impact of which "was nowhere as profound as in Russia," was used by different actors across the political spectrum in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Keep pointed to the performative power of impressions, beliefs, and myths about previous revolutions that had worked as "real elements" of Russian political life.

Similarly, around the bicentenary of the French revolution, historians of Russian descent highlighted the influence of French history over Russian politics. Dmitry Shlapentokh, in a series of works, gave a detailed account of the political use of the French revolutionary myth by various Russian parties in the early twentieth century and the French revolutionary symbolism that Russians have adopted.⁴⁵ Tamara Kondratieva investigated the Thermidorian reaction and its perception in Russia from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1940s.⁴⁶ Alexander Gordon argued that in the 1930s, the French analogy was used to justify repressions, dekulakization, and other measures against "the enemies of the people," thus becoming a tangible factor in Soviet politics.⁴⁷

With all the attention the Russian and Soviet political actors paid to the French precedent, conceptions and reconstructions were as influential as historical facts. Alexander Chudinov believed that "the vision of the French revolution, constructed in the Russian culture of the nineteenth century, was actually closer to the sphere of sacred than to the area of scholarly

⁴⁴ John Keep, "1917: The Tyranny of Paris over Petrograd," *Soviet Studies* 20, no. 1 (1968), 22–35.

⁴⁵ Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The French Revolution in Russian political life: the case of interaction between history and politics," *Revue des études slaves* 61, no. 1 (1989): 131–42; "The images of the French Revolution in the February and Bolshevik Revolutions," *Russian History* 16, no. 1 (1989): 31–54.

⁴⁶ Tamara Kondratieva, *Bolcheviks et jacobins* (Paris : Payot, 1989). Shortened version of the research appeared the same year: Tamara Kondratieva, "Le pouvoir du précédent dans l'histoire : L'impact de la Révolution française en Russie," *Revue des études slaves* 61, no. 1–2 (1989), 201–15. The Russian edition was published in 1993 as *Bolsheviki-yakobintsy i prizrak Termidora* [Bolsheviks-Jacobins and the specter of Thermidor], transl. Elena Lebedeva, Tatyana Posherstnik (Moscow: IPOL, 1993).

⁴⁷ Alexander Gordon, "Velikaya Frantsuzskaya revolyutsia kak yavlenie russkoj kul'tury (k postanovke voprosa)" ["The Great French revolution as a phenomenon of Russian culture (towards posing the question)"], in: Alexander Chudinov (ed.), *Istoricheskie etyudy o frantsuzskoj revolyutsii (pamyati V. M. Dalina)* [Essays in history of the French revolution. To the memory of V. M. Dalin] (Moscow: IVI RAN, 1998), 219–245.

knowledge."⁴⁸ According to him, a "conscious omission of certain facts" installed itself progressively across the century to bring along a crooked and politically usable picture. In this sense, the Bolshevik leaders were proud heirs to this tradition. Sharing the knowledge of French revolutionary history with their fellow members of the intelligentsia, over a few years, they managed to sift and limit the information available to wider audiences and lay the foundations of the highly politicized historical mythology that was dominant in Soviet Russia until the dissolution of the state.

Revolutionary culture: looking for inspiration

Structurally, many aspects of life were common for revolutionary France and Russia: the experience of extended violence and revolutionary wars, external and internal; the general modernization of life, growing urbanization and industrialization; struggle against the leading religion and attempts to secularize everyday life; comparable aspirations to reorganize the very foundations of life and start everything anew.⁴⁹ The French revolution remained an important ideological precedent throughout the entire time of existence of the Soviet regime. However, the comparison becomes more nuanced when it comes to the specificities of the French experience that proved most relevant for the Soviets. What lay at the origin of this story of looking back at France, which lasted for 70 years? What parts of the French experience were in demand in Russia immediately after the 1917 revolution, by whom was it engaged, and in what contexts?

In the following sub-chapter, I show how these questions were addressed by the Bolshevik leadership and decision-makers, as well as other actors in the intellectual and cultural field, in the first years after October. I look at the writings and publications authored by representatives of

⁴⁸ Tchoudinov, "Le culte russe," 485.

⁴⁹ See more in Arendt, *On Revolution*, 37.

different social strata and political currents to show that the French revolution provided a repertoire of references rather than a consistent narrative to reproduce. Then I show that in the sphere of culture, for the Bolshevik leadership, the most relevant was the French revolution's festival and musical culture and that the French references were sporadic rather than systemic in other areas of cultural reforms.

The French revolution in the post-October press, publications, and diaries

On April 5, 1917, writer Mikhail Prishvin made the following entry in his diary:

When the street shooting started to fade, and masses of people started to come out of their houses to Nevsky, in this time of newspaper scarcity, some merchant brought out a pack of books in green wrappers. A vast crowd instantly surrounded him, and when it was my turn, there were no books left for me: everything was bought up. The book was "The history of the French revolution." Who hasn't read it these days? And after having read that, some turned to the history of the Times of Troubles and read it with the same all-absorbing interest as the history of the French revolution. Thus, as if by itself, based on the ground of the revolution, a great striving emerged and arose, the striving to know one's homeland.⁵⁰

Especially in Petrograd, during the revolutionary spring of 1917, the history of the French revolution became trendy reading. Current events spurred historical allusions, and late eighteenth-century French history occupied no small place among them. Intellectuals across the political spectrum referred to figures and situations from the French revolutionary decade, applying familiar images, concepts, stories, and figures from the past to a dangerous and chaotic reality to make sense of it.

Mikhail Rodzianko reportedly told Nicholas II that "even when the French revolution was rampant, the people cried *Vive le Roi* when they saw him [the king]," implying that the loyalty of

⁵⁰ Mikhail Prishvin, *Diary*. 1917. April 5. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/18172>, accessed on June 13, 2023. Notably, this paragraph is preceded by the description of the grand funeral of the victims of the February revolution.

the Russian people should not be trusted.⁵¹ Alexander Kerensky, answering questions about the fate of the Romanovs in late March 1917, publicly said that "he was not a follower of Marat and was not going to execute anyone."⁵² In November 1917, Prishvin noted in his diary that young girls from his family repeatedly asked him, "who was our Marat." He finally figured that "girls wanted to play the part of Charlotte Corday. Since the month of March, all our revolutionaries performed the French revolution and have now achieved such enthusiasm that they have forgotten theater whatsoever: these actors of the French revolution beat each other for real."⁵³

Rachel Khin-Gol'dovskaya, writer and public intellectual, often referenced historical figures and events in her diary; the era of Peter the Great and the French revolution were among her favorites well before 1917.⁵⁴ The revolutionary events in Russia made the French parallel more prominent in her mind. On February 27, Khin-Gol'dovskaya labeled the storming of Peter and Paul's fortress and liberation of political prisoners the "Russian July 14! Taking of the Russian Bastille!" On March 7, she condemned the Russian revolution as resembling "the French vocabulary to a tittle. Militia, commissaires, decrees... We shall probably change the calendar soon as well. We are going to have *pluvioses, messidors, fructidors*. I fear we would end up with a *thermidor*." In the figure of Kerensky, she saw "the rising star of our newborn revolution, its Camille Desmoulins." In late August, Khin-Gol'dovskaya criticized Kornilov for failing the rebellion: "One should make the *18 brumaire* for certain and not "only so far." On the eve of the

⁵¹ Baroness Elena Meiendorf, "Excerpts from diary, Petrograd, February 8 – March 3, 1917," In: N. Surzhikova (ed.), *Rossia 1917 goda v ego-dokumentakh: dnevniki* [1917 Russia in ego-documents. Diaries] (Moscow: Politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2017), 42–61: 43–44.

⁵² Elizaveta Kladischeva, *Diary*. 1917. March 20. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/386391>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

⁵³ Mikhail Prishvin, 1917. November 15. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/18248>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

⁵⁴ Thus, she quoted a 1906 discussion with Anatole France, who had allegedly asked her whether Russia had "great men like Mirabeau or Danton" to lead the revolution. To this, she responded that she did not know of them just yet, but that "Toulon lieutenant" was also unknown until a certain moment. On February 25, 1917, she noted that her acquaintance Osip Gerasimov "look[ed] like a member of the Convention, if not for his kind Russian smile and crafty sparks in his eyes." Rachel Khin-Gol'dovskaya, *Diary*. Quoted from: Surzhikova (ed.), *Rossia 1917 goda v ego-dokumentakh. Dnevniki*, 241–354: 271–272; 253.

Constituent Assembly election in November, she concluded: "This is Russian *Constituante* – *ni plus ni moins*. Scythians will show the world a spectacle hitherto unseen. What is going on is beyond human understanding."⁵⁵

It is easy to notice that for Khin-Gol'dovskaya, the history of the French revolution was not a consistent and cohesive historical narrative that could predict the course of events in Russia, but rather a repertoire of situations, figures, and concepts. She found in the past a collection of familiar situations to apply to the reality around her and try to make sense of the frustrating contemporary experience. Similar was the approach of the right-wing publicist Mikhail Men'shikov. In his diary entry from September 3, 1918, commenting on the attempt on Lenin's life (he then thought that Lenin had died), Men'shikov observed: "Danton was right saying that revolution is like Saturn, devouring its own children."⁵⁶ He continued the note with a reference to September massacres: "I fear that violence would spark at home too on the anniversary of 'September massacres' that chieftains of the revolution themselves would have to tame Who could have thought that the first thing triumphant revolution would catch hold on would be tyranny and that the 'leader of the world proletariat' would die a tyrant's death? And yet, was it not the same during the era of the great French revolution?..⁵⁷ Combining the September massacres from 1792, Danton's death from 1794, and a general reference to a tyrant's death, Men'shikov tried to bring the current events in line with a familiar narrative, not aiming at historical consistency.

Educated strata like the authors of the diaries quoted above were already familiar with the history of the French revolution when the February revolution in Russia took place. As Tamara

⁵⁵ Khin-Gol'dovskaya, *Diary*. Quoted from: Surzhikova (ed.), *Rossia 1917 goda v ego-dokumentakh. Dnevnik*, 241–354: 255, 265, 266–267, 318, 344.

⁵⁶ This phrase is attributed not to Danton, but to Pierre Vergniaud. Men'shikov could have known the phrase through Buchner's drama *Danton's death*, in which it is Danton who pronounces the words.

⁵⁷ Mikhail Men'shikov, *Diary*. 1918. September 3. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/15066>, accessed on June 13, 2023. Note the use of the adjective "great" by a representative of the right-wing political movement.

Kondratieva observed, teaching the history of the French revolution in Russian universities began in the 1870s. Since then, those who received tertiary education could familiarize themselves with the events expounded by Russian historians (such as Vladimir Guerrier) or even the French ones, especially Alexis de Tocqueville and Hyppolite Taine.⁵⁸ For them, the reading frenzy of the spring of 1917 might have been, in fact, re-reading. Even so, the enthusiasm sometimes reached grotesque proportions. An anonymous woman nicknamed Nelly in her 1917 diary described one of her admirers, a 28-year-old officer, who chose a specific way of courting. "October 18, 1917: Vas.[sily] is spending the night at my place again and is reading me 'French revolution' as a bedtime story. It is hilarious. I go to bed; he sits in the corner of the room and starts reading. This reading is interrupted every minute by his looks and various notes and observations that have no relation whatsoever to the history of revolution. I know it is mean to tease him like that...."⁵⁹

For the less educated, knowledge of French history hardly came from books. Before 1917, reading was less accessible for them: literature was expensive, and the selection of titles available was limited. Publications about the French revolution did not stand out, quantitatively or in terms of content. One solid monograph on pre-revolutionary French peasantry was included in the training program for Petersburg workers in 1886, most likely as a lecture source.⁶⁰ Worker Ivan Egorov, an active participant in underground activities in the 1890s, recalled that *History of a peasant* by Erckmann-Chatrian was among the translated titles that were "especially well-

⁵⁸ Kondratieva, *Bolsheviki-yakobintsy*, 61–63.

⁵⁹ M. Musina (publisher), "Dnevnik Nelli. 1917" [Nelly's diary. 1917], *Iskusstvo kino* 7 (1992), 3–13: 9. Archival source of the publication: Central State Archive of Literature and Arts. Fond 1337. Opis' 1. Delo 348. The man in question, Vassily, had received legal training but in 1917 was an officer of the guards. On another occasion, the author reports Vassily reading Schopenhauer to her.

⁶⁰ Boris Itenberg, "Pervaya v Rossii kniga o frantsuzskoj burzhuznoj revolyutsii kontsa XVIII veka" [The first Russian book on the French bourgeois revolution of the late eighteenth century], *Voprosy istorii* 11 (1988), 119–126: 126.

regarded" among workers.⁶¹ The novel told the story of the 1789 French revolution as seen through the eyes of a Lorraine peasant. But such titles were not many before the February revolution, and their impact on the audience is difficult to trace.

When readers managed to get access to books, their preferences were not for foreign history but for Russian fiction. It almost did not matter whether the less educated readers came from a peasant or worker background or how politically conscious and socially engaged they were; the preferences remained the same. Thus, peasant-born Ivan Stolyarov, in his memoirs, underlined the significance of a readers' anthology *Pervaya pchelka* [The first little bee], that "was imprinted in me for life" and pointed to the works of Kol'tsov, Nikitin, and Zhadovskaya as especially important for his reading as a young man.⁶² Memoirs of authors from the workers' milieu mentioned Shelgunov, Nekrasov, and Chernyshevsky, "the Russian classical writers and literary critics" (Belinsky, Pisarev, Dobrolyubov) as writers most sought-for. Ivan Egorov recalled that "in prison, [he] read all Russian and translated classics, all Russian publicists and critics: Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, Chernyshevsky, Shelgunov."⁶³ Mark Steinberg made similar observations in his study of "worker writers" in the first decade of the twentieth century and their sources of inspiration:

The most frequently named authors, and the most likely to be described as inspirational, were almost all Russian poets of the early and middle nineteenth century: Nikolai Nekrasov (mentioned more often than any other author) and Ivan Nikitin, both mid-century poets who wrote with pathos and sympathy about the lives of the poor; the first famous "poets from the people," Aleksei Kol'tsov and

⁶¹ Ivan Egorov, *Moj put' v russkuyu revolyutsiyu, 1873-1906* [My path to the Russian revolution, 1873-1906], <https://corpus.prozhito.org/person/6802>, accessed on October 20, 2022. Egorov wrote this memoir in the 1930s, not long before his passing in 1936. Erckmann-Chatrion was a pen name of a creative duo of Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrion. *History of a peasant* was written in 1868 and translated into Russian among other works of the duo.

⁶² Ivan Stolyarov, *Zapiski russkogo krest'yanina* [Notes of a Russian peasant] (Paris: Institut d'Etudes slaves, 1986), 51.

⁶³ Egorov, *Moj put' v russkuyu revolyutsiyu*. Semyon Kanatchikov, a worker turned party activist, also mentioned Shelgunov and Nekrasov as the most popular authors. Semyon Kanatchikov, "Iz istorii moego bytiya. Prodolzhenie" [From the history of my being, Continuation], *Krasnaya nov'* no. 4 (1929), 144–160: 143, 150.

Ivan Surikov; and the nearly iconic national poet Aleksandr Pushkin. The only living author mentioned so often as inspirational was Maxim Gorky...⁶⁴

Among the translated titles, socially engaged pieces like *The Weavers* by Gerhart Hauptmann or *Spiders and Flies* by Wilhelm Liebknecht attracted attention from worker readers along with non-fiction – Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Engels' *Origin of the Family*, or titles that could serve as a guidance: *The Workers' program*, *On fees*, *The Working Day* and alike.⁶⁵

Most historical narratives about the oppressed struggling against their oppressors were closer to home: they featured familiar figures from recent political life or Russian history. Thus, Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich wrote in his memoirs about Vorovsky that around the turn of the twentieth century, the masses of workers

would express their feelings by singing songs that they loved most and that were forbidden at the time. Songs about the Volga, about Sten'ka Razin, and especially about the legendary highwayman Churkin: the clever entrepreneur and publisher of *Moskovskij listok* newspaper Petukhov printed an endless novel about his heroic adventures.⁶⁶

Rare references to the foreign experience only played a supporting role. Thus, Semyon Kanatchikov, a worker turned party activist, recalled that in the late 1890s, a "conscious" worker, Vassily Klushin, "with his monotonous, strident, but deeply touching voice, would tell stories of *Narodnaya Volya* members' heroic struggles, of specific episodes from the history of the French revolution, of workers' leaders who had led the strike he took part in, and so on."⁶⁷ Klushin sometimes went on fantasizing about a day when "a highwayman would show up among us, like

⁶⁴ Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Cornell University Press, 2002), 31.

⁶⁵ Egorov, *Moj put' v russkuyu revolyutsiyu*; Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, *Na slavnom postu. Pamyati Vorovskogo* [At the glorious watch. To the memory of Vorovsky] (Moscow: Zhizn' i znanie, 1923), 12.

⁶⁶ Bonch-Bruevich, *To the memory of Vorovsky*, 7.

⁶⁷ Kanatchikov, "Iz istorii moego bytiya. Prodolzhenie," 144–145. Kanatchikov was eighteen years old at the time, working at a newly opened plant in Mytishchi, near Moscow. Klushin was his older comrade and landlord.

Sten'ka Razin or Pugachev – in that case, perhaps, everyone would follow them hanging moneybags and nobles on lanterns, just like in France."⁶⁸

For this group of readers, in 1917 and afterward, many publications about the major events and figures of the French revolution provided much-demanded information. Among the available titles published in 1917-1922, one might mention *The Great French Revolution* (1917), *How Did the French Acquire and Lose Their Freedom* (1917), *Storming of the Bastille* (1918), *Essays on the French Revolution* covering the activities of Mirabeau, Danton, Marat, and the trial of Louis XVI (1918), *French revolutionary wars* (1919), or *French revolution and religion* (1919).⁶⁹

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Red Army Deputies supported the publication or republication of some of the titles, including *The Great French revolution* by G. Lindov, *How and Why Did the Great French Revolution of 1789 Come into Being* by Olga Volkenstejn, and *Essays of the Great French revolution* by Emilia Pimenova.⁷⁰ These easy-to-read, short popular brochures (most under one hundred pages) provided general information about the course of revolutionary events in France. Those were complemented by biographical publications, among which one might mention *Marat and his struggle against counterrevolution* by Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov – a book that was republished five times before 1921; *Maximilien Robespierre* by Nikolay Lukin, or a

⁶⁸ Note the interesting combination of Russian history, echoes of the events in France, and the image of violent and physical popular justice.

⁶⁹ E. Efimova, *Velikaya frantsuzskaya revolyutsia* [The great French revolution] (Moscow, People's Library, 1917); A. Strazhev, *Kak frantsuzy dobyli i poteryali svoju svobodu* [How did the French acquire and lose their freedom], (Moscow, 1917); *Vztyatiye Bastilii: ocherk* [Storming of the Bastille: An essay] (Petrograd: Proletarskaya mysl', 1918); Samuil Lozinsky, *Ocherki velikoj frantsuzskoj revolyutsii. Mirabo. Danton. Marat. Protsess Lyudovika XVI* [Essays on the French revolution. Mirabeau. Danton. Marat. The trial of Louis XVI] (Petrograd, 1918); V. Tretyakov, *Frantsuzskiye revolyutsionnyye voyny 1792-96* [French revolutionary wars. 1792-96] (Moscow, 1919); M. Popov, *Frantsuzskaya revolyutsia i religia* [French revolution and religion] (Petrograd, 1919).

⁷⁰ G. Lindov, *Velikaya frantsuzskaya revolyutsia* [The Great French revolution] (Petrograd, 1919); Olga Volkenstejn, *Kak i pochemu vznikla velikaya frantsuzskaya revolyutsia 1789 goda* [How and why did the Great French revolution of 1789 come into being] (Petrograd, 1919, first edition 1906); Emilia Pimenova, *Ocherki velikoj frantsuzskoj revolyutsii* [Essays of the Great French revolution] (Petrograd, 1919).

biography of Saint-Just by Yakov Zakher.⁷¹ For those who might have been interested in a more academic treatment of the subject, a few publications followed in the mid-1920s: Vyacheslav Volgin's *Ideological heritage of babouvism*, in 1923, Abram Prigozhin's *Gracchus Babeuf*, in 1925, or Pavel Schegolev's *Babeuf's Conspiracy* in 1927.⁷²

Despite the impressive number of titles, it is not easy to establish how broad an audience this literature reached and how effectively it delivered its message. On the one hand, as Evgeny Dobrenko and Abram Reitblat pointed out, in 1917-1921, "approximately 4–5 million workers and peasants became regular readers thanks to the eradication of illiteracy."⁷³ On the other hand, scholars observed that, according to records from libraries, these new readers were interested either in practical literature that could help them in their daily activities, or fiction, from Turgenev to Upton Sinclair. Among the non-fiction books, in 1921, readers reported that "antireligious and anti-church books ... or works of natural science" contributed most to their worldviews.⁷⁴ History books or biographies of foreign revolutionaries do not appear specifically in this analysis. Unlike the diaries of public intellectuals and politicians quoted above, diary authors from workers or peasant circles did not reference the French revolution or its key figures after 1917. For them, other media came to the fore.

⁷¹ Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov, *Zhan-Pol' Marat i yego bor'ba s kontrrevolyutsiej (1743 – 13 iyulya 1793 g.) : k 125-letiyu smerti Marata* [Jean-Paul Marat and his struggle against counterrevolution, 1743 – July 13, 1793: To the 125th anniversary of Marat's death] (Petrograd: Kommunist, 1918); Nikolay Lukin, *Maksimilian Robesp'yer* [Maximilien Robespierre] (Moscow: The Department of Print of the Moscow Soviet, 1919, reedited in 1922 and 1924); Yakov Zakher, *Sen-Zhyust, zhizn', deyatel'nost', ideologia* [Saint-Just: Life, activities, ideology] (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922). Importantly, these three authors were of very solid standing: Skvortsov-Stepanov occupied important posts in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* and later was in the lead of Lenin's Institute by the Central Party Committee; Lukin and Zakher were amongst the leading historians of the French revolution in early Soviet Russia.

⁷² Vyacheslav Volgin, *Idejnoe nasledie babuvizma* [Ideological heritage of babouvism] (Moscow, 1923); Abram Prigozhin, *Gracchus Babeuf* (Leningrad, 1925); Pavel Schegolev, *Zagovor Babyofa* [Babeuf's Conspiracy] (Leningrad, 1927, 1931). Note that in the mid-1920s, the selection of subjects narrowed down, following the course taken by the Party and the influence it exercised over the historical research institutions responsible for these publications.

⁷³ Evgeny Dobrenko, Abram Reitblat "The readers' milieu, 1917-1920s", in: Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena (eds.), *Reading Russia. A history of reading in modern Russia. Vol. 3* (Milano: Ledizioni, 2020), 15–42: 16.

⁷⁴ Dobrenko, Reitblat, "The readers' milieu," 20.

Mass festivals of the early Soviet era: learning from the French?

Information about the French revolution was being diffused through means other than the printed word or tales. One initiative was related to memorializing the French legacy in the urban landscape. In the summer and fall of 1918, Lenin's "Monumental Propaganda" plan was firmed up and implemented. In the list of sixty-six figures to commemorate in monuments, approved by Sovnarkom, four were from the French revolution era: Babeuf, Marat, Robespierre, and Danton.⁷⁵ To note, they all died violent deaths during the revolutionary decade (Marat was assassinated, and the other three guillotined).⁷⁶ In France, these personages belonged to different camps and had an ambiguous political reputation during and after the revolution. For the goals of monumental propaganda in Soviet Russia, they were placed on equal standing. Unfortunately for their early Soviet memory, the monuments were built so poorly that they did not survive their first winter.

Another way of disseminating information about French history was the organization of mass festivals. Since 1918, multiple organizations have been concerned with inventing celebratory practices and symbols, formulating mottos, planning festival processes, educating instructors, and publishing guidance materials.⁷⁷ Historical examples were brought up a lot in this preparatory work. Festivals of the French revolution were often mentioned as a historical example of popular

⁷⁵ *Izvestia* no. 163 (August 2, 1918), 3.

⁷⁶ It is indicative for the present study that the set of revolutionary figures that Lenin intended to commemorate was not the same as was significant for French revolutionaries. In France, philosophers, war heroes, and victims of political assassinations made their way to the Pantheon, the names of Mirabeau, Voltaire, Rousseau, Lepelletier, Chalier, Bara, or Viala, were not mentioned on the list of the planned Soviet monuments. Voltaire, along with Diderot and d'Alembert, appear briefly in Lunacharsky's writings as philosophers who had paved the way for the 1789 revolution, but even Lunacharsky does not dwell on their role for too long. See for instance Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Tolstoy i Marks* [Tolstoy and Marx] (Leningrad: Academia, 1924); *Sud'by russkoj literatury* [Fates and fortunes of Russian literature] (Leningrad: Academia, 1925).

⁷⁷ Elena Barysheva enumerates among these organizations the Sector of Arts and Mass Events of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, the Agitprop of the Central Committee of the Party, the Cultural Sector of the Central Council of Trade Unions, along with ad-hoc festival committees formed under the jurisdiction of local party cells. See Elena Barysheva, *Sovetskij gosudarstvennyj prazdnik v sotsial'nom konstruirovanii novogo obschestva, 1918 – 1941 gg.* [The Soviet state festival in social constructing of the new society, 1918–1941], Doctoral thesis (Moscow, 2020). See especially Chapter 2.2, 84–106.

self-expression, along with open-air spectacles of ancient Greece and medieval mystical religious processions.⁷⁸

More importantly for us, though, was the fact that in this context, French history was not just a colorful story to tell but also a revolutionary experiment to learn from and an organizational example to follow. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, was especially impressed by the French model. Admitting that the Soviet masses "have proved themselves to be less lively, less talented" than their French predecessors, Lunacharsky called for learning from them.⁷⁹

The key feature to borrow from the French festivals was their musical organization – a topic Lunacharsky picked up from the book *Festivals and Songs of the French revolution* by the French ethnomusicologist and educator Julien Thiersot, reprinted in Petrograd in 1917.⁸⁰ Thiersot's thick volume provided detailed descriptions of republican festivals – giving, among other things, full attention to the funerals, which, according to the author, "of all public ceremonies, made an especially heartbreaking impression." Thiersot described how "the whole nation carried Mirabeau's ashes to the Pantheon in the evening, by the torchlight, through the streets of old Paris, to the formidable sound of previously unknown instruments invented by Gossec; Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau's body was exposed naked, for everyone to see his wound ajar; and Marat's funeral procession, as splendid as nothing before."⁸¹ In further sections of the book, Thiersot discussed other funerals-festivals, such as the memorial ceremony for those fallen on August 10, 1792, plans to pantheonize Bara and Viala, the Festival for the Martyrs of Liberty on 11 Vendémiaire Year IV,

⁷⁸ See for instance Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, crucible of cultural revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 135.

⁷⁹ Anatoly Lunacharsky, "O narodnykh prazdnestvakh" [On people's festivals], *Vestnik teatra. Izdanie TEO Narkomprosa* no 62. (April 27 – May 2, 1920), 4–5: 4.

⁸⁰ Julien Thiersot, *Prazdnestva i pesni Frantsuzskoj Revolyutsii* [Festivals and songs of the French revolution] (Petrograd: Parus, 1917).

⁸¹ Thiersot, *Prazdnestva i pesni*, 11.

and the funeral of general Joubert in 1799. As a musicologist, Thiersot also paid a lot of attention to creating revolutionary music and organizing mass singing during the festivals.

Lunacharsky thought very highly of Thiersot's oeuvre. He authored the preface to its first Russian edition, recommended it in his lectures, and made it so visible that even by the end of the decade, in 1926, the Committee for the Sociological Study of the Arts still described French revolutionary festivals through Thiersot's lens.⁸² The use of music was the main point that caught Lunacharsky's attention. During the republican celebrations, he pointed out, not only "special composers created special music for the festivals, from the first note to the last: Conservatory students taught the Parisian population to sing those hymns in choirs of several thousand people."⁸³ Lunacharsky found it "extremely desirable" "to follow the example of the French in organizing choir singing." Another idea to take from the French was using giant allegoric figures: allegories of the old world were to be burnt or exploded during a celebration, and representations of the new world were unveiled.⁸⁴

Despite Lunacharsky's prominent position, it is difficult to establish how much was learned from France and used during early Soviet celebrations. According to Katerina Clark, of all festivals in the 1920s, *Misteria osvobodzhennogo truda* [The Mystery of Liberated Labor] (1920) "was the one most indebted to precedents" from the French revolutionary era.⁸⁵ The giant spectacle involved people dancing around the "tree of freedom" at the climax of the performance – an action Rousseau suggested for the French republican festivals. This solution was an apparent reference to France

⁸² Alexey Gvozdev, "Massovye prazdnestva na Zapade," [Mass festivals in the West], in *Massovye prazdnestva. Sbornik Komiteta sotsiologicheskogo izucheniya iskusstv* [Mass festivals. Collection by the Committee for the Sociological Study of Arts] (Leningrad: Academia, 1926), 7–53: 42.

⁸³ Lunacharsky, "Net prazdnika bez muzyki" [There is no festival without music], in: *Lenin i prosveschenie* [Lenin and the Enlightenment] (Moscow: Krasnaya nov', 1924), 148–151.

⁸⁴ Lunacharsky, "K uchastiyu v prazdnike privlech' massy," [Engage the masses in participating in the festival] *Sputnik agitatora* no. 18 (1925), 37–39.

⁸⁵ Clark, *Petersburg, crucible of cultural revolution*, 127.

for the participants and spectators familiar with the symbolism of the "tree of freedom." For others, the mass dance might have been just a joyous finale of a triumphant struggle. In the ego documents authored by authors of proletarian background that I have consulted, I did not find any reflections on this subject or indeed mentions of it.

Another feature of *Mystery* that "followed the example of mass spectacles of that era" (that is, late eighteenth century) was, according to the Soviet art and theatre expert Orest Tsekhnovitser, the continuous musical accompaniment, which included Chopin's funeral march, fragments of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, 'gypsy songs' symbolizing the oppressors, and *Marseillaise* symbolizing the liberators.⁸⁶ Chopin's oeuvre and the *Marseillaise* had undeniable revolutionary significance in the Russian context: the funeral march accompanied revolutionary funerals in Russia at least since 1905, and one of the most popular Russian revolutionary songs was "The Workers' Marseillaise."⁸⁷ But by 1920, these two tunes had been long associated with the Russian, rather than the French, revolutionary tradition. Also, celebrating to the sounds of music and songs as such can hardly be considered a foreign lesson successfully learned. Thus, even given Lunacharsky's heightened attention to music and songs of the French revolution, "learning from the French experience" in this area remained limited.

Thus, even the event "most indebted" to the French example only reflected some of its features, and those indirectly. As for the other large-scale festivals and mass events of the first post-revolutionary years, they were even less close to the French models. I could not find references to the French experience in the protocols of the May and October commissions in Moscow, Ivanovo, and Yaroslavl in 1918-1925. As for large-scale national funerals – another type of mass event in the early Soviet urban landscape – they were also organized with regard to the

⁸⁶ Orest Tsekhnovitser, *Prazdnestva revolyutsii* [Festivals of the revolution] (Leningrad: Priboj, 1931), 18.

⁸⁷ See more on the topic below in Chapter 3.

Russian revolutionary tradition rather than the French one, as will be shown below in more detail. And this with all the detailed attention paid to the French revolutionary funerals by Thiersot and, through him, by Lunacharsky who, in 1924, mentioned the "solemn funeral marches when the leaders died" in his discussion of the French festivals.⁸⁸

Since many of Lunacharsky's comments regarding the usefulness of French examples came after the key mass festivals were organized, one might suspect this was a case of legacy constructed retrospectively. Additional evidence can be found in the already-cited work of Orest Tsekhnovitser. The 1931 book *Festivals of the Revolution* was an enlarged re-edition of his earlier work *Demonstratsia i karnaval* [Demonstration and Carnival] (1926), full of French references, and featured an epigraph from Robespierre. The art critic brought up the burning of monarchical artifacts in the Field of Mars during the Festival of the Constitution in 1792 to continue:

As if to follow this revolutionary tradition, during the 1917 Maydays in Petrograd and during the 1918 October festivities in Moscow at *Lobnoe mesto*, a huge mass of old tsar's portraits, crowns, eagles, and other attributes symbolizing the old regime was piled up in a heap. To the sounds of the *Internationale*, this bonfire was soaked in kerosene and burnt.⁸⁹

Symbolic burnings, burials, and other acts of carnivalesque destruction were indeed widespread in 1918 and beyond. Not just tsar's eagles and crowns: the Second International, 'Nicholas and Alix,' the Bourgeois, the Clergyman, the three-field agricultural system, or alcoholism – just about anything could be symbolically burned or buried during a Soviet

⁸⁸ Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Istoria zapadnoevropejskoj literatury v eyo vazhnejshikh momentakh. Vos'maya lektisia" [History of Western European Literature in its Key Moments. Lecture Eight], in: *Complete Works. Vol. 4* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1964), 211.

⁸⁹ Tsekhnovitser, *Prazdnestva revolyutsii*, 87. Lobnoe mesto was perceived as the traditional scaffold place in the popular conception, associated with executions from medieval times – a.p.

celebration.⁹⁰ But those who put the idea forward or participated in mass festivities in 1918 did not refer to the French experience.

Thus, in his secret telegram to Kamenev on October 24, 1918, Trotsky suggested "to burn an effigy of [the American president Woodrow] Wilson at the squares and send a radio message about it worldwide... Naturally, the destruction of Wilson should have a popular plebeian character."⁹¹ The Committee for organizing the October festivities informed the Moscow districts that on November 6, "there will be no marches ... but the evening of the first day of the festival is planned to end with gatherings at main squares of each District, and the subject for these evening gatherings should be the symbolic destruction of the Old Regime and the birth of the New Regime of the third international."⁹² *Pravda* reported that the "Burning of the Old Regime" took place in Moscow at *Lobnoe mesto*:

At eight hours sharp, an effigy depicting the village exploiter-kulak [*kulak-miroed*] was brought up the *Lobnoe mesto*, soaked in kerosene, and burnt down to ashes to the cheers of the assembled representatives of Moscow toilers. Burning the emblems of the old regime took place in the city districts as well. It was accompanied by speeches and fireworks and gathered huge crowds everywhere.⁹³

Organizers and ideologists did not need to engage distant historical precedents to suggest and conduct these illustrative events. The idea of symbolically destroying an enemy figure during a celebration of the new regime was evident, not least because it was consistently present in folk

⁹⁰ Tsekhnovitser brings more examples (*Prazdnestva revolyutsii*, 56). See also K. Godunov, "Obrazy vragov revolyutsii v prazdnovanii godovshiny Oktyabtya: Sozhzhenie izobrazhenij protivnikov (1918-1920 gg.)" [Images of enemies of the revolution in celebrating October anniversaries: Burning the enemies' images, 1918-1920] *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Istoriya*, 2 (29) (2015), 104–112. The idea lived on. In 1927, a certain N. Tikhomirov from Leningrad province authored the following "godless verse": *Net v molebnakh, brattsy, tolku, // Ne voz'myosh' ikonami // Khoronit' pojdyom trekhpolku // S krasnymi znamenami* [Brothers, there is no point in church service, and you won't buy us with icons! We will go bury the three-field system with red flags] (*Bezbozhnik u stanka* [Atheist at the Workbench] no. 1 (1927), 21).

⁹¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 3. Delo 814. List 5.

⁹² TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 3. Delo 814. List 43.

⁹³ *Pravda* no. 242 (November 9, 1918), 3.

traditions, such as burning the effigy of winter before the coming of spring. The French revolution as a significant precedent might have appeared in art history publications and theoretical discussions in the following years. Still, it hardly drove the organization of early Soviet events.

Surpassing the French

If revolutionary authorities, in their many guises, paid some attention to the propagation of the French revolutionary history in the first post-October years, they did not necessarily do it consistently or with too much attention to historical accuracy. Judging by the publications, brochures, and press debates in which the Bolshevik leaders participated during the first post-revolutionary decade, their position on French history and the use of French references was highly selective and determined by the needs of the hour. The construction of revolutionary lineage, as important as it turned out to be in subsequent years and even decades, was indirect. One pillar of this constructed legacy was the Marxian lens through which the Bolsheviks tended to regard history.

Karl Marx was fascinated by the French revolution and planned to write a book about the Convention. Nevertheless, he did not leave a consistent history or theory of it.⁹⁴ Furthermore, fascination did not mean that Marx intended to replay the revolutionary events from the late eighteenth century in a contemporary setting. According to Gerhard Kluchert, starting already from the 1840s, "Marx regard[ed] the French Revolution as a phenomenon to be overcome."⁹⁵ The philosopher highlighted differences between the 'bourgeois' French revolution and the future

⁹⁴ See for instance Jean Bruhat, "La Révolution française et la formation de la pensée de Marx," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* 184 (1966), 125–170 ; François Furet, *Marx et la Révolution française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986).

⁹⁵ Gerhard Kluchert, "The paradigm and the parody. Karl Marx and the French Revolution in the class struggles from 1848–1851," *History of European Ideas* 14 no. 1 (1992), 85–99: 85.

proletarian one. When searching for his ideological predecessors in the French context, Marx placed himself within the tradition "characterized by the names Babeuf, Buonarotti, and Blanqui – without, of course, simply echoing their theoretical and political ideas."⁹⁶

Fifty years later, Lenin picked up this line of thought. However knowledgeable he was in the history of the French revolution, he was more well-read in Marxism, and his views on the 1789 revolution were in no small degree shaped by his readings of Marx. In the infrequent comparisons Lenin made between revolutionary France and the current situation in Soviet Russia, the comparisons were always to the benefit of the latter.⁹⁷ While admitting the "world-history-making significance" [*vsemirno-istoricheskoe znachenie*] of the great French revolution, he insisted that "we find ourselves in much more favorable circumstances," "we are many times happier than the prominent figures of the French revolution," as the advances of the proletarian revolution for the proletariat were more significant than those of the bourgeois revolution for the bourgeoisie.⁹⁸

In the area of culture specifically, rare French references were usually quoted to underline the progress made by the proletariat since the late eighteenth century. In 1923, talking about the foundations of socialist culture, Evgeny Preobrazhensky used an example from French history to illustrate that "culture that had existed till this day was the culture of the dominant classes," and juxtaposed it to the bright future that lay ahead in a socialist society. In pre-revolutionary France, he reminded, "France that we usually imagine as a country with humming intellectual life, where

⁹⁶ Kluchert, "The paradigm and the parody," 86.

⁹⁷ Alistair Wright believed that Lenin was more attentive to the Jacobin history, but the evidence supporting this point of view seems insufficient. See Alistair S. Wright, "Guns and Guillotines: State Terror in the Russian and French Revolutions," *Revolutionary Russia* 20, no. 2 (2007): 173–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546540701633478>.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Lenin, "Tretij vserossijskij sjezd sovetov rabochikh, soldatskikh i krestyanskikh deputatov, yanvar' 1918 g." [The Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of the Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies, January 1918] *Complete Works Vol. 35*, 261–290; "Doklad na II Vserossijskom sjezde professional'nykh soyuzov, 20 yanvarya 1919 g." [Report at the Second All-Russian Congress of Professional Unions, January 20, 1919] *Complete Works Vol. 37*, 435–453; "Vos'moj sjezd RKP (b), mart 1919 g." [The Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), March 1919], *Complete Works Vol. 38*, 127–215; "K chetyrehletnej godovschine Oktyabrya" [To the Fourth Anniversary of October], *Complete Works Vol. 44*, 144–152.

the Encyclopedia was published already a few decades before the revolution, where freethinkers caused a sensation, and materialistic philosophy was developing," only a small part of the population could participate in cultural production.⁹⁹ This situation, Preobrazhensky asserted, should be improved in a socialist society.

Some scholars believed that Leon Trotsky "was steeped in the history of the French Revolution. He regularly looked at the Bolshevik Revolution through the prism of the French and was even keen to stage an extravagant trial for Nicholas II in the manner of that arranged for Louis XVI."¹⁰⁰ Still, Jay Bergman observed that Trotsky wrote little of the French revolution before the mid-1920s. When he did, "references to the French revolution in his writings [we]re, with one exception, infrequent, most of them in the nature of marginal comments corroborating his principal point that Russia's destiny was different from that of Western Europe ... their point [wa]s to demonstrate the inappropriateness of historical analogy, both in the specific instance of the French Revolution and, more generally, as a tool of political analysis."¹⁰¹ When it came to culture, Trotsky was one of the key participants in the public debate on the new Soviet everyday in the early 1920s. As will be shown below in further detail, in that discussion, he never flashed his knowledge of the French revolution, preferring to stick to the examples and metaphors taken from the Russian context, which were undoubtedly closer to the hearts of his audience.

Lunacharsky was among the few Bolshevik leaders who openly referred to the French experience in the cultural sphere or used it as an analogy. He was fascinated by revolutionary festivals and the figure of Robespierre, whom he counted, with Rousseau, among the "harbingers

⁹⁹ Evgeny Preobrazhensky, *O material'noj baze kul'tury v sotsialisticheskom obshchestve. Doklad, sdannyj v Tsentral'nom klube Moskovskogo Proletkul'ta im. F. I. Kalinina* [On the material foundations of culture in a socialist society. Report in the Central Club of the Moscow Proletkul't named after Fyodor Kalinin] (Moscow: Vserossijskiy proletkul't, 1923), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, "Guns and Guillotines," 178.

¹⁰¹ Jay Bergman, "The Perils of Historical Analogy: Leon Trotsky on the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 1 (1987): 73–98: 79.

of socialist theatre." In 1920, after the May Day celebration, *Vestnik teatra* [The Theatre Bulletin], the press organ of Narkompros Theatre Department, put up the following quotes: "There is nothing more magnificent in the world than man, and no spectacle is more magnificent than a spectacle of the nation gathered" (Robespierre), "Let the audience be the spectacle; make themselves actors; let everyone see and love themselves in others so that the association between people became closer" (Rousseau).¹⁰² Lunacharsky kept returning to this formula with slight changes.¹⁰³ However, even the Commissaire of Enlightenment eventually concluded that the Soviet revolution was superior to the French. In 1924, he asserted that "we should... go beyond the French revolution ... our proletarian culture will have to fixate many of the things that the semi-proletarian, more or less popular [*narodnaya*] Jacobin revolutionary France started already back in the day."¹⁰⁴

The area of culture in which the French experience seemed most in demand for Soviet leadership was the antireligious struggle. But even in this case, the Bolshevik leaders' references to it were broad and mediated. Lenin, for instance, did not focus much on the questions of religion and antireligious struggles as such. For him, as for Marx, religion was "a form of 'spiritual oppression,'" "merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society."¹⁰⁵ In *Socialism and Religion*, 1905 ("his most developed statement on the subject," according to Victoria Smolkin), Lenin briefly mentioned the French antireligious experience that could have been useful

¹⁰² "Provozvestniki sotsialisticheskogo teatra" [Harbingers of socialist theatre], *Vestnik teatra. Izdanie TEO Narkomprosa*, no 62. (April 27 – May 2, 1920), 3.

¹⁰³ In the same issue of *Vestnik teatra*, in an article under his own name, Lunacharsky quoted Robespierre as saying that "to conceive themselves, the masses should express themselves, and this is only possible when they are a spectacle for themselves." (Lunacharsky, "O narodnykh prazdnestvakh," 4). In 1925, he "had no doubt that Robespierre had been profoundly correct when he spoke about the masses' passion for broad mass spectacles where the nation and its labor greatness or the revolution are at the same time the audience and the spectacle." (Lunacharsky, "Dlya chego my sokhranyaem Bol'shoj teatr" [Why do we keep the Bolshoi theatre], *Complete Works, Vol. 3*, 249–252. First edition: Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Upravleniya gosudarstvennykh akademicheskikh teatrov, 1925).

¹⁰⁴ Lunacharsky, "Istoria zapadnoevropejskoj literatury v eyo vazhnejshikh momentakh. Vos'maya leksia," 211, 213. Lunacharsky first taught this course in literature history in 1923–24.

¹⁰⁵ Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 12.

for scientific materialists of the twentieth century. He quoted Engels: "We should now perhaps follow the advice Engels once gave to German socialists: translate and propagate the French enlightening and atheist literature from the eighteenth century."¹⁰⁶ In the same article, Lenin first used the famous phrase "Religion is the opium of the people," taken from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.¹⁰⁷

Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, in 1925, recalled that for Lenin, the major contribution of the French revolution to the antireligious cause was the bulk of "atheist" literature produced by the *philosophes*. Working on an antireligious series for *Zhizn' i Znaniye* [Life and Knowledge], Bonch-Bruевич discussed its content with Lenin, who approved of the idea and "found it necessary to make excerpts from the works of atheists and materialists from the era of the Great French revolution." In his opinion, "Voltaire's mockeries of Catholicism were highly useful for disinfecting people's brain from the miasma of the religious fog."¹⁰⁸ Still, apart from quoting Lenin's desire to publish French atheist philosophers, other Bolshevik thinkers and theoreticians of antireligious struggle – Bonch-Bruевич and Emelyan Yaroslavsky, for instance – never mentioned French antireligious moves in relation to the envisioned Soviet policies.¹⁰⁹ Against such initiatives as confiscation of church property, openings of relics, or destruction of icons, publishing century-old, translated pamphlets was hardly among the most effective measures in the Soviet domestic policy.

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir Lenin, "Sotsializm i religia" [Socialism and Religion], first published in *Novaya Zhizn'*, №28 (December 3, 1905). *Complete Works*, Vol. 12, 142–147: 145.

¹⁰⁷ This phrase can, with minor variations, be traced back to Rousseau's *New Heloise* – another subtle reference to the French philosophy of the revolutionary era.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, "V. I. Lenin o massovoj ateisticheskoy propagande" [V. I. Lenin on mass atheist propaganda] (1925), in: *Izbrannye ateisticheskie proizvedeniya* [Selected writings on atheism], (Moscow: Mysl', 1973), 62–63.

¹⁰⁹ Emelyan Yaroslavsky, "Mysli Lenina o religii" [Lenin's thoughts on religion], 1924, In: *O religii* [On religion] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1958), 46–100: 50.

Even indirect borrowings and references to the French context were few and sporadic in general early Soviet culture. Furthermore, although these references indicated a connection, they also emphasized the distance covered since the eighteenth century. Unlike the areas of culture, religion, or everyday life, where for the Bolshevik leaders, the French experience remained a repertoire of rhetorical analogies, the French-Soviet connection was more prominent in the spheres related to violence.

War, terror, violence, and death in the two revolutions

Both before and after October 1917, top party figures frequently referred to the Reign of Terror, revolutionary wars and armies, violent political struggles, instances of capital punishment, and other telling images from the French revolutionary decade. Before October, the parallels could have been more cautious and general. Thus, in March 1917, Yuri Steklov – at the time, the member of the Petrosovet Executive Committee and the chief editor of *Izvestia* – invoked the French example in the Petrograd Soviet.¹¹⁰ In his speech on March 14, he reminded the audience of the French revolutionary tradition, which included 1830 and 1848 but began in 1789 when "our great ally France had first shaken itself free from the yoke of monarchical power and announced to the world the basic rights of man and citizen." According to Steklov, the French revolutionary army was a predecessor of Russian revolutionary soldiers.¹¹¹ In the summer of the same year, Lenin highlighted the succession and the difference between the French and the Russian revolutionaries, maintaining that "the 'Jacobins' of the twentieth century would not guillotine the capitalists because

¹¹⁰ Mikhail V. Fedorov, "Redaktory 'Izvestij Petrogradskogo soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov' v 1917 g." [Editors of *Izvestia of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies* in 1917], *Vestnik SPbGU* 2 no. 4 (2013), 69–79: 69, 70.

¹¹¹ *The Petrograd Soviet in 1917*, 303.

to imitate a worthy model was not to copy it." Instead, he believed that arresting a few hundred "magnates" and "bankers" and putting them under workers' control would be sufficient.¹¹²

After the Bolshevik takeover, the rhetoric became more assertive. While wondering how "one can make a revolution without firing squads," Lenin nevertheless tried to stay distant from "the terrorism of the French revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed men."¹¹³ Trotsky, on the other hand, was more openly aggressive, warning that the terror would "assume very violent forms, after the example of the great French Revolution."¹¹⁴ The intensity of references to the French experience was such that some scholars were led to believe that this influence "may well have been significant in shaping their policies during and after 1917" and that "it is clear that the Bolshevik leader drew upon the experiences of the French Revolution and found in it a source of guidance and inspiration when it came to the Red Terror."¹¹⁵

While there indeed can be little doubt that "the party's leading figures... were acutely aware of these precedents from French history," as the quoted article suggested, it did not necessarily mean the reproduction of solutions or policies. While analogies often hang in the air, it is hard to find sufficiently convincing evidence for the Bolsheviks' decisions being directed or dictated by historical precedents. As the overview of Lenin's post-October writings suggests, the violent expressions of the French precedent were quoted occasionally, not systematically, and rather as a supportive rhetorical device than as a justification.

The most frequent reference to the French experience in Lenin's writings after October 1917 was the contemporary "English-French "imperialism" and "capitalism" triggered by the uneasy international reception of the Bolshevik coup and subsequent foreign intervention. Thus,

¹¹² Mayer, *The Furies*, 255.

¹¹³ Mayer, *The Furies*, 255.

¹¹⁴ Mayer, *The Furies*. 256.

¹¹⁵ Wright, "Guns and Guillotines," 178.

in 1918, Lenin repeatedly condemned the "large advance of English-French-American imperialism against the Russian Soviet Republic" and proclaimed that "the recent history...proved that the English-French imperialism was as odious as the German imperialism."¹¹⁶

When Lenin gave more general comments supported by historical examples, his position proved flexible and fluctuated over the years.¹¹⁷ In some cases, he found it meaningless to compare "bourgeois" revolutionary France and Soviet Russia. In February 1918, he juxtaposed "vanquished feudalism, stabilized bourgeois liberty, and well-fed peasant against the feudal countries" that constituted the foundation for the French military successes in 1792-93 and "a country of small peasants, hungry and exhausted by the war, a country that had just started to heal the war wounds, against the labor productivity that is technically and organizationally superior," that was "the objective situation" of the Soviet republic in 1918.¹¹⁸ Notably, only a few days after this publication highlighting the futility of comparison, the Sovnarkom decree "Socialist Homeland is in Danger!" was published, whose title rephrased that of the French declaration from 1792.

In other cases, a comparison could make sense but only to suggest that the October revolution was for the proletariat, what the great European revolutions had been to the bourgeoisie. Therefore, contemporary Europeans should not complain about the methods the Bolsheviks used as their ancestors had recurred to similar techniques in their time. In the "Letter to American Workers" in August 1918, Lenin argued that the English and French bourgeoisie accusing the Bolsheviks of recurring to terror had forgotten "the English bourgeois, their 1649, the French, their

¹¹⁶ Vladimir Lenin, "Rech' na rabochej konferentsii Presnenskogo rayona, 14 dekabrya 1918 g." [Speech at the Workers' Conference in the Presnenskiy district, December 14, 1918], "Sobranie partijnykh rabotnikov Moskvyy, 27 noyabrya 1918 g." [Assembly of the Moscow Party officials, November 27, 1918] in: *Complete Works*. Vol. 37. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1969), 207-233; 370-383.

¹¹⁷ See for example: Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The French Revolution in Lenin's Mind: The Case of the 'False Consciousness,'" *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research* 44, no. 4 (1995): 247-62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.1995.9972548>; Jay Bergman, "The Paris Commune in Bolshevik Mythology," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1412-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceu270>.

¹¹⁸ Lenin, "O revolyutsionnoj fraze" [On revolutionary phrasemongery], *Complete Works*, Vol. 37, 343-353: 346.

1793. Terror was just and lawful when the bourgeoisie used it to its benefit against the feudalists. Terror became appalling and criminal when workers and poorest peasants dared to use it against the bourgeoisie!"¹¹⁹ Similarly, in March 1919, he reminded his audience at the First Congress of the Communist International that "the bourgeoisie, when it was revolutionary, did not grant the freedom of gathering to monarchists and aristocrats ... neither in 1649 England nor in 1793 France," and therefore, it should not demand from the proletariat to grant such freedom to the exploiting classes in 1919.¹²⁰

These examples suggest that Lenin, like many of his contemporaries, regarded the French revolution as less of a comprehensive model to imitate but rather a set of cases that could be employed to support an argument when the need arose. Depending on the goals of a particular speech or publication, the same instances could be praised as progressive for their time or looked down upon as not as advanced as the proletarian character of the October revolution. Such flexibility was partly possible because Lenin usually did not cite factual details from French history. Instead, he operated with broad political and historical-philosophical concepts like "revolutionary war," "terror," or "bourgeoisie," using them not as explanatory but as rhetorical devices to enforce rather than formulate his arguments.

And yet, one can observe that of all episodes of the French revolution, Lenin tended to invoke 1792, the year of revolutionary wars, and 1793, the year of terror. This inclination was hardly accidental: violence was closely associated with revolution, perhaps lay at its core, and the relationship between violence and revolution constantly raised questions among the Bolsheviks and their supporters, but also among representatives of other left-wing parties. Is revolutionary

¹¹⁹ Lenin, "Pis'mo k amerikanskim rabochim" [Letter to American workers], *Complete Works*, Vol. 37, 48–64: 59.

¹²⁰ Lenin, "Tezisy i doklad o burzhuasnoj demokratii i diktature proletariata" [Theses and speech regarding the bourgeois democracy and proletarian dictatorship], *Complete Works*, Vol. 37, 489–511: 494.

violence justifiable, or avoidable, or desirable, or simply necessary for a new regime to survive? Can it be controlled or manipulated, and to what extent? What consequences could it have? Finding themselves amid a prolonged militarized conflict, the Bolsheviks looked back to the past, including the French historical past – perhaps not precisely for inspiration, but at least for reference.

For the current study, the topic of revolutionary violence occupies a special place as violence was a constant source of excessive deaths that would not have happened if not for the revolution. In France, as in Russia, a spectrum of attitudes towards the necessity of violence overlapped with the often-unplanned results of internal and external armed action, causing abnormalities and excesses that came to be associated with the revolution as such.

Many aspects of the militarized violence and armed conflicts that accompanied the French and Russian revolution were similar. In the initial stages, instances of grassroots violence marked the passage from the pre-revolutionary to the revolutionary era. Further developments escalated to trigger internal wars and large-scale peasant unrest that were aggravated by external military action. On the political home front, regicide hit the core of the old order, while mutual aggression between revolutionary factions corroded the new governments.

Nevertheless, Arno Mayer was not incorrect when he asserted that "the contrast between France in 1789 and Russia in 1917 could not be more striking."¹²¹ There was a range of differences between late eighteenth-century France and early twentieth-century Russia in 1917, which Lenin pointed out in the abovementioned speech, and there was also a range of significant differences in the unfolding of the revolutionary events. As Mayer summarized,

When the Bastille fell, the Bourbon monarchy was at peace with Europe. Despite a momentary budgetary squeeze, its public finances and economy were sound, and so was its state apparatus, including the armed forces. Not surprisingly, the French Revolution heated up only gradually: it took between three and four years for

¹²¹ Mayer, *The Furies*, 229, 227.

France to go to war, for Louis XVI to be tried and executed, for civil war to erupt in the Vendée, and for terror to be put *à l'ordre du jour*.¹²²

In Russia, Mayer continued, "the pace was altogether quicker:" the revolution, civil war, foreign intervention, the execution of the royal family, and the start of the Red Terror all happened within merely two years. But did the velocity of events have a decisive influence on revolutionary death and its treatments in the two cases, or was there still similarity in responses to similar situations? In what follows, I take a closer look at a few similar types of deadly violence occurring under revolutionary circumstances – mob violence at the early stages of revolution, war violence, and lethal aggression against fellow revolutionaries – to set the context for the subsequent comparison of death-related policies and practices in France and Soviet Russia.

Mob violence, mob justice

Spontaneous outbreaks of popular urban violence and mob justice were inseparable from the revolutionary events in France and Russia since the very first days. Yet, very soon, the respective new governments faced the difficulty of positioning themselves against (or alongside) such cases and evaluating them. On the one hand, those expressions of people's freedom and popular sovereignty resonated with the revolutionary message of liberation and re-ordering of society on fairer grounds. On the other hand, the brutality of these assaults often made a grim impression, and the spontaneous character of these violent outbursts made them hard to predict, direct, and control, which could compromise or even endanger the new regime.

¹²² Mayer, *The Furies*, 227.

In France, already over the first revolutionary week in mid-July 1789, Parisian crowds killed four prominent *ancien régime* officials.¹²³ Their heads were severed and paraded across the city on tops of pikes – a striking and threatening image that became a veritable symbol of the revolution and a practice that spread across revolutionary towns up to 1792.¹²⁴ The image stuck not least because of its novelty: such spectacle "seems to have been entirely new. There are few known instances of heads paraded on pikes in earlier centuries ... But all these antecedents were exceptional and were designed to degrade and humiliate the victim."¹²⁵ But more importantly, the phenomenon marked a definitive passage of sovereignty from the former elites to *peuple français*.

Before July 1789, the monopoly on violence resided with the sovereign king and his representatives. Public acts of violence committed by ordinary people were punishable crimes. The declarative character of killing state officials in 1789 and beyond clearly manifested the revolutionary transformation of power relations and restoration of historical justice. As Regina Janes aptly observed, "When the people cut off and displayed the head of a 'traitor,' they made the 'sovereignty of the people' more than a pretty compliment. They enacted that sovereignty by exercising a traditional prerogative of the sovereign."¹²⁶

The instances of popular violence were not random: all four victims were assassinated for their alleged abuse of power associated with their elevated social position.¹²⁷ For their assassins,

¹²³ Richard D. E. Burton, "Violent Origins: The Taking of the Bastille, July 1789," in *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 29–36. See also J. J. Guiffrey, "Documents inédits sur le mouvement populaire du 14 juillet 1789 et le supplice de M. De Launay, gouverneur de la Bastille, et de Berthier de Sauvigny," *Revue historique* 1, no. 2 (1876), 497–508.

¹²⁴ William Beik, "The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution," *Past and Present* 197, no. 1 (2007), 75–110: 101.

¹²⁵ Beik, "The Violence of the French Crowd," 98.

¹²⁶ Regina Janes, "Beheadings," *Representations* no. 35 (1991), 21–51: 24.

¹²⁷ Bernard René Jourdan, Marquis de Launay, was not just any official: his family was in charge of the Bastille for decades, and he inherited his governance of the hated prison. Jacques de Flesselles, the provost of Paris merchants and the president of the city's provisional assembly, was suspected of deliberately misleading the crowds and urging de Launay to resist the revolutionaries, which eventually resulted in the storming and casualties among the crowds. (Beik, "The Violence of the French Crowd," 98; Burton, "Violent origins," 35). Louis Bénigne Bertier de Sauvigny, the intendant of Paris and, at the time, also the intendant of the army, was suspected of organizing grain shortages in

violence against them had an air of restoring historical justice and making amends for old wrongs. This attitude might explain the adherence to quasi-legal procedures: the accused were taken to Hôtel de Ville, the seat of the elected provisional government, for interrogations, and some accusations were formally voiced.¹²⁸ There was rarely any solid proof of their guilt, but the accused were destroyed anyway – a solution perceived as just by those who executed it. Thus, the cook named Desnot, a man who severed one of the victims' heads, took pride in his deed. According to the interrogation protocol, "he believed that he had performed a patriotic act and deserved a medal."¹²⁹

Ad hoc trials also took place three years later during an episode known as the September massacres. Against an increasingly tense political background – recent overturn of the monarchy, imprisonment of the royal family, and Prussian and Austrian troops marching towards Paris – the rumors intensified about complots and conspiracies that could put France in even more danger.¹³⁰ Prisons, believed to be hotspots of counterrevolutionary menace, became a target of popular violence.¹³¹ Between September 2 and 7, 1792, crowds consisting mainly of *fédérés*, members of the National Guard, and *sans-culottes* attacked several Parisian prisons, publicly interrogated the

the city. His father-in-law Joseph François Foullon, the council of state and prospective minister, was known for his arrogance: commenting on the threat of hunger, he notoriously said: "If they (people) are hungry, they should graze off the grass." ("S'ils ont faim, qu'ils broutent l'herbe," Quoted from Alain Cohen, "L'assassinat de l'Intendant de Paris le 22 juillet 1789, un prélude à la Grande Peur," *La Révolution Française*, no. 12 (2017), 1–18 : 3).

¹²⁸ De Launay was killed on the way to Hôtel de Ville. De Fleselles and Bertier de Sauvigny were killed on exiting Hôtel de Ville after interrogation. Foulon was hanged near the building. As Colin Lucas pointed out, "the crowd ... insisted on having an *ad hoc* court of lawyers set up then and there to try him." When it came to constituting the court, the mob "did not choose men from its own ranks but, rather, elite figures with public functions ... It was only with the procrastination of these figures that the crowd reverted to its traditional behavior" (Colin Lucas, "The Crowd and Politics between 'Ancien Regime' and Revolution in France," *The Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 3 (1988), 421–57: 443, 445). See also Simon Schama, *Citizens: A chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 405–406.

¹²⁹ Guiffrey, " Documents inédits, " 504.

¹³⁰ See more in Frédéric Bluché, *Septembre 1792 : Logique d'un massacre* (Paris : R. Laffont, 1986).

¹³¹ The Swiss officers of the royal detachment that defended the king of August 10 were put in the prison de l'Abbaye. See Bluché, *Septembre 1792*, 21. On the role of rumors, see Timothy Tackett, "Rumor and Revolution: The Case of the September Massacres," *French History and Civilization* 4 (2011), 54–64; Côme Simien, " Rumeurs et Révolution : la saison des massacres de septembre 1792 ," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* 402, no. 4 (2020), 3–31.

confined, and deciding whether to execute them on the spot or let them go. By different estimates, 1100 to 1400 people were killed in five days.¹³² A wave of similar massacres swept the country between July and October 1792: Donald M. G. Sutherland quotes Caron and Bluché in their estimate of "244 murders in 72 such incidents in the summer of 1792 alone."¹³³

The *septembriseurs* made efforts to reproduce the visibility of legal procedures. In most cases, there were improvised trials with charges read aloud and sentences pronounced before the prisoner was executed or set free.¹³⁴ Adhering to the procedure transformed an act of brutality into an act of justice.¹³⁵ As in 1789, executions were public and mostly happened in broad daylight, contrary to a popular misconception. Côme Simien, who made this observation, explained it by the sense of legitimacy: "There was no reason to hide in the darkness if the recourse to deadly violence in order to punish the enemies of the homeland was perceived as legitimate."¹³⁶

What distinguished the September massacres from the earlier instances of popular violence was its preventative character. If in July 1789, the crowds eliminated *ancien régime* officials,

¹³² See more in Pierre Caron, "La Commune de Paris et les Massacres de Septembre," *La Révolution française: revue historique, tome quatre-vingt-cinquième* (1932), 16–41.

¹³³ D. M. G. Sutherland, "Justice and Murder: Massacres in the Provinces, Versailles, Meaux, and Reims in 1792," *Past and Present* 222 (2014), 129–62: 132. See also part IV in Pierre Caron, *Les Massacres de Septembre* (Paris, Maison du Livre Français, 1935).

¹³⁴ Despite William Beik's assertion that "in 1792, the victims were indiscriminately condemned by virtue of the simple fact that they were incarcerated together and associated with an imagined plot organized by aristocrats," (Beik, "The violence of the French crowd," 105), there are reasons to believe that prison killings across France have been selective. In the words of Colin Lucas, "although the mobilizing factors and the definitions of 'enemy' were of the evolved type, the crowd clearly took pains – and, in some cases, lengthy pains – to distinguish between individuals, liberating some and killing others" (Lucas, "The Crowd and Politics between 'Ancien Regime' and Revolution," 447). Principles of decision-making were blurry. In Paris, common criminals were executed along with refractory priests and aristocrats. Discussing a similar event from a later date, Lucas showed that "the crowd that murdered counterrevolutionaries at Aix-en-Provence ... also strung up a couple of thieves and a rapist;" according to Sutherland, in Meaux, "debtors were released, but those merely suspected of heinous crimes such as murder were killed" (Lucas, "The crowd and politics," 448; Sutherland, "Justice and Murder," 149).

¹³⁵ Haim Burstin hypothesized that the goal of holding on to the procedure was not only to "transform the savage violence into a legitimate act but also to make it more tolerable in the eyes of those who exercised it." Haim Burstin, "Pour une phénoménologie de la violence révolutionnaire: réflexions autour du cas parisien," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 29, no. 3 (2003), 389–407: 403.

¹³⁶ Côme Simien, "Septembre 1792 : un mois de massacre en clair-obscur", in Philippe Bourdin (dir.), *Les nuits de la Révolution française* (Clermont Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2013), 61–78 : 67.

recompensing their (alleged) misdeeds against the French people, in September 1792, they were destroying people already isolated by the revolutionary authorities, eradicating crimes that were yet to happen. Manifestations of violence changed as well. As Brian Singer noted, with body parts paraded on pikes across the French cities, "popular violence prior to the September massacres made a spectacle of the victim and his mutilation."¹³⁷ After the September massacres, bodies were left to pile in prison yards for the authorities to control their removal and burial – not a spectacle of power and intimidation but that of disdain and neglect.¹³⁸

Instances of popular violence provoked deep concerns among the authorities. In 1789, the elected representatives, worried about the possibility of it going out of control, tried to navigate between adopting new regulations to prevent further escalation of violence and redefining it as rightful actions of virtuous people (whether the people were virtuous or not was also reconsidered over the following years).¹³⁹ In 1792, there have long been suspicions that violence *was*, in fact, planned or instigated by the press, specifically Marat's *Ami du peuple*, or the authorities, specifically Danton and the *Comité de surveillance*, but spiraled out of control of those who designed it.¹⁴⁰ Directing it was indeed a challenge, and soon enough, the monopoly on violence

¹³⁷ Brian C. Singer, "Violence in the French Revolution: Forms of Ingestion / Forms of Expulsion," *Social Research* 56, no. 1 (1989), 263–93: 278.

¹³⁸ According to Caron, the transport and burial began on the night of September 2-3 (Caron, "La Commune de Paris et les Massacres de Septembre," 27). Bodies were taken to the outskirts of Paris "where they were buried in pits covered with chalk" (Singer, "Violence in the French Revolution," 279). In Paris, there was no marching with severed heads, even though it sometimes took place in the provinces, as Donald Sutherland showed (Sutherland, "Justice and Murder," 154).

¹³⁹ On the discussions in the National Assembly regarding the July killings see Cohen, "L'assassinat de l'Intendant de Paris," 11–12; Beik, "The violence of the French crowd," 103–104.

¹⁴⁰ A review of historiography covering Danton's possible participation in preparing the September massacres see in: Côme Simien, "Un ministre face aux massacres de septembre 1792," in: Michel Biard et Hervé Leuwers, *Danton. Le mythe et l'Histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2016), 55–69. On the role of the press see for instance Bluché, *Septembre 1792*, chapter 1. Pierre Caron in his series of articles for *La Révolution française* (1932, see above) shows the weak sides of three main arguments in favor of the premeditated character of the massacres. Pierre Caron and Albert Soboul arrive to the conclusion that September massacres were not pre-planned. Frédéric Bluché, while pointing to their engaged judgement, however, does not provide more convincing evidence supporting a different point of view.

returned to the state, taking multiple forms of terror. And yet, these early instances were directly associated with revolutionary-specific violence, creating revolutionary-specific deaths.

In Russia, the early stages of the revolution did not engender a memorable image of a nobleman hanged on a streetlamp or a severed head carried across the city on top of a pike. Given that since its early days, the Russian revolution involved the interaction of larger armed groups, it can be that singular instances of popular violence were overshadowed by movements of regiments and crowds. Yet, since the first days of the February revolution, however "bloodless" it might have seemed, Russian peasants attacked landlords and seized their land, workers established factory workers' committees at the cost of owners' and managers' lives, and soldiers and sailors raised their weapons against officers, while on the streets of the Russian cities, violent crime skyrocketed, causing an asymmetrically violent response.¹⁴¹

Many instances of violence in the Russian revolution were targeted at the previously superior. Several studies have analyzed the army and navy mutinies and violent aggression against the officers during the first revolutionary summer.¹⁴² These cases, as in France, signaled the inversion of power relations, if not their erosion. The sense of settling centuries-long scores between the upper crust and the ordinary people and retributing the accomplices of tsarism (such as policemen) was very much present in Russia. But perhaps more than that, popular violence in 1917 had an air of installing freedom, which was widely associated with no restrictions at all.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ See Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment in the Russian Revolution: Mob Justice and Police in Petrograd* (Cambridge (MA): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁴² On the details of aggression against officers see for example: I. Grebenkin, "The Disintegration of the Russian Army in 1917: Factors and Actors in the Process," *Russian Studies in History* 56 (3), 172–187; Mikhail Elizarov, *Prichiny levogo ekstremizma na flote v period revolyutsionnykh sobytij 1917 goda I Grazhdanskoj vojny* [Reasons for the leftist extremism in the navy during the revolutionary events of 1917 and the Civil War] (Saint Petersburg: SPb VMI, 2001). On the incidence of mutinies and insurrections in the tsarist army, see for example John Bushnell, "The Revolution of 1905-06 in the Army: The Incidence and Impact of Mutiny," *Russian History-Histoire Russe*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1985), 71–94.

¹⁴³ Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 15; 106-107; 167.

Other instances of mob violence were more situational. They could rather fit into the category of on-the-spot justice, aimed not against the historically unfair distribution of power and resources but rather against the perpetrators of everyday crimes. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, who studied the criminal incidence in Petrograd in 1917, made an overview of the eighty-six cases of mob justice with known targets. Of those,

fifty-two were suspected criminals. Twenty-two of the suspected criminals were petty thieves and pickpockets, seventeen were armed robbers who inflicted no bodily injuries, ten were armed robbers who inflicted injuries, two were murderers, and one was a rapist. Other victims included twelve militiamen, nine merchants, nine political opponents, two bystanders, and two hospital personnel.¹⁴⁴

The immediate punishment that befell the suspects – they were brutally beaten by the crowd or shot on the spot or on the way to commissariats and local police stations – was far more violent than the nature of their crimes would warrant. Among the sources of street violence, Hasegawa mentioned the influence of the World War experience on the veterans and deserters and the inability of militia to prevent the crime rate rise. But the violent response to the not-so-violent crime only "contributed to escalating lawlessness and violence."¹⁴⁵

In terms of the ideological commitments of the parties involved, this violence could hardly be labeled revolutionary. Hasegawa's analysis of Petrograd crowd justice suggested that the usual crowd executing on-the-spot justice "probably was not politically organized or attuned to social movements."¹⁴⁶ And while from the Bolshevik perspective, any attack against the old order worked in favor of the revolution, and Lenin "would continue to equate mob violence with political expression as he rallied the party toward armed insurrection," there are reasons to suggest that the violence was a situational response to the disintegration of power.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 169-170.

¹⁴⁵ Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 273-274; Chapter 4 "Militias Rise and Fall;" 172.

¹⁴⁶ Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 179.

¹⁴⁷ Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 190.

In contemporaries' reports about grassroots violence, actors remain unidentified. According to eyewitnesses' stories and rumors, armed anonyms and "revolutionary masses" of soldiers, sailors, or peasants shared responsibility for the spontaneous violent attacks. One feature radical enough to manifest a difference between peaceful times and the revolutionary period was the destruction of enemies' bodies. Stripping the corpses naked, dismemberment, cutting them into pieces, throwing them into rivers, or burning them were aplenty in the contemporaries' stories about street violence. These stories were all the more horrifying as they represented a violation of all traditional norms related to the burial and treatment of the dead.

According to Georgy Knyazev, in March 1917, Kronstadt soldiers not only killed their officers but destroyed their bodies: they "allegedly cut officers into pieces and danced on these pieces of dead bodies to the sounds of music;"¹⁴⁸ "They not only cut and burned officers at stake, but pulled them to pieces alive, and then trampled and burned them."¹⁴⁹ Daniil Fibikh, from Penza, recited a similar case of local soldiers who killed a hated officer: "The crowd has completely crushed the unfortunate Bem ... But the most outrageous, the most disgusting thing was the abuse of the dead body. How much must the soldiers have hated him if everyone held it their duty to kick the ugly, crushed, blood-covered corpse or spit upon it? They tore all the clothes off him, and the corpse was laying there completely naked."¹⁵⁰

Physical abuse and striving for complete disintegration of the enemies' bodies was typical for mob violence in 1917 and beyond. It is not entirely clear whether these actions were meant as intimidation for enemies yet in hiding. But the fact that the act of violence often happened in broad

¹⁴⁸ Georgy Knyazev, "Iz zapisnoj knizhki russkogo intelligenta vo vremya vojny i revolyutsii, 1915-1922 gg. [From the notebooks of a Russian intellectual written during the war and the revolution, 1915-1922]," *Russkoe proshloe. Istoriko-dokumental'nyj almanakh* no. 2 (Leningrad: Svelen, 1991), 97–200: 136.

¹⁴⁹ Georgy Knyazev, *Diary*. 1917. March 7. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/343533>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Daniil Fibikh, *Diary*. 1917. March 18/5. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/171274>, accessed on June 13, 2023.

daylight added to the overall atmosphere of revolutionary havoc, which later was partially capitalized upon by the Bolsheviks and that logically grew into the everyday violence of the Civil War era.

Is war the father of all things?

One noticeable difference between the French and the Russian revolution regarding violence was the "omnipresence of war" in the Russian case. While France entered its revolutionary era as a relatively peaceful country, Russia had been at war since 1914. The war was influencing mortality rates, everyday practices, social norms (to an extent), and political and administrative solutions adopted over the first post-revolutionary decade. My study does not specifically focus on the situation at multiple war fronts and deaths caused by militarized violence, but a few notes are necessary to contextualize the subsequent analysis.

Several years of fighting in World War I preceded the revolution in Russia. Despite the difference in longer-term outcomes, neither the World War experience nor its revolutionary development was unique to Russia. As Peter Holquist convincingly demonstrated in his prominent study, "Throughout much of central and eastern Europe, the war wound down in an extended convulsion of revolutions and civil strife. In this light, the violence of the Russian civil wars appears not as something perversely Russian or uniquely Bolshevik, but rather as the most advanced case of a more extended European civil war, beginning with the Great War and stretching several years after its formal conclusion."¹⁵¹ The shared experience of war drew the Soviet people closer to their contemporaries and put early Soviet Russia in line with other European countries

¹⁵¹ Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Harvard University Press, 2002), 4.

living through the consequences of World War I – a connection that the Bolshevik propaganda did not emphasize, preferring to focus on the uniqueness of the socialist state.

Holquist went on to argue that the Bolsheviks carried over into peacetime "the institutions and practices of total mobilization (that) became the building blocks of both a new state and a new socio-economic order."¹⁵² Notably, he showed that many of the solutions used during the war were proposed not by the radical left but by tsarist officials and parastate organizations. These solutions included means of coercion and suppression that later became characteristic of the Soviet state, which suggests that links between the Bolsheviks and the tsarist regime were closer than the imagined ideological continuity between the Bolsheviks and the Jacobins.

The World War experience also directly influenced the brutality of the Russian Civil War, which, as Mayer pointed out, was "of much greater importance in the Russian than the French revolution."¹⁵³ Several other scholars, including Stephen Cohen, Robert Tucker, and Sheila Fitzpatrick, highlighted the importance of being at war for the subsequent political developments in the Soviet state. Notably, Fitzpatrick pointed out that "the old Bolshevik leaders had not led violent lives," and therefore, "one must assume that the Civil War terror was one of the major formative experiences for the Bolshevik leadership."¹⁵⁴ And not just for them. Thousands of Russian citizens only read about the German war in the papers. By contrast, the Civil War was experienced first-hand and at home.

Soldiers, of course, were the most exposed to the violence of both external and internal war. Even before the fighting between the Reds and the Whites broke out, the presence of draftees

¹⁵² Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 286.

¹⁵³ Mayer, *The Furies*, 231.

¹⁵⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Civil War as a Formative Experience", in: Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), 57–77: 57–58, 66.

and trainees significantly increased the chances for escalation. As Stefan Karsch demonstrated for the Voronezh region, accommodating the draftees in regional garrisons was often associated with unrest, mutinies, and increased aggression.¹⁵⁵ When the troops started returning from the fronts, the situation took a turn for the worse. In the words of Liudmila Novikova, ex-servicemen "brought home from the front not only military experience and new political language, but also the ability and eagerness to kill."¹⁵⁶ At home, these men became local chieftains, organizers of paramilitary detachments, partisan commanders; as Novikova wrote on another occasion, "all across Russia, and in a manner quite similar to postwar Europe, ex-servicemen created paramilitary groups that exercised significant influence on local and supraregional levels."¹⁵⁷

The presence of armed men, the availability of arms, and the deterioration of authority increased the chances for lethal violence on the eve of the Civil War, catalyzing wider groups of the population.¹⁵⁸ When the fighting broke out, these violent agents were instrumental in leading military action. The Reds, the Whites, and others, in desperate need of armed forces, often had to form shaky alliances with partisans and paramilitary companies to hold power. Thus, in Voronezh,

Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries, who had hardly any resources of their own after the uprising, cooperated with self-appointed guardians of law and order ... who may have been effective but were largely unreliable. Their cooperation was not based on complex shared ideological principles. What bound the militias to the new power structure of the radical left was merely that it allowed them to carry out violent activities almost totally free of external control.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Stefan Karsch, "Voronezh: Revolutionary Violence and Bolshevik Victory," in Sarah Badcock, A. Retish, and L. G. Novikova (eds.), *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective* (Bloomsburg, 2015), 323–355: 335.

¹⁵⁶ Liudmila G. Novikova "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921: A Provincial Perspective", *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 65, No. 9 (November 2013), 1755–1770: 1767.

¹⁵⁷ Liudmila G. Novikova, "The Russian Revolution from a Provincial Perspective," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 4 (2015), 769–85: 776.

¹⁵⁸ The influence of ex-military men on the outbreak of the Antonov rebellion was discussed, for example, by Erik C. Landis, *Bandits and Partisans: The Antonov Movement in the Russian Civil War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁹ Karsch, "Voronezh: Revolutionary Violence and Bolshevik Victory," 327.

In her study of the Russian North, Novikova also found that the local revolutionary authorities often "had to rely on this grass-root violence and channel it to secure their own political domination."¹⁶⁰ On the other side of the frontline, engagement with militarized violence and the scope and forms of terror were relatively similar. The White commanders in the Arkhangelsk region cooperated with peasants-turned-partisans – an endeavor that worked fine in the partisans' native villages but was extremely hard to scale to the outside areas as the primary affiliation of these detachments was local, not ideological.¹⁶¹

Local participation, according to Novikova, became a major driving force in the Civil War. Once the population was catalyzed by the injection of military-trained veterans, the old feuds cut loose in a spiral of violence. Settling old scores and the desire to intimidate the enemy and deter possible future attacks were behind the countless instances of brutal killings, mutilations, and torture, especially noticeable along the front lines.¹⁶² Popular violence subsided only after the definitive end of the Civil War.

To summarize the relationship between the World War and the Russian Civil War, Peter Holquist argued that the Civil War "was that conjuncture at which many of the practices of violence forged for 'normal' war were redirected to the project of the revolutionary transformation of society."¹⁶³ It can be added that it was also that conjuncture at which the attempts of contending governments to instrumentalize and channel popular violence clashed with its uncontrollable expressions, which added to the count of deaths associated with the revolution.

¹⁶⁰ Novikova, "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921," 1758.

¹⁶¹ Novikova, "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921," 1756–57, 1764.

¹⁶² Liudmila G. Novikova, *Provintsial'naya "Kontrrevolutsiya": Beloe Dvizhenie i Grazhdanskaya vojna na Russkom Severe, 1917-1920* [Provincial "counterrevolution": The White movement and the Civil war in the Russian North, 1917-1920] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2011), 223. See also Novikova, "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921", 1761–62; Mayer, *The Furies*, 233–234. The same assessment was made by Sergei Mel'gunov in: *Krasnyj terror v Rossii* [The Red Terror in Russia] (New York: Brandy, 1979), Chapter 4 "Civil war."

¹⁶³ Peter Holquist, "Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905 – 21," *Kritika* 4, no. 3 (2003), 627–52: 645.

Saturnal violence: revolution devouring its children

Another type of lethal violence specific for the revolutionary contexts targeted not enemies but friends, not representatives of the *ancien regime* but members of the revolutionary parties and factions. Dan Edelstein claimed that this specificity was the key factor making the French and the Russian revolution events of the same type.¹⁶⁴

In France, the elimination of the "enemy within" was predated by the introduction of instruments of paralegal justice as early as the summer of 1792.¹⁶⁵ By March 1793, deputies Danton, Lindet, and Levasseur proposed the creation of an extraordinary criminal tribunal to combat "every counterrevolutionary enterprise and all attempts against liberty, equality, unity, and indivisibility of the republic, the interior and exterior safety of the State, and all conspiracies trying to reestablish royalty."¹⁶⁶ The institution was later renamed the Revolutionary Tribunal. Surveillance committees, introduced in March 1793, were another instrument of persecution. The new institutions radically broadened the authorities' powers, aggravating the severity of court sentences and reducing the range of possibilities for the accused. This process peaked on June 10, 1794 (22 Prairial Year II), with the adoption of the famous "*loi de prairial*". It deprived the accused

¹⁶⁴ Dan Edelstein, "Red Leviathan: Authority and Violence in Revolutionary Political Culture," *History and Theory* no. 55 (2017): 76–96.

¹⁶⁵ Events of the summer of 1792 are sometimes referred to as "the first Terror": see Jean Tulard, Jean-François Fayard, Alfred Fierro, *Histoire et dictionnaire de la Révolution française, 1789-1799* (Paris : Robert Laffront, 1987), 1113; Roger Dupuy, *Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine. Vol. 2, La République jacobine : Terreur, guerre et gouvernement révolutionnaire 1792-1794* (Paris : Seuil, 2005), 156. Some scholars trace the roots of Terror even further back: thus, Timothy Tackett links the king's family flight to Varennes in June 1791 to the early instances of introducing extraordinary measures against the enemies of the revolution. Timothy Tackett, "The Flight to Varennes and the Coming of the Terror," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 29, no. 3 (2003), 469–93.

¹⁶⁶ *Bulletin annoté des lois, décrets et ordonnances, depuis le mois de juin 1789 jusqu'au mois d'août 1830*. T. 4 (Paris, 1834-1840), 132, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6447705x/f150.item.r=d%C3%A9cret%2010%20mars%201793#>, accessed on April 17, 2023.

of the rights to preliminary questioning, defense, and appeal. The law allowed for only two verdicts: acquittal or death.¹⁶⁷

These factors brought about an enormous number of victims. By minimal estimates, from July 1792 to July 1794, between 100,000 and 300,000 people were arrested, and about 35,000 to 40,000 were executed; of these, approximately 16,500 by orders of revolutionary tribunals. During the Great Terror, between June 10 and July 27, 1794, 2,554 people were sentenced to execution.¹⁶⁸ Even though economic crimes formally also fell under the jurisdiction of revolutionary tribunals, most victims were political. Behind most verdicts were their opinions, sympathies, and allegiances, confirmed or suspected. The series of coups in the revolutionary government – elimination of Girondins in October 1793, then of Hébertists in March 1794, then of Dantonists in April 1794 – reflected the same logic.

In Russia, the political attacks arrived later, even though a system of paralegal justice was being built starting from 1917 when the so-called Decree on Court No. 1 abolished all preexisting courts and introduced two novel formats: local courts to solve all minor civil and criminal cases and revolutionary tribunals "to struggle against the counterrevolutionary forces," pillage, sabotage, and malversation of tradesmen, industrialists, and officials.¹⁶⁹ (To note, Matthew Rendle pointed out that "at the Petrograd tribunal's first meeting on December 10, its chair, I. P. Zhukov, compared the new tribunals to those established during the French Revolution"¹⁷⁰). A similar structure was

¹⁶⁷ *Bulletin des lois de la République française*, no. 1, 22 prairial an II, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56373g/f1.item>, accessed on April 16, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ See for example Jacques Hussenet (dir.), *"Détruisez la Vendée ! " Regards croisés sur les victimes et destructions de la guerre de Vendée* (La Roche-sur-Yon, Centre vendéen de recherches historiques, 2007), 450. See also the article "Terreur" in Larousse encyclopedia, https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/la_Terreur/146370, accessed on April 16, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ *Dekrety Sovetskoy vlasti. T. I* [Decrees of the Soviet government. Vol. 1] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1957), 124–126, http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/o_sude1.htm, accessed on April 17, 2023.

¹⁷⁰ Matthew Rendle, "Revolutionary tribunals and the origins of terror in early Soviet Russia", *Historical Research*, vol. 84, no. 226 (November 2011), 693–721: 693.

formed in the military. On December 7 (20), 1917, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, or Cheka, was created to fight against counterrevolution and sabotage. With their rights and competencies constantly growing, the special branches of extrajudicial authority soon started to dominate over the people's courts that were supposed to constitute the base of the Soviet legal system.

While the introduction of the revolutionary organs of justice certainly enabled the excesses of the Red Terror as early as September 1918, it is notable that it was not aimed at the leaders of other revolutionary parties. Mayer observed that "Even as late as November 1918, when the friend-enemy dissociation was rampant, Lenin claimed, not unreasonably, that "[w]e are arresting, but we are not resorting to terror," notably against enemy brothers."¹⁷¹ Alistair Wright agreed that, at least during the first and formative revolutionary decade, Bolsheviks were less violent than Jacobins, meaning they did not aim to destroy their political adversaries physically. Instead, measures of "soft terror," intimidation, blackmail, and encouraging political factionalism among the enemies allowed the Bolsheviks to navigate the complex political moment.¹⁷² The turn would come later, in the mid-thirties. In Mayer's words, "When the French Revolution devoured its own children, it did so with an unremittingly "blind but still fresh passion," the Russian Revolution... took this turn only after "its lava . . . seems to have cooled down."¹⁷³

Notwithstanding the temporal discrepancies, the conceptualization of violence and terror in both contexts was similar. It goes without saying that during the early years of the establishment of revolutionary regimes, all sides of the conflict inflicted violence against each other. Arno Mayer devoted an entire chapter to the White terror during the war in Vendée; Peter Holquist observed, for the Russian case, that "all sides seem to have had a common repertoire of measures upon which

¹⁷¹ Mayer, *The Furies*, 255.

¹⁷² Wright, "Guns and Guillotines," 180-182.

¹⁷³ Mayer, *The Furies*, 651.

they drew in pursuing their explicitly articulated political goals."¹⁷⁴ What distinguished the justifiable and necessary violence from damnable instances of sheer brutality was the target. In the eyes of revolutionaries and their contemporaries from the other camps, those committing violent acts for the right cause could be excused, whereas the enemy was "truly violent."¹⁷⁵

The use of violence, even for the good of revolution, was often regarded as morally problematic by contemporaries: observing abundant deaths and executions was believed to harm morals.¹⁷⁶ Still, the winning governments retrospectively justified the acts of violence performed by it or to its name along the lines of re-creating society anew without the harmful or obsolete elements.¹⁷⁷ From this perspective, violence accompanying the foundation of the revolutionary state was a necessary evil. All while intimidating the enemy, it purified the revolution and led to a better future for humanity.¹⁷⁸

The understanding of just what acts of violence were justifiable during the revolutionary aftermaths was as fluid as the understanding of revolution. As Dan Edelstein observed, "To define the revolution also meant to exclude alternative definitions, often attacking those who defended them... The act of defining the Revolution thus appears intrinsically connected with the specific type of violence that characterizes "permanent" revolutions, namely the elimination of political

¹⁷⁴ Mayer, *The Furies*, 323-370; Holquist, "Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism ?" 649.

¹⁷⁵ James Ryan, "The Sacralization of Violence : Bolshevik Justifications for Violence and Terror during the Civil War," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (2015): 808–31: 830.

¹⁷⁶ Thus, after seeing De Launay's and Foulon's heads on pikes, Babeuf wrote to his wife in July 1789: " « Les supplices de tous genres, l'écartèlement, la torture, la roue, les bûchers, le fouet, les gibets, les bourreaux multipliés partout, nous ont fait de si mauvaises mœurs ! Les maîtres, au lieu de nous policer, nous ont rendus barbares, parce qu'ils le sont eux-mêmes." Quoted from: Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et Révolution. Essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris : Seuil, 2006), 15. When in the 1820s, in France, a debate about abolishing capital punishment took place, "one of the recurring arguments for the abolition of the death penalty, which drew directly on the echoes of the Terror, was that public executions led to the barbarization of society." Ronen Steinberg, "Trauma and the Effects of Mass Violence in Revolutionary France: A Critical Inquiry," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 41, no. 3 (2015), 28–46: 39.

¹⁷⁷ See Ryan, "The sacralization of violence," 827; Steinberg, "Trauma and the Effects of Mass Violence," 32–33.

¹⁷⁸ On "violence as terror" vs "violence as purge", see for example: Ryan, "The Sacralization of Violence," 808.

rivals under the pretense that they are actually counterrevolutionaries."¹⁷⁹ Just like the revolution – "a floating signifier, "in itself devoid of meaning and thus susceptible of receiving any meaning at all," – revolutionary violence changed meaning over time.¹⁸⁰ This fluidity translated into the shifting understanding of what a good death was during the revolutionary era.

Conclusion

The French revolution was very much on the minds of the Russian revolutionaries (and not only revolutionaries) in the twentieth century, who frequently looked back to find explanatory paradigms for current events in history. However, these paradigms did not necessarily need to be consistent or historically accurate. A set of recognizable names, dates, or concepts was often sufficient to claim similarity between French and Russian history and make predictions or warnings regarding the course the latter would take. Furthermore, the historical precedents did not necessarily provide models to reproduce, as illustrated by the story of revolutionary festivals. Despite Lunacharsky's repeated calls to "learn from the French," such learning remained limited and was not definitive for early Soviet events.

In the domain of violence, the French example was present in the Bolsheviks' narratives, but, again, it was hardly a model to imitate, rather a dreadful extreme to distinguish oneself from. With that, there was a range of structural similarities between violence types in France and Russia. Furthermore, in both cases, deaths were excessive, urging the revolutionary governments to take action. But there is a difference between death, which requires practical action, and death, which requires a revolutionary response. Reconsidering death-related legislation, expanding the surface

¹⁷⁹ Edelstein, "Red Leviathan," 84.

¹⁸⁰ Edelstein, "Red Leviathan," 91.

of cemeteries, introducing new sanitary norms, and dealing with eventual excesses were all parts of the post-revolutionary death-related policy, as shown in Chapter 2. With that, another question the revolutionary government had to answer was to what extent death happening in revolutionary circumstances called for a revolutionary approach. Which deaths are revolutionized, when, and how? As shown in Chapters 3 and 4, political polarization of "us" and "them" manifested itself in the treatment of dead bodies, thus allowing us to approach the analysis of death in revolutionary times as yet another prism through which to understand revolution.

Chapter 2. Burial after the revolution: laws, objects, spaces

Introduction

Before the revolutions, ancien régime France and late imperial Russia shared several traits inherited from premodern times in the organization of death and burial. In both countries, critical actors engaged in death-related procedures were families of the deceased and representatives of the church. While the former were responsible for the initial preparations of the body for burial and took care of the social arrangements, the latter played various roles associated with administration and power. The church, of course, ensured proper passage of the soul to the other world; but it also registered the dead in parochial books, owned and managed cemeteries, and profited from selling funeral accessories. The dominant church – the Catholic church in France and the Orthodox in Russia – enjoyed enormous wealth and influence, second only to the state and sometimes surpassing it. Living outside a confession was virtually impossible, and so was burial without church participation.¹

Both revolutions saw it as their task to reassess relations between the church and the state and delimit the role of clergy in state affairs.² The revolutionary governments aimed at taking over the traditional spheres of church influence – administratively, financially, and ideologically. While the effects of the secularization drive on death-related practices may seem minor amidst general assaults on the church, the traditions and practices surrounding death and burial eventually affected

¹ On the Russian case, see for example Paul W. Werth, "In the State's Embrace? Civil Acts in an Imperial Order," *Kritika* 7, no. 3 (2006): 433–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2006.0046>.

² Literature is very vast on this topic. One can point to : Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution contre l'Église. De la raison à l'Être Suprême* (Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1988), Timothy Tackett, *La Révolution, l'Église, la France* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), Daniel Peris, *Storming the heavens: The Soviet league of the militant godless* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), William B. Husband, "Godless Communists": *Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), among many others.

everyone, and changes in those provide telling illustrations to the broader processes in revolutionary culture and everyday life.

In this chapter, I address initiatives in the administration of death and the organization of burials in France and Russia shortly after the revolutions. I focus on the state efforts to put procedures surrounding death – making and keeping records, providing funeral supplies and materials, and burying the dead – on new foundations. While I do not focus specifically on the church's resistance, I keep in mind that the church managed to maintain at least part of its influence during the period in question, and often a significant one. Furthermore, the first post-revolutionary years were periods of ongoing military conflicts, and therefore, the story I tell is, to a large extent, a story of revolutionary governments overcoming obstacles. In particular, I discuss the problems related to workforce, transportation, and delivery of materials for burials during wartime in Russia.

The chapter is structured thematically. Within each topic, I describe the situation in France and Russia to show how the aspirations of revolutionary governments were alike, how the implementation of their ideas stumbled upon similar problems, and how similar situations could prompt similar solutions. While the two revolutions can be compared by many criteria, in my opinion, for death-related practices, the most important were the desire for secularization, the egalitarian urge to make burials and funerals more accessible and standardized for all citizens, and the considerations of public hygiene. With that, the similarity of solutions cannot be attributed to "borrowing": I demonstrate that the Soviet government acted upon the given circumstances and did not turn to the French experience for models to reproduce.

In this and the following chapters, I frequently refer to "death-related practices." I use this expression as an umbrella term to describe actions performed by the living when another person had passed away. On different occasions, the term can include preparations for burial and the

manner of interment, procedures followed, and rituals observed during the funeral ceremony, bereavement behaviors, commemorative actions, and more. While this term can theoretically also include actions taken by the person in preparation for their own passing, within the framework of the present study, I do not focus on those, with a few exceptions, such as cases of suicide or execution, when the person knew what was coming. Death-related practices are connected to various other areas of life and activity, from religious rites and beliefs to commercial relations in the funeral industry. Taken together, these areas form what I sometimes refer to as the death-related sphere at large or the sphere of death.

"Lie down and be counted": death administration in France and Russia

When rites of passage and accompanying ceremonies – funeral and commemorative masses, baptisms, marriages – were primarily instances of relations between people and God, performing the rituals and registering the respective acts logically fell under the responsibility of the church. In late *ancien régime* France and late imperial Russia, against the growing disappointment in religion and the clergy, the increasingly centralized state was willing to emerge as an equally significant participant in each person's life. As a first step, it began paying attention to administration – registering, counting, and keeping records of citizens alive and dead.

In pre-revolutionary France, religious denominations controlled the administration of death. While, as Anne Byrne pointed out, the deathbed was "an occasion on which French people were required 'to lie down and be counted,'" this principle only applied to Catholics.³ Representatives of other major confessions – primarily Protestants and Jews – existed by their own rules. No general nationwide regulations governed the headcount of non-Catholic dead or allowed

³ Byrne, *Death and the Crown*, 23.

for the state's access to such data. The civil statuses of these groups were not officially recognized until very late in the *ancien régime*: in 1787, a royal edict permitted the non-Catholics to have their statuses certified by a local *curé* or a judge.⁴ Other confessional differences among French citizens only lost their significance after the Revolution.

After 1789, several pieces of legislation made different groups of the population more equal in the face of the state, breaking links between civil statuses and religious denominations. Protestants acquired citizenship rights in 1789; Jews gained emancipation in 1791.⁵ In parallel, the Civil Constitution of the clergy from July 1790 marked the decisive turn towards bringing religious affairs and the public sector to a unified standard. Civil statuses were also progressively secularized. The 1791 Constitution named marriage a civil contract; a year later, in September 1792, the Legislative Assembly proclaimed secularization of civil statuses along the lines of redefining citizenship and the freedom of conscience. In a country where the Constitution guaranteed everyone the right to exercise whatever religion they belonged to, the government "could not have different ways to record births, marriages, and deaths."⁶

Formally speaking, the clergy was prohibited from keeping the registries of births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths starting from January 1793, and the existing books were to be transferred to laic authorities.⁷ But, as Gérard Noiriel demonstrated, several factors protracted and impeded the realization of this project.

For one, communication of the new decrees and distribution of new paper forms across the territory of France stumbled upon the imperfections of the postal service. Regulations and new

⁴ Gérard Noiriel, "L'identification des citoyens. Naissance de l'état civil républicain," *Genèses* 13 (1993): 3–28.

⁵ Noiriel, "L'identification des citoyens." Michel-Louis Lévy, "La Révolution et la famille," *Population et Sociétés. Bulletin mensuel d'Informations Démographiques, Économiques, Sociales*, no. 240 (November 1989), https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/18939/pop_et_soc_francais_240.fr.pdf, accessed on October 30, 2022.

⁶ *Archives Parlementaires*, première série, June 19, 1792, t. 45, p. 379.

⁷ Lévy, "La Révolution et la famille," 2.

standardized templates for registering civil statuses that were sent out to the departments did not reach destinations on time, and local officials did not have access to the necessary books or continued using the old ones long after they had been officially removed from use.

Then, in multiple locations across the country, the new regulations hit against intense opposition from the clergy. Priests protested, either openly, refusing to transfer books to the secular authorities, or tacitly, by continuing their traditional duties of performing the rites and keeping the records, as they did in Normandy in Year II.⁸ It only complicated matters further that, of all regional actors, the clergy was best prepared for the task. Especially in rural areas, elected representatives of municipalities often did not possess the necessary reading and writing skills to take over the registration duty, whereas priests and *curés* were at least literate.⁹

The force of habit also played its role. The population often saw it sufficient only to declare the change in their status to the church, as was customary before the revolution, and ignored the new obligation to report it to the state as well. The habits persisted despite further legislative efforts to definitively pass the registration of deaths, marriages, and births to secular processors – such as the decree of 7 Vendémiaire Year IV (September 29, 1795) against the cults that forbade all administrators to recognize any personal records produced by the clergy.¹⁰

The French revolutionary governments brought to the surface and legitimized some of the ideas only slightly touched upon by the royal administration, and effectively put forward the egalitarian principles in death administration for religious minorities. But its efforts in secularizing

⁸ Maurice Dommanget, "La déchristianisation à Beauvais. Les sacrements civiques," *Annales Révolutionnaires* 11, no. 2 (1919), 160–94: 167.

⁹ Noiriel, "L'identification des citoyens," 10, 13.

¹⁰ Décret de 7 vendémiaire an IV, Section IV art. 20. https://ledroitcriminel.fr/la-legislation-criminelle/anciens-textes/lois-penales-revolution-francaise/lois-penales-revolution-francaise_2.htm, accessed on May 28, 2023.

death were not definitive and had to be continued under Napoleon: The Civil Code of 1804 had to address the issue again.

Over a hundred years later, the Bolshevik government in Russia faced similar problems trying to standardize the count of the dead through administrative reforms. In the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russian empire, keeping the records of births, marriages, and death (all these records were known under the umbrella term *metricheskie knigy*, metrical books) was entrusted to clergy at least since the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ For most of the population – about seventy percent by 1897 – it was the Orthodox priesthood that registered the newborn and the dead in parish books.¹² Families were legally obliged to inform them about the newly dead upon pain of detention.¹³ For Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews, the records of life events and related civil statuses were kept by respective religious authorities.

Even though there was a clear hierarchy of confessions in the Russian Empire – Orthodox Christianity on top, followed by other Christian denominations, and then other religions and even sects – several scholars agree that "the Russian Empire was a tolerant state... There is no way that a fundamentally premodern (in both attitudes and resources) empire could rule over hundreds of diverse linguistic, religious, cultural, or ethnic groups ... without a good deal of *live and let live*."¹⁴

¹¹ Paul W. Werth, "In the State's Embrace? Civil Acts in an Imperial Order," *Kritika* 7, no. 3 (2006), 433–58: 441.

¹² According to the 1897 census, 69 percent of the population of the Romanov empire were Orthodox Christians. See for example: Alexander I. Klibanov (ed.), *Russkoe pravoslavie: vekhi istorii* [Russian Orthodoxy. Historical milestones] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1989), 380.

¹³ Sergiy V. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naya kniga dlya svyaschenno-tserkovno-sluzhitelej* [A Handbook for Priests]. Ed. three, revised and enlarged. (Kiev: Kiev-Pecherskaya Uspenskaya Lavra, 1913), 1296–1301.

¹⁴ Quote taken from: Theodore R. Weeks, "Religious Tolerance in the Russian Empire's Northwest Provinces," (Review), *Kritika* 14 (4) (Fall 2013), 876–884: 878. Paul W. Werth fundamentally shares the same opinion in *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2014). See also Lucien J. Frary, "The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia by Paul W. Werth," *Ab Imperio* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 453–58. For a general overview of religious life and its interactions with the Russian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see for example Nadieszda Kizenko, "The Orthodox Church and Religious Life in Imperial Russia", and Vera Shevzov, "The Orthodox Church and Religion in Revolutionary Russia, 1894–1924", in: Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, Randall A. Poole, *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 21–37 and 38–60.

The imperial administration spared itself time and effort by transferring the burdensome task of keeping the metrical books over to the respective clergies, and managed to navigate the ensuing complexity well enough for the system to last until the end of the regime.

And yet, complications associated with the confessional split in record-keeping grew. The records were essential for integrating a person not just in the religious life of a local community but in the civil life of the state, as a range of rights and life perspectives depended on them.¹⁵ In the absence of a unified metrical standard, extracting information from the records that were often kept in distant places or in different languages proved time- and effort-consuming. Some groups, such as sectarians or pagans, stayed entirely outside the system. When, in 1905, the October Manifesto declared the freedom of conscience, the situation became even more complex, as the existing system of registering civil statuses was incompatible with the possibility of converting to another faith or, worse, officially living outside of a confession.

Paul Werth demonstrated how, in the ensuing debate, the Ministry of Interior considered the introduction of "civil registration (*grazhdanskaia metrikatsiia*), non-confessional graveyards, civil oaths, and civil marriage."¹⁶ But eventually, this project was abandoned for the benefit of maintaining the confessional system of record-keeping. In Werth's words, "tsarist officials, even as they recognized the fundamentally secular significance of these books, did not make any serious effort to introduce some universal form of civil registration," which attested "to both the scale of the job of maintaining metrical books and the strongly confessional character of the Russian empire."¹⁷ It was not before 1917 that things started to change.

¹⁵ Among the most significant were rights to education, place of residence, or an obligation to join the army. See more in: Werth, "In the State's Embrace?," 436–439.

¹⁶ Werth, "In the State's Embrace?," 453.

¹⁷ Werth, "In the State's Embrace?," 451.

The revolution made apologists of secularization more vocal. In March 1917, Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich called for a reform separating church and state and resulting in the "civil marriage and the civil funeral that all free-thinking people have long awaited."¹⁸ After October, the Bolshevik government adopted several pieces of legislation to abolish the religious character of civil statuses in general and death in particular. The decree "On civil marriage, children, and introducing civil act registration books," adopted in December 1917, became the first normative act to address burials. It transferred the death registration from the church to newly organized lay bureaus.¹⁹ The decree also obliged all authorities that were previously responsible for the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, ecclesiastical and secular alike, to "immediately send their registry books to the respective town, *uyezd*, *volost'* or *zemstvo* offices" (article 14), becoming the first Soviet act of law to prescribe handing over the administration of death from ecclesiastic to lay authorities.

About a month later, the decree "On the separation of church from state, and the school from the church" (January 23, 1918) secularized the public sphere and definitively deprived the church of the right to register civil statuses, including death. Registry books were to be handed over to the bureaus for registering civil acts (*organy zapisi aktov grazhdanskogo sostoyania*, ZAGS).²⁰ Finally, on December 7, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree "On cemeteries and funerals" that transferred "all cemeteries, crematoriums, and morgues, as well as organizational aspects of funerals" to the local Soviets of Deputies (art. 1) and tied burials to formal permits from local ZAGS (art. 4).²¹

¹⁸ *Izvestia Petrogradskogo soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov*, no. 13 (March 22, 1917).

¹⁹ *Sobranie uzakonenij i rasporyazhenij pravitelstva za 1917-1918. Upravlenie delami Sovnarkoma SSSR* [Code of regulations, 1917-1918. Sovnarkom general affairs department] (Moscow, 1942), 161–163.

²⁰ *Code of regulations 1942*, 849-858.

²¹ Decree "On cemeteries and funerals," http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_414.htm, accessed on June 30, 2023.

As these initiatives proved, the secularization of record-keeping was not less important for the Russian revolutionary government than it had been for the French. And similar to the French story, implementing this novelty in Soviet Russia was fraught with problems. It was time-consuming: eight months after the adoption of the first decree on the topic, many registry books remained in the hands of the church, and an instruction issued by the People's Commissariat for Justice on August 24, 1918, reiterated – for the third time in one year – the call for immediate transfer of births, marriages, and deaths registers "that for any reason have not to date been withdrawn," to the local ZAGS.²² In October 1918, the heads of juridical departments of the Moscow district soviets admitted that "the population was indifferent" to secular registration of marriages, births, and deaths. People continued to reach out to the clergy for the performance of rites and issuance of copies of registries, and the church was willing to support such requests. To counter this unwanted practice, heads of juridical departments suggested providing administrative services only to those who could present the respective civil status documents issued by the Soviet institutions, not the church.²³ The outcome of this particular suggestion is unknown.

Civil authorities were supposed to step in and take over the funeral procedures, replacing the church, a responsibility they had never had before the revolution. Without experience and clear operational instructions, the ongoing redistribution of the church's administrative duties among Soviet institutions caused a visible imbalance. After being generally transferred from the religious to lay institutions, registration of civil statuses was passed from local notary departments to the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs – a move that was met with confusion in Moscow and the provinces alike. According to a report in the *Revolutsiya i tserkov'* from 1919,

²² Resolution (Instruction) on the implementation of the decree "On separation of church from state and school from the church," article 26. Article 27 of the same instruction granted the priesthood right to copy the registers upon their withdrawal by the Soviets.

²³ Moscow Central City Archive (TsAGM). Fond R-1952. Opis' 1. Delo 3. List 25-25 rev.

local ZAGS "had hard times understanding the point of a profound destruction of an affair that was still a work in progress."²⁴ Furthermore, similarly to the French case, the protracted delivery of new templates for metrical books put the implementation of the reform at risk of obstruction.²⁵

Unfamiliar formalities accompanied the registration of deaths. One should have "made a note... in the legal department of the local Soviet of Deputies, and after that, petition the local commissariat to obtain a burial certificate," which was needed for contacting the cemetery committee in order to arrange a grave plot.²⁶ Extensive bureaucracy made funerals problematic for families and authorities alike. According to an official report in 1919, the "registration of each individual death case was accompanied by needless bureaucratic formalities, the completion of which would hold back the very act of the internment of each particular body sometimes for weeks" – an extremely long time considering that the usual span between death and funeral was one to three days.²⁷

Bureaucratic protractions continued to impede funerals in the capital for several years after adopting secularization decrees. In November 1919, a 20-year-old student at Shanyavsky courses, F. El'kina, wrote ironically in her essay on Moscow life:

Do not think that dying is that easy: you die, they bury you, and that's it. No, you must have permission, or they will not bury you. So, there are almost no suicides.

²⁴ See f. e. Mikhail Galkin, "Akty sostoyanij (prodolzhenie). Novoe zakonodatel'stvo i soobscheniya s mest" ["Acts of civil statuses (continuation). The new legislation and messages from the provinces"], *Revolutsia i tserkov'* no. 2 (1919), 5–9: 6.

²⁵ Galkin quotes complaints from various Moscow districts that did not receive the updated templates in 1919 and were forced to make them manually and on their own [*kustarnym sposobom*]. See Galkin, "Akty sostoyanij (prodolzhenie)," 6–7.

²⁶ Central State Archive of the Moscow region (TsGAMO). Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 21 rev.

²⁷ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 21 rev. For the timeline of death and burial, the church regulations did not recommend burying the dead before three days had passed from the moment of death, but, especially in rural areas, burial could occur as early as the next day after death. The normal period could be extended for special circumstances, such as police investigation or the need to transport the body. See more in: Boris M. Firsov, I. Kiseleva (eds.), *Byt velikorusskikh krestyan-zemleposhtsev. Opisanie materialov etnograficheskogo byuro knyazya V. N. Tenisheva: na primere Vladimirskoj gubernii* [Daily life of Great-Russian peasants. Description of materials collected by the Prince V. N. Tenishev ethnographic bureau (materials from the Vladimir guberniya)], Saint Petersburg: European House Publishing, 1993), 287; Bulgakov, *Handbook for Priests*, 1310.

But at the cemetery, there is a line that you must join in advance, or otherwise, you can wait there all day long.²⁸

In February 1920, Olga Bessarabova, a native of Voronezh and a figure among the Silver Age intelligentsia, enumerated in her diary the steps necessary to bury her mother: "1) Permission for the right of burial. Get the passport from the Volost' Troitsky Executive Committee and present it to the priest (sic! – a.p.), 2) Permission from the Funeral Bureau to dig the grave. Death certificate from the House Committee [*domovyy komitet*]. Get the warrant to gravediggers." These notes were followed by a petition to the Executive Commissar of the Southeastern Railway (where Bessarabova's father, the husband of the deceased, used to work and where he received his pension) for ordering a coffin.²⁹

On March 7, 1922, Yuri Gauthier, historian and head of the Rumyantsevsky Museum library, made the following entry in his diary:

The funeral of M. M. Ryndin lasted for six days because only on the second day after his death did we manage to get a permit to bury him in the Novodevichy monastery. We got the burial order in exchange for a couple of overshoes from Glavrezina. The body was taken out on Sunday the 5th (he died on Thursday the 2nd), the funeral service was on the 6th, and the grave was not ready, so the burial only took place today.³⁰

Despite protractions, unfamiliar and complex bureaucracy, and the unwillingness of the clergy to collaborate, secular registration of the civil statuses became habitual by the end of the decade, especially in the urban areas – a result more rapid and more secure than the one achieved by the French revolutionary government. This did not mean, however, that the Orthodox church

²⁸ Maria V. Katagoshchina, A. V. Yemel'yanov (eds.), "Moskva v noyabre 1919 goda: Sochineniya uchashchikhsya nauchno-populyarnogo otdeleniya Universiteta im. A. L. Shanyavskogo" [Moscow in November 1919: Essays of the students of the popular science department of the university named after A. L. Shanyavsky], in: *Rossiyskiy Arkhiv: Istoriya Otechestva v svidetel'stvakh i dokumentakh XVIII—XX vv.: Al'manakh*. Vol. II—III. (M.: Studiia TRITE: Ros. Arkhiv, 1992), 362–376: 376.

²⁹ Olga Bessarabova. Diary. 1920. February 10. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/124654>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

³⁰ Yuri Gauthier. Diary. 1922. March 7. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/38716>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

was effectively pushed out of its previous areas of influence. As shown below in Chapter 4, during the 1920s, the clergy played a major role in death-related practices, especially in rural areas.

Both revolutions accelerated and enforced the centralizing and standardizing tendencies in death administration that were haltingly considered by the *ancien régimes*. The course towards secularization made it possible: once the constataction of death became unlinked from confession, the state could step in. The new administrative procedure offered the population more equal treatment in the questions of burial, not connected with the person's background or individual beliefs. At the same time, the reform provided the state with more information about its citizens, and, with that, further possibilities for state control.

Supplies, accessories, and the quest for equality

The last rites in France and Russia required many accessories. Some were basic and constituted the *sine qua non* of the funeral practice – such as a shroud or special clothing for the body or a coffin. Others – means of transportation, candles and chandeliers, flowers, decorations, invitations, alms, additional religious and memorial services – could be added according to the wishes and possibilities of the family. The more elaborate these accessories and services were, the more they cost. There were also expenses for church services, cemetery plots, or food and drinks for the funeral feast that, at the end of the day, made funerals a costly affair.

Traditional parties to arrange a funeral were families of the deceased (sometimes supported by more or less formalized local communities), representatives of the church, and, to a certain extent, private suppliers and providers of goods and services. For the former, the crucial concern was balancing the decency of the funeral against spending – a balance that was often uneasy to

strike. The latter, i.e., the church and private suppliers, collaborated and competed with each other, providing material supplies that were imbued with high symbolic value.

An additional challenge was presented by the state, which, in line with the antireligious and centralizing processes mentioned above, was increasingly interested in finding its place in this system. Along with aspirations to take over the church and, possibly, share profits with private suppliers, the state administration had an ideological stake in this interplay. The difference between the funerals of the rich and the poor was striking, reproducing the fundamental social inequality in a sphere which, due to its universal character, only made the discrepancy stand out more. Two revolutionary states, in their quest for equality, were motivated to eradicate this gap. But substituting for actors involved in the process for centuries came with responsibilities that the state was not always ready to bear. Moreover, during the revolutionary crisis, many goods and materials were in scarce supply. Along with the complicated relations of the actors involved in the funeral process, it engendered some of the problems that are discussed below.

In *ancien régime* France, people were buried according to their social status. To quote Laurence Croq, "funeral expenses ... were a part of the costs of social representation, of the duties that were required actors to maintain their rank."³¹ There was no general understanding of what the ranks were and what funeral accessories they required: tariffs for different classes of funeral consumption were set locally by either civil or ecclesiastical authorities, and the number of funeral categories, or classes, varied from region to region.³²

³¹ Laurence Croq, "Le dernier hommage. La comptabilité des dépenses funéraires et du deuil dans la société parisienne aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles," *Histoire et Mesure* 27, no. 1 (2012), 161–214: 165. Original in French, translation here and below is mine. — a.p.

³² According to Croq, in the second half of the eighteenth century, there were three funeral classes in Angers and Dijon, and four in Poitiers, Clermont-Ferrand, and Angers, set by bishops and archbishops of the respective dioceses (Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 168, 172). According to Madeleine Lassère, in Lille it was the magistrate that suggested four funeral classes in 1779. Madeleine Lassère, "Les pauvres et la mort en milieu urbain dans la France du XIX^e siècle : funérailles et cimetières," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 42, no. 1 (1995), 107–25: 109.

Some families, especially among the more financially advantageous, could find it wasteful to adhere to social conventions related to funerals. Croq quoted numerous testaments in which pious men and women asked to be buried modestly, spending less than required by their social rank and finding a better use for the remaining resources, such as supporting the poor.³³ Others, on the contrary, went above and beyond to cover the funeral expenses required by the social norms. Surviving family members might have been forced to use their inheritance to cover the funeral costs, borrow from friends, or ask for credit from the providers (even though, in the late eighteenth century, the practice of burying on trust, previously more widespread, was fading away, especially in the urban context).³⁴ The parish council and clergy could cover the funeral costs for the poorest if family resources were insufficient.³⁵ In general, the period of our study saw an expansion of services and goods that were offered for a price.³⁶

According to Thomas Kselman, the urban funeral industry was run jointly "by the clergy, elected parish councils (*fabriques*), and the guild of town criers (*jurés-crieurs*)."³⁷ Pascal Trompette pointed out that the clergy performed rites and received remuneration for it according to the tariffs set by the diocese, while the *fabriques* took hold of most of the resources and redistributed them for parish needs such as the church and cemetery maintenance or supporting the poor.³⁸ It is hard to establish how profitable the funeral organization was.³⁹ Nevertheless,

³³ Croq, "Le dernier hommage", 165, 175. He admitted that this tendency was more pronounced in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century than during the Enlightenment age.

³⁴ Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 188.

³⁵ Pascale Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu ... Dispositifs et controverses morales au coeur du marché des funérailles," in: Philippe Steiner, Marie Trespeuch (eds.) *Marchés Contestés. Quand Le Marché Rencontre La Morale* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2014), 279–309. <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023.

³⁶ Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 171.

³⁷ Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 223–224.

³⁸ Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023. Croq highlighted that in Paris, the clergy's remuneration did not depend on the status of the deceased (Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 168).

³⁹ According to Croq, the parish notes of revenues and expenses are not reliable, or else were sometimes accounted for jointly with the marriage revenues (Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 167).

several authors agree that the church was the primary beneficiary of funeral production and trade until at least the Napoleonic era.⁴⁰

Jurés-crieurs were a powerful monopolist corporation that existed since medieval times and enjoyed several privileges granted by royal edicts.⁴¹ In the late eighteenth century, their responsibilities spread from announcing death to providing accessories, from textiles and mourning clothing to chandeliers, from horses and carts to candle wax and invitations to the funeral.⁴² *Jurés-crieurs* controlled most aspects of the funeral organization that did not have a direct connection to religion. Other accessories providers, such as textile makers, wax sellers, printers, or ragmen selling second-hand clothing, aspired to challenge their monopoly but were far from driving the old guild out of business.⁴³

The first thing that the revolutionaries challenged was the inequality of funerals. Several attempts were made to delimit the baroque pomp of high-class funerals and introduce a more reserved and unified approach. Kselman quoted examples from Nevers and Paris to illustrate that, according to various projects, "all dead citizens, regardless of sect," should be buried with the same rather ascetic decorations.⁴⁴ Egalitarian rhetoric continued beyond the period that is the focus of this study: thus, in Year IX (1801), Nicholas Frochot, the prefect of the Seine, issued a decree that sought to establish equal funerals, making burials of the poor "an obligation of communal piety."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023; Stéphanie Sauget, "La mise en place d'un marché funéraire du cercueil à Paris au XIX^e siècle," *Annales de démographie historique* 133, no. 1 (2017), 117–43.

⁴¹ For the history of the guild of criers, see for example Arina Makarova, "La fonction sociale de la rubrique nécrologique," *Hypothèses* 10, no. 1 (2007): 113–121, and Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023.

⁴² Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023; Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 172.

⁴³ Trompette also pointed to other possibilities of funeral organizations, especially in the provinces and rural areas: various fraternities, professional or religious associations, and the net of support provided by village neighborhoods acted as both funeral organizers and providers. Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023.

⁴⁴ Kselman, *Death and Afterlife*, 225.

⁴⁵ Kselman, *Death and Afterlife*, 227.

One further aspect in which the revolution could put forward the ideas of funeral equality was executions. During *ancien régime*, the death penalty depended on the social background of the condemned: only a nobleman could be beheaded, and lowborn were to be hanged or dismembered. The extended scenes of execution implied much pain for the executed. The suffering was as often a result of technicality (the blade was not always sharp enough, ropes broke, and even the most experienced executioners could take more than one blow to sever the head of the condemned) as it was an integral part of the punishment, being seen as a step towards making satisfaction for the misdeeds the criminal had committed.

Louis XV's reign saw attempts to minimize suffering, leading to the ban of torture and physical coercion in 1780.⁴⁶ But a more significant innovation of the revolutionary era, put forward by Joseph Ignace Guillotin, was a humane and functional execution machine.⁴⁷ As a member first of the General Estates and then the National Assembly, Guillotin proposed a series of adjustments to the penal system. The text of his initial speech from October 1789 is not extant; according to second-hand accounts, Guillotin suggested that "crimes of the same kind should be punished by the same kind of punishment, regardless of the rank and social condition of the guilty party."⁴⁸ As capital punishment, he proposed decapitation using a "simple mechanism," thus aligning all punishments on the more honorable model and curtailing unnecessary pain. Using a machine of a proven design was regarded as an instrument of "a maximum of social defense with the minimum of individual suffering."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Hector Fleischmann, *La guillotine en 1793 : d'après des documents inédits des Archives nationales* (Paris, Librairie des publications modernes, 1910), 22.

⁴⁷ Earlier versions of the decapitating mechanism were known in Italy, England, Scotland, Holland, and Germany, so Guillotin acted rather as a propagator than an inventor. See Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror* (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1989), 14–16. For the details on the history of executions in France, see also Ludovic Pichon, *Code de la guillotine, recueil complet de documents concernant l'application de la peine de mort en France et les exécuteurs des hautes-oeuvres* (Paris : Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1910), esp. pp. 17–20.

⁴⁸ Fleischmann, *La guillotine en 1793*, 28.

⁴⁹ Guyau, "Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction." Quoted in Fleischmann, *La guillotine en 1793*, 14.

The introduction of a mechanism for decapitation had another egalitarian aspect: it eliminated the age-old difference between the executioner and his fellow citizens. For centuries, the *bourreau* (a pejorative term for hangman) was a pariah in French society, living in almost total social isolation.⁵⁰ With the "simple mechanism" substituting the executioner in taking life, the hangman could rejoin the body of citizens.⁵¹

The National Assembly adopted Guillotin's suggestion on January 21, 1790. The new law "established the personalization of punishment, abolished confiscation of goods, and secured the rights of the family over the dead man's body."⁵² Articles 2 and 3 of the 1791 Penal Code proclaimed that "the death penalty consist[ed] in simple deprivation of life, without ever using any kind of torture towards the condemned" and that all the condemned should be decapitated.⁵³

The guillotine was constructed in March 1792 and was first used on April 25 to decapitate Nicolas Jacques Pelletier, who was charged with robbery. The fact that Pelletier was an ordinary criminal, not a celebrity of any sort, had its significance: his quasi-anonymity selected for the inaugural occasion illustrated the egalitarian character of the decapitation machine. In the following years, guillotining became the only, or almost the only, punishment for crimes punishable by death. The social background and gender of the condemned did not affect the

⁵⁰ For instance, executioners traditionally only married within the profession, which led to the formation of executioners' dynasties, such as Sansons. On the situation of executioners in France, see for example G. Lenôtre, *La guillotine et les exécuteurs des arrêts criminels pendant la révolution* (Paris, Perrin, 1893).

⁵¹ A legal change of 1790 reflected this transformation: the executioner gained the right to be elected to the National Assembly along with a few other previously deprived groups such as actors and Jews. See more in: Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, 14.

⁵² Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, 19.

⁵³ *Code pénal du 25 septembre – 6 octobre 1791*. http://ledroitcriminel.fr/la_legislation_criminelle/anciens_textes/code_penal_25_09_1791.htm, accessed on June 3, 2023.

manner of execution, and there was no distinction by type of crime either: political and non-political transgressors who deserved the death penalty were executed similarly.⁵⁴

Despite the noble aspirations of its creator, the guillotine did not come to signify the humane advances of the penitentiary system. It soon became associated with the repulsive extremes of the revolutionary regime, and the Reign of Terror ended what remained of the humane image of the guillotine. The radically increased number of victims and deindividualized execution fixated a new range of associations, securing the "catastrophic devaluation" of the guillotine.⁵⁵

The abuse of technical perfection offered by the guillotine coincided with other extremes that the egalitarian aspirations of the legislators translated themselves into in the middle of the decade. On the one hand, especially the years 1793-1794 saw an increase in burials accompanied by the most modest rites possible. "The funeral was reduced to transporting the body to the cemetery and burying it;" at best, the coffin covered with a tricolor flag was transported to the cemetery accompanied only by a police officer.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the egalitarian decrees maintained the possibility for families to purchase further services and goods should they wish it, a provision that proved fatal for the legislators' aspirations. Kselman admitted that "No attempt was made to regulate either the number and kind of items available or the prices that could be charged, thus opening the way for the rapid growth of funeral pomp" in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Daniel Arasse has argued that the placement of the guillotine still marked the difference between political and non-political decapitations. While the non-political guillotine was quite traditionally stationed at Place de Grève, the political one occupied other spots such as Place du Carrousel and Place de la Révolution. Arasse, *The guillotine and the Terror*, 105–108.

⁵⁵ Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, 33.

⁵⁶ Régis Bertrand, "Chapitre 4. Révolution et Consulat. Origines et genèse du décret du 23 prairial an XII," in: Régis Bertrand and Anne Carol (eds.) *Aux origines des cimetières contemporains : Les réformes funéraires de l'Europe occidentale. XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle*. Nouvelle édition [en ligne] (Aix-en-Provence : Presses universitaires de Provence, 2016), 93–129. <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on February 22, 2023.

⁵⁷ Kselman, *Death and Afterlife*, 228.

The system of funeral provisions also survived the revolutionary decade. Thus, according to Trompette, even though the *jurés-crieurs* were formally stripped of their privileges during the revolution, "they possessed the funerary equipment which ensured them the service at almost all burials; they, therefore, continued, by the very force of things and as in the past, to provide for this first need of healthiness and urban decency."⁵⁸ With that, the revolutionary decade opened some possibilities for private suppliers of funeral accessories and materials. These entrepreneurs started to establish themselves more securely as rightful participants of the funeral economy, but this process continued throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ After the revolution, the decree of 23 Prairial Year XII (1804) formally restored the privileges of *fabriques*, which confirmed that the egalitarian aspirations of the revolutionaries did not reach their full potential.

In the rural areas of late imperial Russia, professional funeral services did not exist. Funerals were organized by families and neighbors, with the participation of local "ritual specialists," usually older women.⁶⁰ Funeral clothing and footwear were sewn or knitted at home, and the coffin was made "at home by the men of the family."⁶¹ Still, accessories and especially food demanded significant contributions from the family.⁶² For most, the help of the village community was essential, and neighbors would bring suitable offerings: food, money, or funeral

⁵⁸ Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023.

⁵⁹ Trompette, "Faire de spéculation vertu," <https://books.openedition.org/pumi/8148#tocto2n1>, accessed on February 11, 2023.

⁶⁰ Sergei Mokhov and Anna Sokolova, "Broken infrastructure and Soviet modernity: The funeral market in Russia," *Mortality* 25, no. 2 (2020): 232–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2019.1588239>. Esp. pp. 233–234.

⁶¹ Elizabeth A. Warner, "Russian peasant beliefs and practices concerning death and the supernatural collected in Novosokol'niki region, Pskov province, Russia, 1995. Part II: Death in natural circumstances," *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000), 255–81: 262. Warner had done her fieldwork in 1995, talking to informants who were 70–80 years old at the time.

⁶² Food was used not only for the funeral feast but often as a payment for the priest's services, as will be illustrated below. See also Catherine Merridale, "Revolution among the dead: cemeteries in twentieth-century Russia," *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying* 8, no. 2 (2003), 176–88: 178.

supplies (cloth or candles).⁶³ Local priests profited from performing the funeral rite and selling small supplies as well.

In urban areas, specialized agencies were an important party in the funeral organization process. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, numerous funeral businesses were running in Russian cities. According to Sergei Mokhov and Anna Sokolova, "There were 80 funeral agencies in Saint Petersburg by the end of the nineteenth century, and 33 agencies in Moscow by 1917."⁶⁴ The agencies acted under the domain of the church, as Sokolova pointed out.⁶⁵ Funeral bureaus provided coffins and wreaths, clothing and decorations, transportation means, and flowers, and catered primarily for the upper and middle class – a clientele capable of paying for the services.

Bureaus also helped families hire the necessary personnel, from carriers, diggers, and torchbearers to singers and wailers. These jobs were considered unprestigious, physically demanding, often dirty, and largely unwanted. Despite the formation, in 1905, of a "union of gravediggers and cemetery watchmen," to which Mokhov and Sokolova point, there are reasons to believe that the overwhelming majority of drivers, diggers, and other low-level funeral employees were daily workers recruited from marginalized strata of the urban population.⁶⁶ Publicist Nikolay Zhivotov, who, in 1895, worked as an undercover torchbearer for a journalist's investigation, described the miserable living conditions of those who were regularly employed as

⁶³ *Daily life of Great-Russian peasants*, 287.

⁶⁴ Mokhov and Sokolova, "Broken Infrastructure and Soviet Modernity," 233.

⁶⁵ Anna Sokolova, "Soviet Funeral Services: From Moral Economy to Social Welfare and Back," *Revolutionary Russia* no. 1 (2019), 1–21: 2.

⁶⁶ For the details on this professional union, see Mokhov and Sokolova, "Broken infrastructure and Soviet modernity," 235. Interestingly, in 1919, the situation repeated itself. Sextons, watchmen, and cemetery workers tried to get their professional union registered at the Moscow Soviet of Professional Unions and were rejected, because functions of cemetery workers were considered similar to those of construction workers, and sextons were aligned with house workers. See "Cemetery workers," *Revolutsia i Tserkov'* no. 2 (1919), 37. http://www.odinblago.ru/revolucia_i_cerkov_2/9, accessed on June 30, 2023.

funeral procession members.⁶⁷ He frequently underlined the "disgust" such workers provoked in others and insisted that "these people had no idea of the cleanliness of body and soul" and "they have lost all idea of human decency."

By the turn of the twentieth century, funeral bureaus provided supplies and personnel according to ranks (*razryady*) that reflected the social status and wealth of the deceased and their family. Everything depended on the rank: clothes worn by the dead in the coffin, the number of horses pulling the hearse, the number of torchbearers accompanying the procession, presence of a choir, organization of public requiems, duration of funeral masses, the place at the cemetery (better places would be closer to the church or the gate).⁶⁸ The lowest-rank funerals – those of seventh, fifth, or third *razryad*, by different accounts – could cost as much as twenty times cheaper than the first-rank ceremony, and the agency's profit could amount to over 800 percent.⁶⁹

In the city, the parish church sponsored the cheapest funerals, mainly using the funds collected from top-rank ceremonies.⁷⁰ However, it was not uncommon that charitable participation did not suffice. For example, many seasonal workers did not have a support network, and, as Catherine Merridale noted, "few actually had the money or the foresight to return to their villages

⁶⁷ Nikolay Zhivotov, *Peterburgskie profili. Vypusk 3: Sredi fakel'schikov. Shest' dney v roli fakel'schika* [Profiles of Petersburg. Issue 3: Among the torchbearers. Six days as a torchbearer] (Saint-Petersburg: A. Vineke, 1895), 15.

⁶⁸ Mokhov and Sokolova, "Broken infrastructure and Soviet modernity," 235; Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 178. See also: Svetlana Filippova, "Kladsische kak simvolicheskoe prostranstvo dlya sotsial'noj stratifikatsii" ["Cemetery as a symbolic space of social stratification"], *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial'noj antropologii* 12 no. 4 (2009), 80–96, esp. p. 81.

⁶⁹ By Zhivotov's account, the first rank funeral in 1894 cost the relatives of the deceased 950 to 1200 RUB, with the actual cost of services for the agency being 113 to 190 RUB; the last rank funeral cost the family 45 RUB, the actual cost for the agency being 12 RUB 25 kopecks. (Zhivotov, *Six days as a torchbearer*, 25). On the organization of funerals in pre-revolutionary Saint-Petersburg/Petrograd see, for example: Dmitry Zasosov, Vladimir Pyzin, *Povsednevnyaya zhizn' Peterburga na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov* [Petersburg everyday life at the turn of the twentieth century] (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2003), 45–48; Mikhail A. Grigoryev, *Peterburg 1910-kh godov: Progulki v proshloe* [Petersburg in the 1910s. Walks into the past] (St. Petersburg: Rossijskij institut istorii iskusstv, 2005), 235–245; P. A. Piskarev, L. L. Uralab, *Milyj staryj Peterburg. Vospominaniya o byte starogo Peterburga v nachale XX veka* [Good old Petersburg. Memories of the everyday life of old Petersburg in the early twentieth century] (Saint-Petersburg, Giperion, 2007), <https://www.rulit.me/books/milyj-staryj-peterburg-download-378535.html>, accessed on June 30, 2023.

⁷⁰ See more in Grigoryev, *Petersburg in the 1910s*; Zasosov, Pyzin, *Petersburg everyday life*.

in time for their deaths."⁷¹ When they died – of typhus, cholera, or simply malnutrition and exhaustion – it was not easy to determine who should take care of their bodies and where they should be laid to rest. According to Zhivotov, town authorities, funeral agencies, and individual professionals such as carters and coffin-makers tried to shift these duties to somebody else because there was no profit in burying the unconnected poor. Zhivotov pointed out that the Petersburg city administration "did not assign any sums" for that, and funeral agencies "did not have funeral ranks cheaper than fifty rubles."⁷² Medical morgues and prosectoriums could accept some of the bodies; otherwise, in Petersburg, the dead were placed in the cheapest covers and coffins to be transported, by rail, for burial at a cemetery way outside the city.⁷³

The funeral inequality and the omnipresence of the church became the two main targets of the funeral reform after the revolution. The 1918 decree "On cemeteries and funerals" introduced the principle of equality for all citizens and formally eliminated the burial hierarchy. The decree also forbade paying for cemetery plots (article 3) and municipalized funeral homes while obliging them to continue operations (article 5).⁷⁴

The decree brought a change in role distribution. Families of the deceased remained key actors in the funeral process: they initiated it, paid for it, and arranged all the extras.⁷⁵ But the church and the funeral agencies were expected to give way to the newly created Soviet institutions. Secular administrations were now to ensure that all citizens received the same minimal service irrespective of their financial and social situation. For the most vulnerable social strata, the Soviet institutions were also to arrange for the funeral.

⁷¹ Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 178–179.

⁷² Zhivotov, *Six days as a torchbearer*, 27.

⁷³ Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 179; Zhivotov, *Six days as a torchbearer*, 24.

⁷⁴ Decree "On cemeteries and funerals," http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_414.htm, accessed on October 30, 2022.

⁷⁵ Decree "On cemeteries and funerals," article 6. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_414.htm, accessed on October 30, 2022.

The church was not eliminated from the equation yet: families were allowed to request religious ceremonies, should they wish so. But the daily death-related activities formally became the responsibility of communal departments (*kommunal'nye otdeley*) – municipal institutions that were to control all "utility enterprises of local importance," including cemeteries, funeral bureaus, and crematoriums (to note, crematoriums did not yet exist in Russia at the time). Other utility enterprises of local importance included slaughterhouses, bathes, hairdressers' salons, and sewage systems.⁷⁶ Thus, death was considered by the city authorities an issue of public sanitation.⁷⁷

Communal departments acted in an often-tense interaction with other institutions, and distributing responsibilities was not always easy. For instance, in Moscow, an administration with the telling name "Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements" was established under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Soviet. The Department was supposed to act as a specialized institution focusing on the issues related to funerals. At the same time, it was not in charge of the municipalization of the funeral homes and agencies: this process was intermittently controlled by the Economic Department of the Moscow Soviet and the Department of Social Security; the People's Commissariat for Public Health and the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs sometimes made recommendations. Supplies for funerals – fabrics, wood, tools, accessories – were to be obtained at *Prododel*, *Gorprodukt*, *Predrasmet*, *Tsentrotekstil'*, or some other centralized entity that redistributed nationalized or municipalized goods. The Department of Transport had to provide horses, carts, or trucks if requested.⁷⁸ Employees of these organizations often lacked

⁷⁶ See for example the letter exchange between the Moscow Soviet and the respective *kommunal'nyi otdeley* in: TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 217.

⁷⁷ On the precursors of this decision, and more specifically on the meaning of public sanitation / applied public hygiene in pre-revolutionary Russia, see for example: Anna Mazanik, "Sanitation, Urban Environment, and the Politics of Public Health in Late Imperial Moscow," PhD diss. (Central European University, 2015).

⁷⁸ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 54; GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. List 37 rev.

understanding of their exact responsibilities and did not have clear service instructions, which caused misunderstandings, conflicts, and protractions.

The overlapping responsibilities of different institutions and the "dispersal of functions" of the communal department were among the reasons for the delayed implementation of the new death-related legislation in the rapidly growing industrial town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, 300 km northeast of Moscow. There, the funeral sections and other communal functions were united under the jurisdiction of a single department as late as the second half of 1922.⁷⁹ Other small towns managed to adapt faster. In Yaroslavl, 270 km northeast of Moscow, the formal reorganization of the funeral industry took only a few months. In February 1919, a commission at the Communal Department of the City Soviet had to "urgently get to the organization of the funeral business."⁸⁰ By June, the commission cheerily reported that private funeral agencies were municipalized, two new ones were founded, and the business "ran strictly in the prescribed manner," providing the population with all the necessary services.⁸¹

With that, some evidence shows that the Soviet institutions were not created from scratch but rather took over or grew out of the existing businesses and processes – quite like in France, where *jurés-crieurs* continued providing for the funerals during the revolutionary decade "by the very force of things." Private funeral bureaus continued operations after municipalization, albeit under different management, and, as the exact distribution of responsibilities was not prescribed, they could supervise administrative tasks along with the practical ones. In Yaroslavl, the newly organized bureaus issued burial orders and work tickets for transportation and digging graves upon

⁷⁹ State Archive of the Ivanovo region (hereinafter GAIO). Fond R-139. Opis' 1. Delo 40. List 45. "The activities of the Gubernia Communal Department and the state of the municipal economy of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk *gubernia* in 1922." A report to the 12th Gubernia Congress of Soviets, November 1922.

⁸⁰ State Archive of the Yaroslavl region (hereinafter GAYaO). Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 6. List 70. Journal of the meeting of the Board of the Department of Local Economy, February 1919.

⁸¹ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 119. List 14 rev., 22 rev., 28 rev., 36. Secretariat of Yaroslavl City Department of Local Economy, reports, March, June, August 1919.

receiving the death report from the notarial department.⁸² In the latter, they continued the business of older funeral homes, and they sold funeral apparel, flowers, and other accessories as well. Moreover, according to the complaints that the local communal department received, the head of the funeral bureau was the same person who had run a coffin trade before the revolution; he did not hesitate to abuse his new office for profit.⁸³ Somewhat similarly, in Ivanovo, in the winter of 1920, the communal department took formal control over the Consumer Society's business of making coffins and funeral accessories. But the distribution of products remained the responsibility of said society.⁸⁴

Despite the egalitarian revolutionary legislation, neither in France nor in Russia did the legislators demand that people altogether abandon funeral accessories. This trapdoor allowed the continuation of traditional practices that differentiated the dead and reproduced social hierarchy. At the same time, continuing these traditions became more difficult in wartime conditions.

War and the funeral crisis⁸⁵

Russia had been at war since 1914; after signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, fighting continued within the territory of the former Romanov Empire until at least 1922. During this period, one significant consequence of the war was a colossal rise in mortality. Due to unreliable and incomplete statistical data, administrative issues related to the regime change, and methodological complications, the estimates of Russian death rates during these years vary greatly. Based on various estimates, the First World War, the Civil War, war-associated epidemics, other

⁸² GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. List 97.

⁸³ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. Listy 45, 68. Complaints received by the Yaroslavl communal department in 1919 (not dated).

⁸⁴ GAIO. Fond R-31. Opis' 1. Delo 193. List 31 rev., 47.

⁸⁵ A more focused story of the "funeral crisis" in Moscow, Ivanovo, and Yaroslavl see in: Anastasia Papushina, "Funeral Reform and the Materiality of Death in the Russian Civil War," *Quaestio Rossica* 9 no. 1 (2021), 155–168.

diseases, hunger, political executions, and terror might have taken 8 to 18 million lives.⁸⁶ According to Christopher Read, the largest cities suffered the most: their population significantly decreased, due to out-migration and de-proletarianization, but also to a rise in mortality. Petrograd's population "collapsed from a peak of 2.5 million in February 1917 to 750,000 in August 1920", and the number of Moscow's inhabitants dropped from 1.8 million in 1915 to about one million in 1920.⁸⁷ A comparative report of the city cemeteries drawn by the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements in Moscow showed the tempo of population loss. Excluding the data from Garnizonnoe and Bratskoe cemeteries, in 1918, 3,477 deaths were registered in March, 3,138 in April, and 5,059 in December – but in 1919, these numbers further increased to reach 7,952 deaths in March, 8,093 in April, and 6,388 in December, showing a "threatening growth."⁸⁸

In the cities and towns of Central Russia, Moscow included, it was not the fighting itself but war-related infections that took on the most menacing proportions. In winter, the leading killers were typhus and diseases of the respiratory system: pneumonia, influenza, and the Spanish flu. In summer, the heat and humidity helped spread gastrointestinal infections, cholera, and dysentery. The spread of diseases was associated with social migrations. "It is known that typhus is brought to Moscow from the outside, and this time, epidemics are spread along the railroads, mostly by soldiers coming back from the front," *Krasnaya Moskva* wrote in 1920.⁸⁹ In the overcrowded barracks of soldiers and war prisoners, infections were numerous and ever more threatening for

⁸⁶ See references to statistics in the Introduction.

⁸⁷ Read, *War and Revolution in Russia*, 160.

⁸⁸ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 16. Report of the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements.

⁸⁹ *Krasnaya Moskva, 1917–1920 g.g.* [Red Moscow, 1917–1920] (Moscow: Gos. obraztsovaya tipografiya, byvsh. tovarischestva I. D. Sytina, 1920), 76.

civilian populations, given that they were often situated within the city's reach.⁹⁰ Permanent migrations of armies, refugees, and seasonal workers running to their native villages away from hunger and conscription helped spread diseases into the provinces. Hindered access to sanitation and medicine aggravated the situation and further increased mortality.

The rise in mortality had a major impact on the funeral industry. An increasing number of bodies had to be buried, and due to migrations, many of those bodies belonged to people who had died away from home, not having their families to take care of them. The burdensome task of burial fell on the state administrations and institutions, and the Soviet state often proved unable to cope with the challenges in the funeral sphere it was partly responsible for. Taking control over cemeteries and municipalizing funeral supplies was insufficient for responding to increased mortality and wartime scarcity. The cost of materials and services was ever-rising as private suppliers used the situation for their benefit. Members of the Moscow Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements lamented the "unscrupulous" (*bessovestnye*) demands of private drivers and gravediggers. Yuri Gauthier's diary provides an example of such unscrupulous behavior. On November 18, 1918, he wrote, "The gravediggers would not bury more than seven dead a day and do not bury before 1 p. m. During the K. A Vil'ken funeral, the grave was unfinished, and they had to bring the coffin up again; they lost the cross that was prepared in advance and were rude and annoyed; typical manifestation of the Russian revolution."⁹¹

Undertakers had numerous possibilities for taking advantage of the situation and acting cynically, as they were indispensable but few. The urban male population capable of the job was

⁹⁰ One report from mid-1919 pointed out that "bodies, increasing in numbers from day to day ... massed up in hospitals, clinics, morgues, commissariats, and private apartments in such numbers that there appeared a serious threat to the public order regarding health of the citizens of Moscow." TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 16.

⁹¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 25; Yuri Gauthier, Diary. 1918. November 18. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/38227>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

shrinking. The closure of factories and subsequent loss of jobs, the threat of hunger, and the need to perform seasonal agricultural works caused a significant backflow of men of peasant origin to their native villages. Furthermore, finding volunteers for jobs considered dirty, non-prestigious, and potentially damaging to health was hard, even in less tense times, as illustrated by Zhivotov above. After the revolution and during the Civil War, it became even harder. According to the report on the functioning of Yaroslavl funeral bureau, the staff was insufficient, but it was impossible to supplement it "due to the unwillingness of candidates sent... by the Labor Exchange" to take up the job.⁹² In some places, town authorities had to force people to participate. According to Vladislav Kokoulin, in Novonikolaevsk (now Novosibirsk), "the new authorities from the early days resorted to forced labor. They mobilized citizens for disposing of corpses, cleaning the snow, taking to pieces rundown houses for firewood, *etc.*"⁹³

Another factor was conscription: military duty claimed many potential Soviet personnel. Sometimes, the Soviet funeral institutions tried to protect their colleagues from going to the fronts of war while forcing them to work. Thus, in July 1919 and again in February 1920, the Moscow Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements proclaimed funeral-related jobs "labor conscription" and asked the presidium of the Moscow Soviet to consider all department staff members "enlisted in the military." As such, they would be banned from leaving their jobs under penalty of "consequences envisaged by wartime laws."⁹⁴ Alternatively, the same Department

⁹² GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. List 97. Report on the activities of the City Funeral Bureau, Department of Local Economy, n/d.

⁹³ Vladislav G. Kokoulin, "Povsednevnyaya zhizn' Novonikolaevska v period "voennogo kommunizma" (dekabr' 1919 – mart 1921 g.)" ["Everyday life of Novonikolaevsk during the period of war communism, December 1919 – March 1921"], in: N. Sergeeva (ed.), *Aktual'nye problemy gumanitarnykh nauk. Mezhvuzovskaya nauchno-prakticheskaya konferentsiya pamyati doktora filosofskikh i yuridicheskikh nauk prof. A. Chernenko. 25 marta 2010 g.* [Current problems in the humanities. An interuniversity research and practical conference in memoriam of Professor A. Chernenko, Doctor of Philosophy and Jurisprudence. March 25, 2010] (Novosibirsk, SGUPS Publishing House, 2011), 47–52: 49.

⁹⁴ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 53, 53 rev; Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 96 rev.

attempted to enlist the Moscow garrison soldiers as diggers and cart drivers. The output of this suggestion is unknown.⁹⁵

Transportation issues were also acute, as most horses and automobiles were mobilized for the war. The remaining animals, carts, and trucks either belonged to private owners – and therefore had to be rented at exorbitant prices – or were at the disposal of several Soviet institutions simultaneously, which caused never-ending competition and made the means of transportation almost inaccessible for funerals. In addition, horses often suffered from malnutrition and poor living conditions. An inspection of the Moscow funeral department's stable in the winter of 1919 showed that all eighteen animals were malnourished, and seven were sick with mange.⁹⁶

Finally, the war demanded all material resources, including wood, textiles, and ironware. The remaining supplies were offered to several competing Soviet institutions, and the funeral sections of communal departments were not first on the list. The dire straits affected the funeral industry, even though the shortage was somewhat expected. Thus, in November 1918, the Juridical Department of the Moscow Soviet sent a circular letter to the district soviets of deputies. The letter, preceding the decree on cemeteries and funerals that would nationalize the funeral industry, called for "immediate action for enumerating [the existing] funeral homes and establishing the most vigilant surveillance so that the agencies remain in perfect order and do not cease their operations, and so that the agencies would not be liquidated. If it turned out that the owners intended to liquidate the agency or reduce its operations, the agency should be confiscated."⁹⁷ The preparations did not help much, and the nationalized funeral agencies soon depleted their resources.

⁹⁵ TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List. 10; Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 2.

⁹⁶ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 8 rev.

⁹⁷ TsAGM Fond R-1952. Opis' 1. Delo 3. List 39.

When the stocks of both the communal department and *Gorprodukt* ran out, tools were purchased from private sellers at exceedingly high prices.⁹⁸ And even this solution was not universal, as businesses were almost equally unprepared for the overwhelming task. As one report put it, "Entrepreneurs ran funeral business mostly in a predatory way, not storing goods but buying them as needed and charging extra costs on the client," that is, the private funeral agencies did not have the necessary materials stored in advance. In Moscow, it turned out, there were no "coffin factories," and most coffins were produced individually by craftsmen (*kustari*) in Volokolamsk, some 125 kilometers from the capital. When mass orders were placed, the factory could not start working "for the lack of wood and specialist workers."⁹⁹ In the same vein, the attempts, in the winter of 1919, to rent carts from private owners "incurred such fantastic expenditures that [the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements] had to renounce this idea the very next day."¹⁰⁰ Citizens were quick to notice this shortage. Mikhail Prishvin retold stories of burials "in second-hand coffins (there are two categories: contagious and ordinary)."¹⁰¹ Lyubov' Martynova said, "Now, one cannot order coffins privately [*chastnym obrazom*], and so there are lines of the dead. This is outright terrible."¹⁰²

As a result, Moscow had no means to clothe, cover, transport, and bury its dead, although their number increased daily.¹⁰³ Throughout 1919, unburied bodies "accumulated in hospitals, clinics, morgues, commissariats, and private apartments in such numbers that there appeared a

⁹⁸ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 54.

⁹⁹ GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. Listy 37–37 rev.

¹⁰⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 28 rev.

¹⁰¹ To note, this story featured "a lonely priest" that accompanied the procession. Prishvin. *Diary*. 1919. February 5. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/188786>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁰² Lyubov' Martynova. *Diary*. 1919. January 22 (9). <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/244326>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁰³ In the 1919 report, the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements mentioned that "According to statistics, the death rate in Moscow currently reaches 50 to 55 people per thousand inhabitants, while in the recent past it was 25 people. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 27.

serious threat to the public order regarding the health of the citizens of Moscow."¹⁰⁴ Other bodies were buried, but scandalously: they arrived in cemeteries "in a disgraceful condition: naked, in horrible postures; they were put not only inside streetcar carriages but also on the platforms." At the cemeteries, they were buried with violations of the basic norms: often in communal graves, often without coffins.¹⁰⁵ Such disorder lasted in Moscow for over a year and only started to ease in mid to late 1920.

According to the study of Ekaterina Krasil'nikova, Novonikolaevsk in Siberia suffered a similar crisis in the winter of 1919-1920 after Kolchak's armies were forced out. As in Moscow, wounded, sick, and dead in enormous numbers arrived at the provincial center by railroad, and as in Moscow, material and human resources were not enough to put all the deceased to the ground. The Bolsheviks were forced to recur to mass graves and forced labor to put things in order, but the process was, by the eyewitness' account, "something of a nightmare."¹⁰⁶

In Yaroslavl, wartime hardships hit the funeral industry in the same way as other branches of the communal economy. Horses were dying; men were leaving or unwilling to take on the unpleasant responsibilities of the burial process.¹⁰⁷ Between December 1918 and April 1920, costs of funeral services and prices of "all accessories related to funerals" rose four times, each time going up by 20 to 50 percent.¹⁰⁸ The variety of funeral accessories available in the warehouse of the communal department was scarce: the two bureaus, despite their alleged smooth functioning, could only offer mousseline for shrouds, as "there was nothing else." A special statement also admitted that "catafalques did not function due to the absence of horses" – but one could ask for a

¹⁰⁴ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 16.

¹⁰⁵ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 25 rev.; GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. List 32 rev.

¹⁰⁶ Ekaterina Krasil'nikova, *Pomnit' nel'zya zabyt'? Pamyatnye mesta i kommemorativnye praktiki v gorodakh Zapadnoj Sibiri (konets 1919 — seredina 1941 g.)* [To forget or to remember? Memorial places and commemorative practices in the cities of Western Siberia, late 1919 – mid-1941] (Novosibirsk: NGTU, 2015), 121–122.

¹⁰⁷ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 119. List 14, 14 rev.

¹⁰⁸ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 7. List 80 rev., 189, 189 rev.

carrier to take the body to the cemetery.¹⁰⁹ Violations of burial norms were similar to those in Moscow but infrequent. Thus, in March 1919, a squadron commander of a railroad defense regiment called the sanitary department's attention to the "inadmissible occurrences": bodies taken to a cholera cemetery were not buried but simply piled up "as if at a wood yard."¹¹⁰ Still, according to a report from late 1919, "the population was getting all the services they wanted," and the situation was far from critical. Notably, after a short period of reorganization, individual artisans resumed their businesses, producing accessories for the deceased. The funeral department acted as their employer and an intermediary between them and their clients.¹¹¹

In Ivanovo, the shortage of materials, workforce, and supplies was tangible in the communal department as well. The dirtiest work caused the most problems: the sanitation brigade suffered from the loss of horses and an "absence (crossed out) shortage of manpower and absence (crossed out) shortage of shoes for workers."¹¹² Compared to this, the situation in the funeral department was regular. It generally "satisfied all citizens' requests for coffins," even though the coffin workshop was often "in urgent need of battens for making coffins and of upholsterer's sundries."¹¹³

Shortage of materials came hand in hand with the lack of finances. State and city budgets were in disarray during the revolution and Civil War years, and administrations had to push some of their costs onto the population. This forced measure could go against the ideological plans manifested in legislation. Thus, in 1920, in the spirit of equality, the Sovnarkom decree from October 15 and the supporting circular letter No. 1903 from the Moscow ZAGS lifted the stamp

¹⁰⁹ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. List 9-rev.

¹¹⁰ GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. List 5.

¹¹¹ GAYaO. Fond R-208. Opis' 1. Delo 56; Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 214.

¹¹² GAIO. Fond R-1175. Opis' 1. Delo 52a. List 4, 11.

¹¹³ GAIO. Fond R-1175. Opis' 1. Delo 52a. List 4, 11.

fee for all civil statuses.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, in 1921, the local ZAGS of the Baumansky district of Moscow admitted accepting payments for marriage, divorce, and change of surname.¹¹⁵ It could not continue functioning otherwise, as it did not "receive any sums for the Department's expenses" from the city or state budget.

In the funeral industry, state allocations of funds were close to nothing, which hindered the implementation of new laws. In January 1919, the head of the Moscow Vagan'kovskoe Cemetery Workers' Committee explained that "the decree on nationalizing the funeral industry has not been implemented yet" because the cemetery did not receive any state funding.¹¹⁶ Funeral administrations had to spend increasingly high sums from their tight budgets on transportation, workers' remuneration, and supplies. Consequently, institutions tried to share the costs with the population, which seemed especially appropriate given the traditionally high level of family engagement in the funeral process. Cemetery management and funeral departments charged for their services, as this was often the only way to ensure the provision of even the modest supplies they could offer. Cemetery committees continued the pre-revolutionary practice of selling grave plots, which was formally prohibited in 1919. By the decrees of 1917 and 1918, families were allowed to organize extra services and arrangements at their own expense; in 1919–1920, they were also forced to cover the basics that were supposed to come for free.

Feeble local efforts to keep funerals at least affordable – such as exchanging payments for coupons to be reimbursed in cash at the social security department after the funeral – were

¹¹⁴ TsAGM. Fond R-2560. Opis' 1. Delo 32. List 6. To note, the fee for registering civil statuses was a debatable issue. The legislation did not initially specify the sums to charge for issuing certificates and registering statuses. Consequently, "locally, there [wa]s total arbitrariness and incoherence in this respect. There [we]re *uezds* where certificates [we]re issued completely free of charge, and there [we]re *uezds* where the very registration costs citizens ten-fifteen rubles, and they ha[d] to pay approximately as much for issuing a certificate; there [we]re, moreover, *uezds* where, as odd as it [wa]s, registering a civil marriage cost a lot more than a church ceremony" (Galkin, "Civil statuses (continuation)," 8).

¹¹⁵ TsAGM. Fond R-2560. Opis' 1. Delo 141. List 164.

¹¹⁶ GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. List 30.

doomed.¹¹⁷ Funerals remained a service to be purchased, and the prices skyrocketed along with hyperinflation. On March 7, 1922, in Moscow, Yuri Gauthier recalled that "Ninotchka's funeral in November 1919 cost 30,000; Uncle Eduard's funeral in December 1921 – 5 000 000; funeral of M. M. [Ryndin – a.p.] in March 1922 – 33 000 000. Bread costs 60,000 a pound."¹¹⁸ Almost at the same time, in February 1922, Fedor Grigoryev, head of the First Cadet School in Petrograd, observed: "In November, my cousin Olga Kossarzhevskaya died; her funeral cost 1 200 000 rubles. In late February, I buried Olga's sister; her funeral cost me 10 million. And around Easter, my long-term comrade and friend G. M. Yakovlev died. His funeral cost over 200 million. If I live another year and do not die on duty or at a hospital, my funeral will probably cost one billion rubles!"¹¹⁹

Some families could afford more sophisticated services (in more fortunate cases, this would cover the costs of burying the poorest).¹²⁰ Families that had some resources could theoretically expect the Soviet institutions to provide "a simple white coffin" with interior trim, "a robe, slippers, stockings, underwear, funerary cart with one horse, attendants (a coachman and a lackey)" for the funeral. Other supplies and services – such as a coffin made of oakwood or metal, religious items for the ceremony, and the option to deliver the coffin to the home address of the deceased in advance – could be provided at an extra charge.¹²¹

But for many, the financial barrier completely blocked off any possibility of a funeral. As one report pointed out, prices for carrying the body to the cemetery and digging the grave could be so high that the "horrified" relatives of the deceased, "unable to satisfy the appetites of cemetery

¹¹⁷ The scheme was discussed in: GAYaO. Fond R-122. Opis' 1. Delo 133. List 3.

¹¹⁸ Yuri Gauthier. 1922. March 7. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/38716>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹¹⁹ Fedor Grigoryev. 1922. February 11. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/50029>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹²⁰ GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. List 30.

¹²¹ 28 December 1918. GARF, Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 40. List 42.

bureaus and gravediggers due to the stringency in money, left the bodies of their relatives in the institutions where death had taken them."¹²² Others would "bring the body to the cemetery, claim that they will dig a grave themselves, and then leave the body and sneak away."¹²³

These critical situations were never considered a norm.¹²⁴ Soviet authorities condemned them in internal reports and letter exchanges, and citizens, according to official papers, openly expressed their discontent at the sight of a communal grave or an unburied body. Secularizing the funeral ritual was provocative; the possibility of arranging a private religious service mitigated the irritation. But a departure from the basic sanitation norms, decency, and respect when dealing with the dead was intolerable.

Clothing and shoes, preferably specially made, were considered critical. The sight of naked corpses scandalized citizens and the authorities, although the extreme death rates would seem to have made such a picture more habitual. To make sure the dead from town hospitals and morgues would not be sent for burial undressed, the Moscow Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements secured a promise from *Tsentrotekstil'* "to send 30,000 arshines of mousseline for dressing the dead ... If absolutely necessary, it is recommended to use hospital rags for dressing the bodies, or to dress them in their own clothes."¹²⁵

Securing individual coffins for each deceased was also crucial; otherwise, "extremely undesirable" cases of putting two or three bodies in one coffin or sending corpses to cemeteries without any coffins might happen.¹²⁶ As for the graves, the dominant opinion had it that

¹²² TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 22.

¹²³ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 47.

¹²⁴ According to Thomas Laqueur, such attitude is not a Soviet-specific or even Western-civilization-specific phenomenon. He believed that "there seems to be a universally shared feeling not only that there is something deeply wrong about not caring for the dead body in some fashion, but also that the uncared- for body, no matter the cultural norms, is unbearable." (Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 8).

¹²⁵ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 25 rev.

¹²⁶ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 24 rev.

"communal graves are evil as they are dug, in most cases, without attention to sanitary requirements." They could only be tolerated in extreme situations.¹²⁷ Where possible, bodies should be buried in individual graves in designated cemeteries.

Rethinking cemeteries

Cemetery management and maintenance were crucial for revolutionizing death in France and Russia. An apparent reason behind that was that the cemetery was the focal point of the process, the final place to which all the roads led, literally and figuratively. Various actions could be taken before the burial; responsibilities could be shifted between the actors; different decisions about decorations and ceremonies could be made. But eventually, the body had to be interred, and there was (almost) no way around it. It was thus crucial to have cemeteries available for burial.

From the religious perspective, death was a spiritual occasion, a mysterious passage of the soul to the other world. As the religious worldview was being increasingly challenged, the questions of the soul, even its very existence, were put into question – first by the intellectuals and then by revolutionary authorities. The bodies remained, though, and they had to be interred somewhere. This is why, during the revolutionary decade, the spatial aspect of cemeteries came to the fore, transforming the mystery of death into a problem of urban planning and public hygiene. Into the broader secularization trend, two tendencies manifested in France and Russia: founding new burial grounds further away from the living quarters went in hand with the projects of repurposing old graveyards' lands.

In Catholic France, traditionally, there were two types of burials: tombs within the church for those of higher social and/or financial standing and graves at the church graveyard for those of more

¹²⁷ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 24 rev.

modest background.¹²⁸ Those who lived in the quarter and were part of the parish had a priority right to be buried in the given graveyard.¹²⁹ Church burials were individual; cemetery graves tended to be communal.¹³⁰ For the sake of space, it was common to bury new bodies on top of the older ones or add them to earlier tombs. A decent reburial would happen five to ten years after the initial interment; this period was considered sufficient for the bodies to decompose.¹³¹ The dug-up bones would then be placed into *charniers* – open galleries in cemetery walls, seemingly to remain there until wholly decayed.¹³²

Graveyards were often the same age as the settlement, and with centuries, burial grounds came to find themselves in city centers. Due to cemeteries' central position in cities and towns, the population used them for many purposes other than burials: holding fairs, organizing commerce, meeting with neighbors to discuss town affairs, or grazing livestock, to name a few.¹³³ Many such activities were progressively banned or restricted over the eighteenth century, but passage through cemeteries was still relatively free for people and cattle.

In the late eighteenth century, urban populations increased, as did mortality rates, and urban cemeteries started to fill up – a process that continued in Paris and other large French cities until at least the mid-nineteenth century – while the existing graveyards' surface was not being

¹²⁸ Daniel Ligou, "L'évolution des cimetières," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 20, no. 39 (1975), 61–77: 62, 64, 66. Jacques Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières du vieux Paris* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1958), 10. See also Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-century Paris* (MIT Press, 1987), 6–10.

¹²⁹ Croq, "Le dernier hommage," 169.

¹³⁰ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 12.

¹³¹ This conception overlived the revolutionary decade. In the Napoleonic decree concerning funerals from 1804 reiterated the five-year period as normal for reburials. See for instance : Isabelle Duhau, Guénola Groud, *Cimetières et patrimoine funéraire. Étude, protection, valorisation* (Paris, Inventaire général, 2020), 27. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02484319>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹³² Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death* (New York: Knopf, Distributed by Random House, 1981), 51–61; Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 13.

¹³³ Jacqueline Thibaut-Payen, *Les morts, l'Église et l'État : recherches d'histoire administrative sur la sépulture et les cimetières dans le ressort du parlement de Paris aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris : Fernand Lanore, 1977), 241, 243; Ligou, "L'évolution des cimetières," 69.

expanded, due to economic considerations.¹³⁴ Space scarcity triggered changes in burial practices; thus, reburials started to happen only one year or even less after the initial burial. New corpses were being interred before the complete decomposition of the previously buried ones, and to make place in a communal grave, diggers sometimes had to cut carcasses into pieces – instances considered scandalous.¹³⁵

Exposure and destruction of bodies long dead and buried, combined with the free passage of people and animals through cemetery grounds, enhanced public attention to the problem of hygiene. Starting already from the 1740s, medical professionals and public thinkers systematically evoked churches and cemeteries as "sources of infection" whose "dreadful odor spreading across the whole quarter" repulsed the locals.¹³⁶ It was believed that the proximity of the dead – under the floor of a frequented church or at a cemetery through which people freely walked – facilitated the spread of contagious diseases. The actual influence of church burials and city cemeteries over the spread of diseases is unclear. Madeleine Foisil argued that the change in morals and manners, not harmful emanations and infections, added to their worsening reputation.¹³⁷ Richard Etlin agreed, noting that "new sensibilities ... along with new concern about urban hygiene combined to impart

¹³⁴ Pascale Trompette and Robert Howell Griffiths, "L'économie morale de la mort au XIX^e siècle. Regards croisés sur la France et l'Angleterre," *Le Mouvement Social* 237 no. 4 (2011), 33–54: 35. Jacqueline Thibaut-Payen studied the Parisian case, Thomas Kselman observed similar phenomena in the city of Angers, and Diego Carnevale wrote about the cemeteries of the Napoleonic-era Naples filling up due to overpopulation of the city. Kselman, *Death and Afterlife*, 172; Diego Carnevale, "Dynamiques du marché funéraire dans la ville de Naples entre l'âge napoléonien et la Restauration: la naissance d'un service public," *Histoire et Mesure* 27 (2012), 29–58. Hillairet mentions that by the late eighteenth century, the largest of Parisian cemeteries, the cemetery of Saints-Innocents, was only approximately 120 x 60 m in size, the Saint-Severin cemetery barely surpassed 45 x 20 m, and others were even smaller (Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 13). On space scarcity, see Thibaut-Payen, *Les morts, l'Église et l'État*, 233.

¹³⁵ Thibaut-Payen, *Les morts, l'Église et l'État*, 235.

¹³⁶ Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières*, 251–252. Among other earlier evidence, Favre cites certain Charles Gabriel Porée who, in 1743, had denounced burials in churches "in the name of health and dignity threatened by contaminated, infectious air." See also Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 12.

¹³⁷ Madeleine Foisil, "Les attitudes devant la mort au XVIII^e siècle : sépultures et suppressions de sépultures dans le cimetière parisien des Saints-Innocents," *Revue Historique* 251, no. 2 (1974): 303–330. Especially p. 317–323.

to the cemetery as well as to the hospital, the slaughterhouse, and the prison the taint of impure institutions that had to be banished to the periphery of the city."¹³⁸

Madeleine Lassère showed that as early as the mid-eighteenth century, multiple projects across France denounced the insalubrious and repulsive state of urban cemeteries and suggested solutions to this problem. One possible solution was to increase the distance between the living and the dead. In the 1770s, municipalities and town councils devised initiatives to reorganize urban cemeteries and move them outside city walls.¹³⁹ In Paris, the city Parliament ordered the transfer of cemeteries outside the city walls in 1765 after an investigation that took over two decades. Burials at existing *intra-muros* cemeteries were formally banned in the capital as of 1766.¹⁴⁰

Finding suitable grounds for the new cemeteries and finding resources to transfer the old ones were two significant obstacles to this solution.¹⁴¹ According to Favre, the promised financial aid from the government came irregularly and did not suffice, forcing the parishes and *fabriques* to pay for the transportation, which might cost up to 80–100,000 livres.¹⁴² But the authorities were principally in favor of this solution, and in 1776, a royal ordinance ordered the transfer of cemeteries outside city walls once more.¹⁴³

Another solution was to ban burials within churches and in the existing graveyards for the sake of their more hygienic condition. The same parliament decision from 1765 quoted above drastically limited the number of church burials. Somewhat paradoxically for a modern reader, it

¹³⁸ Etlin, *The Architecture of Death*, x.

¹³⁹ Madeleine Lassère, "Territoires des morts et projets urbain XVIII^e-XIX^e siècles," in: Jean-Paul Charrié (ed.), *Villes en projet(s). Nouvelle édition* (Pessac : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1996), 263–273, <https://books.openedition.org/msha/9702>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁴⁰ Ligou, "L'état des cimetières," 70 ; Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières*, 255.

¹⁴¹ Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières*, 256.

¹⁴² Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières*, 256. See also, Thibaut-Payen, *Les morts, l'Église et l'État*, 378.

¹⁴³ Déclaration du Roi, concernant les inhumations, donnée à Versailles le 10 Mars 1776. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8615015t>, accessed on May 28, 2023. See also Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières*, 255–256.

also reinforced the practice of inhumations in communal graves, making it the obligatory form of cemetery burial.¹⁴⁴ Individual burials and non-reusable coffins did not become obligatory in Paris before 1801, and it took at least another decade for the innovation to take root.¹⁴⁵ Thus, in the last third of the eighteenth century, in urban France, frequent re-opening of communal graves at overcrowded city cemeteries and burying the dead in reusable coffins remained common, and like cemetery transfers, the limitations on inhumations were easier envisioned than implemented. Throughout the late 1770s, the government continued to receive complaints regarding public cemeteries' insalubrious state.¹⁴⁶ These concerns were well-grounded, as the case of the Parisian Saints-Innocents cemetery proved.

The largest graveyard of the capital and one of the oldest, in the eighteenth century, the Saints-Innocents provided funeral services for sixteen parishes and three hospitals.¹⁴⁷ It was located in the city center and surrounded by living quarters, bordering a residential house. This proximity, and the fact that it was mostly poor people that were buried there, was frustrating for the quartier population that incessantly complained about abominable odors and liquids emanating from the cemetery.¹⁴⁸ The situation culminated in a scandal in May 1780: a communal grave full of half-rotten bodies erupted into the nearby house. The cemetery was closed in December 1780 – fourteen years after the city Parliament banned *intra-muros* inhumations and four years after the royal decree reintroduced the ban. But it was not before 1785 that a new regulation definitively prohibited renovating and reconstructing the graveyard.

¹⁴⁴ Hillaires, *Les 200 cimetières*, 14–15.

¹⁴⁵ Sauget, "La mise en place d'un marché funéraire du cercueil...", 118.

¹⁴⁶ Thibaut-Payen, *Les morts, l'Église et l'État*, 229.

¹⁴⁷ Foisil, "Les attitudes devant la mort...", 307. According to Etlin, it was eighteen parishes, two hospitals and a morgue. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 35–36.

By 1789, French cemeteries found themselves in a long-drawn transitory phase. As church lands, they fell under the Assembly decree of November 2, 1789, which put the church property at the disposal of the nation only a few months after the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed the liberty of conscience.¹⁴⁹ Then, in May 1791, cemetery lands were transferred under the jurisdiction of municipalities. Formally, they could be sold on the same conditions as national property, and only after ten years since the last inhumation.¹⁵⁰ It is unclear, though, whether the sale of church cemeteries envisaged by the decree ever took place. Daniel Ligou believed it remained on paper.¹⁵¹

Regarding religious freedoms, the revolution made a significant step towards burial equality. On 12 Frimaire Year II (November 22, 1793), the Convention decreed that no one could be refused burial at a public cemetery, notwithstanding their religious opinions, thus opening cemeteries for denominations other than Catholics. Protestants and Jews had long been banned from using common cemeteries. Protestant inhumations at Catholic graveyards, done tacitly and reluctantly, could be tolerated, depending on the time and place; the Jews had their own cemeteries.¹⁵² Now, they could enjoy equal access to burial.

In terms of public sanitation, though, the revolutionary authorities followed the steps of Enlightenment philosophers and royal ministries. The ban on interment within church buildings

¹⁴⁹ See for instance: Armand Gaston Camus, "Décret du 2 novembre 1789 sur les biens ecclésiastiques," *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860 - Première série (1787–1799) Tome IX, Du 16 septembre au 11 novembre 1789* (Paris, Librairie Administrative P. Dupont, 1877), 649. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1877_num_9_1_5267_t1_0649_0000_7, accessed on March 4, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 15; Lassère, "Territoires des morts et projets urbain XVIII^e-XIX^e siècles," <https://books.openedition.org/msha/9702>, accessed on May 27, 2023; Bertrand, "Origines et genèse du décret du 23 prairial an XII," <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on May 27, 2023.

¹⁵¹ Ligou, "L'évolution des cimetières," 72. The idea of selling cemetery lands to laic authorities was promulgated but not invented by the revolutionaries. Already during the last decades of ancien régime, it was discussed in some places in France. Thus, Charles Tamason observed that in Lille, the royal ordinance of 1779 "stipulated that parishes would sell their cemetery land to the magistrates" (Charles A. Tamason, "From mortuary to cemetery: Funeral riots and funeral demonstrations in Lille, 1779-1870," *Social Science History* 4, no. 1 (1980), 15–31: 15).

¹⁵² Ligou, "L'évolution des cimetières," 67–68.

was reiterated in 1790, and the abolition of *intra-muros* cemeteries in 1791.¹⁵³ But implementation of these measures was no easier after the revolution than it was during the *ancien régime*. Cemetery transfers and plans for constructing new burial sites continuously foundered on financial difficulties. In Paris, most smaller cemeteries were progressively closed in the 1790s. Still, the plans to organize new large cemeteries outside the city walls to substitute for all the closed graveyards were not set about before Year IX (1801).¹⁵⁴

As for the existing graveyards, according to revolutionary politicians, they could have been transformed into public spaces. By contrast with their quite pragmatic medieval uses – such as grazing cattle or holding commercial affairs – during the revolutionary times, cemeteries were reimagined as places of meditation, reminiscence, and unity with nature. According to various political and artistic projects, especially prominent in the second half of the decade, citizens were supposed to visit cemeteries to walk around, contemplate the meaning of life and death, and draw lessons of civic virtue from their deceased ancestors and fellow citizens.¹⁵⁵ For this image to become a reality, cemeteries should always be open for visiting and as pleasant as possible to "inspire respect and meditative reverence" towards the dead.¹⁵⁶ But this peaceful image largely remained a fantasy, and burials continued in shrinking urban graveyards while the new projects were being discussed.

It only made things worse that, especially in 1792–94, mortality drastically grew due to the extraordinary measures of fighting against counterrevolution known as the Reign of Terror.

¹⁵³ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Bertrand, "Origines et genèse du décret du 23 prairial an XII," <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on February 22, 2023.

¹⁵⁶ Bertrand, "Origines et genèse du décret du 23 prairial an XII," <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on February 22, 2023.

Unprecedented violence from both sides produced enormous numbers of victims.¹⁵⁷ The legislation increasingly favored death sentences, culminating in June 1794 (22 Prairial Year II), when the notorious *loi de prairial* introduced only two verdicts possible for the accused of counterrevolutionary crimes: acquittal or death.¹⁵⁸ By minimal estimates, about 35,000 to 40,000 people were executed between July 1792 and July 1794. During the Great Terror (June 10 to July 27, 1794), 2,554 people were sentenced to execution.¹⁵⁹ Surveillance and persecution mechanisms of the era of Terror favored "repression or civil exclusion of whole categories of people (all emigrants, all nobles, all refractory clergymen, *etc.*)."¹⁶⁰

Mass executions led to the need for mass burials. Before 1790, the condemned and executed had no right to burial in public cemeteries.¹⁶¹ The Constituent Assembly changed that, allowing the burials of condemned alongside common graves. In Paris, four cemeteries were used for laying to rest the executed during the Reign of Terror. Madeleine cemetery, where the royal family was buried, was closed in March 1794 due to overload. Cemetery *des Errancis* (literally "of the maimed") was inaugurated at a free spot of land towards the north of Madeleine to accept the Dantonists' and Robespierrists' bodies, among others. In June 1794, after the guillotine was moved from the Place de la Révolution (currently Concorde) to the Place de la Bastille on June 9, the executed were for a few days buried at the nearby cemetery of Sainte Marguerite. On June 13,

¹⁵⁷ See for example Jean-Clément Martin, *Blancs et Bleus dans la Vendée déchirée* (Découvertes/Gallimard, 1986), 102; Jean-René Suratteau, "Lyon (Ville-Affranchie/Commune-Affranchie)", in Albert Soboul, Jean-René Suratteau, and François Gendron (dir.), *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 688–696.

¹⁵⁸ *Bulletin des lois de la République française*, no. 1, 22 prairial an II. Text available at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56373g/f1.item>, accessed on January 6, 2023.

¹⁵⁹ See for example Jacques Husenet (dir.), "*Détruisez la Vendée ! "Regards croisés sur les victimes et destructions de la guerre de Vendée*" (La Roche-sur-Yon, Centre vendéen de recherches historiques, 2007), 450. See also the article "Terreur" in Larousse encyclopedia, https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/la_Terreur/146370, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁶⁰ Tackett, "Flight to Varennes," 470.

¹⁶¹ Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 282.

the guillotine was further moved to the Place du Trône-Renversé (currently Nation), and the executed were buried at the Picpus cemetery.

The bodies of the executed were laid in communal graves, with no coffins and no memorials, crosses, or name plaques. The executor's assistants confiscated their personal belongings for the nation's benefit so that later on, it proved impossible to identify the remains.¹⁶² Nobody cared about the integrity of body parts, and, by some accounts, undertakers randomly used severed heads to fill free space in the graves. At Picpus, graves remained open for quite some time as the executions continued, which caused constant complaints from nearby districts' population.¹⁶³

In other cities, the situation was no different. Lassère quoted evidence from Lyon, Nantes, Rennes, Avignon, Grenoble, and Besançon, where the bodies of the executed were piled into vast pits without any sign of individualization, causing horror and repulsion among the city folk.¹⁶⁴

But even when the era of Terror was over, French urban cemeteries remained in disarray, and popular complaints continued. Thomas Kselman quoted a certain Gaspar Delamalle who, in 1795, described one Parisian cemetery as a "narrow plot encumbered in the middle by an enormous pile of earth and debris bordered by a path covered with a foot of mud."¹⁶⁵ Trompette and Griffiths agree that during the revolutionary period, cemetery lands were "in ruins."¹⁶⁶ In 1795, the *Moniteur* condemned "indecent with which the funerals [we]re now being done in Paris. This neglect for the dead, this contempt, this impiety towards their remains that we witness – would those not be

¹⁶² Hillairet, *Les 200 cimetières*, 296–297. See also M. A. De Beauchesne, *La Vie de Mme Elisabeth, sœur de Louis XVI*, Vol. 2 (Paris, Henri Plon éditeur, 1870), 266.

¹⁶³ The National Convention and the Paris Commune were constantly dealing with issues of public sanitation related to mass executions. See also Philippe Bourdin, "La terreur et la mort, une écriture de la postérité," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 29, no. 3 (2003), 451–68: 462.

¹⁶⁴ Lassère, "Territoires des morts et projets urbain XVIII^e-XIX^e siècles," <https://books.openedition.org/msha/9702>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁶⁵ Kselman, *Death and Afterlife*, 166.

¹⁶⁶ Trompette and Griffiths, "L'économie morale de la mort au XIX^e siècle...", 36.

further offenses of the tyranny that had corrupted everything? [...] The Convention should hurry to grant us this precious morality that we have lost."¹⁶⁷ In 1796, François-Antoine Daubermesnil called for fighting "against the current indecency of burials," and other initiatives against the "indecency" of burials were being discussed throughout 1796 to reconcile "decency, dignity, respect for the dead with the principles of the republican regime," in the words of Paul-Benoît-François Bontoux, a deputy from Hautes-Alpes.¹⁶⁸ And yet, in 1798, by the report of deputy Jean-Baptiste Lafargue, "the anarchy [wa]s such that there [we]re burial places where corpses lay on the ground and became prey to animals... It is time that the Frenchmen stop being dumped on the highways."¹⁶⁹

Eventually, the lasting regulations were adopted in Napoleonic times. According to Bertrand, some *fabriques* managed to regain control over some of the *ancien régime* cemeteries; generally, the ministerial decision of 15 Brumaire Year XI (November 6, 1802) declared the places of inhumation public property, and by the decree of 23 Prairial Year XII (June 12, 1804) recognized cemeteries as communal property.¹⁷⁰ But these developments are beyond the scope of the current study.

In late imperial Russia, a decent burial could only happen at a consecrated cemetery, preferably a local one, close to the person's place of birth and having the remains of his ancestors.¹⁷¹ Cemeteries were usually enclosed, and family plots had a small fence around them,

¹⁶⁷ Bertrand, "Révolution et Consulat," <https://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Bertrand, "Révolution et Consulat," <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Baptiste Lafargue, *Corps législatif. Conseil des Cinq-Cents, Motion d'ordre de Lafargue, ... sur la police des cimetières et des inhumations. Séance du 14 frimaire an VII*, Paris, Impr. nationale.

¹⁷⁰ Bertrand, "Origines et genèse du décret du 23 prairial an XII," <http://books.openedition.org/pup/33955>, consulted on February 22, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Rare exceptions were burials of people who died in an "unclean," unnatural way: suicides, brigands, those who froze or starved to death. See more in: *Daily life of Great-Russian peasants*, 144–145, Dmitry K. Zelenin, *Vostochnoslavianskaya etnografiya* [Ethnography of Eastern Slavs] Translated by K. Tsivina (Moscow: Nauka,

allowing for some privacy when relatives visited and commemorated the dead at special times of the year.¹⁷²

Despite the supposed continuous spiritual interaction between the living and the dead, rural cemeteries were in a dispiriting state by the late nineteenth century. Cattle were pasturing on the grass, destroying crosses and memorials, and the local population did not hurry to restore fences, sweep the lanes, and cultivate the greenery.¹⁷³ Relatives of the deceased tended only to take care of the family grave plot, ignoring the adjacent ones or the state of the whole area. No state institution existed to control and maintain the condition of rural cemeteries. The lands belonged to the church that hardly had any leverage to force people to care for graveyards better.¹⁷⁴

After the revolution, some cemeteries moved under the management of believers' communities while Soviet institutions ran others. As discussed above, the "cemetery soviets" had minimal resources, and state allocations were close to nothing. During the years of the civil war, even in the capital, cemetery maintenance faced severe problems. In winter 1919, for example, Semenovskoe cemetery was one of the very few in Moscow kept in "exemplary order," that is, "pathways and graves sodded, no garbage, memorials and crosses are unbroken and in order, gravediggers are diligent."¹⁷⁵ Danilovskoe cemetery, more characteristically for the period, "was

1991), 352. From medieval times and up to the late eighteenth century, such bodies were collected throughout the year in a pit or a special building outside the settlement and buried charitably once a year, usually a week before the Trinity Day. See for example: Sergey Shokarev, *Moskovskij nekropol' XV – nach. XX veka kak sotsiokul'turnoe yavlenie (Istochnikovedcheskij aspekt)* [The Moscow necropolis of the fifteenth to early twentieth century as a social and cultural phenomenon. The source study aspect]. Synopsis of a Candidate thesis in history (Moscow, 2000), 16. See also Zelenin, *Ethnography of Eastern Slavs*, 353–354. After 1771, this practice was put to an end, but the belief persisted that those who died unnaturally desecrated the cemetery land and should not be granted the right to a Christian burial. This conviction led, as late as the late nineteenth century, even to exhumation and reburial of unwanted bodies. Examples can be found in: Dmitry K. Zelenin, *Ocherki russkoj mifologii. Vypusk 1: Umershie neestestvennoj smertju i rusalki* [Essays on Russian mythology. Part 1. Those who died unnatural death and mermaids] (Moscow, Indrik, 1995), 95–129.

¹⁷² Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 177–178.

¹⁷³ Komarov, "Culture of death in the Russian village," 32–33.

¹⁷⁴ Bulgakov, *Handbook for Priests*, 950–951.

¹⁷⁵ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 27.

found in a terrible state ... despite fourteen gravediggers employed there, no one [wa]s willing to take up cleaning – dirt and garbage and absolute mess are everywhere across the cemetery."¹⁷⁶ The visual disorder at the cemeteries added to the overall picture of the funeral crisis.

When the most acute situation was over, instances of inappropriate use of cemeteries attracted the attention of the respective authorities. In 1921, the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements alarmed the direction of the Communal Services that "recently, various scandalous instances have been especially intense at cemeteries, such as: cutting down trees, pasturing of cows, horses, and goats, breaking down monuments, crosses, et cetera, and that overall, cemeteries became similar to public thoroughfares."¹⁷⁷ In 1922, S. Anserov wrote in the official bulletin *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* [Communal Services] that "Moscow cemeteries "fell into total decay and demand imperiously to be restored and regularized" as "places of eternal sleep of loved ones that are dear to our citizens."¹⁷⁸

One reason for such complications was the same as in France: the existing urban cemeteries, often several centuries old, were located in the city center. Against the rapid growth of the population and even more rapid increase in mortality during the Civil War years, there was hardly any possibility of allotting more land to the cemetery surface and accommodating more dead. Like in France, in Russia, the city natives had a priority over the immigrants when it came to distributing grave plots. A tradition of burying members of one family near to each other survived the October revolution and made its way to the official regulations. An instruction of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs from January 22, 1919, "complied with the request of families and loved ones regarding burying the deceased near the deceased members of his family.

¹⁷⁶ TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 27..

¹⁷⁷ TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 463. List 39.

¹⁷⁸ S. Anserov, "Etapy pokhoronnogo dela v Moskve (okonchanie)," ["Stages of funeral business in Moscow (ending)"] *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 13 (1922), 14.

Therefore, all previously enclosed and free plots within the cemetery walls cannot be occupied to bury the deceased who are not related to those already buried within the walls, unless specially permitted by the Department of Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements."¹⁷⁹ In 1921, the decision of the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet further enforced this tradition: it proclaimed the city's monastery cemeteries closed for interments unless the deceased were Communists or had family members already buried in the same cemetery.¹⁸⁰

The existing norms strongly favored the locals to the injury of various types of migrants who died in the city: seasonal workers, soldiers, deserters, or refugees.¹⁸¹ But in the end, the entire city population suffered from the lack of burial space. In Moscow, in late 1919, the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements estimated that all Moscow cemeteries had 314,668 square *arshins* of free land – enough to accommodate roughly 70,000 bodies. The average mortality was about 50,000 people yearly, so the Department hoped they had enough land for one year.¹⁸² Against this estimate, the recommendation to only use the existing grave plots for new interments 35 years after the last burial sounded feasible.¹⁸³ But, according to a later study, these and other norms were probably routinely violated.

In 1926, sanitary doctor Vladimir Fedynskij, a specialist in public hygiene, published a report covering various aspects of cemetery management over the previous decade. He pointed to the poor maintenance of Moscow cemeteries, where the "chaotic exploitation" of lands led to their overflow. According to Fedynskij, of Moscow's 32 cemeteries, ten belonged to monasteries and were closed for interments but for rare exceptions; fourteen were run by the believers'

¹⁷⁹ The instruction is quoted in the Proclamation "On Cemeteries" from April 25, 1919. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 33 rev., 34.

¹⁸⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 463. List 295.

¹⁸¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 33.

¹⁸² Report on the activities of the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements for January 1, 1920. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 11 rev.

¹⁸³ December 1919. GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 127.

communities; eight were under the control of the Moscow Department for Communal Services.¹⁸⁴

In the mid-1920s, the allocation of plots significantly exceeded existing sanitary norms:

By late 1923, according to the Moscow Healthcare Department questionnaire, all 32 cemeteries had 13 *desiatinas* of free land, which, with a norm being eight arshins for a grave, 35,100 bodies could be buried; actually, though, in two years from October 1923 to October 1925, 54,458 bodies were buried which would occupy a surface of 20 *desiatinas*. The data for eight communal cemeteries is even more telling: they had six *desiatinas* of free land by late 1923, which could accommodate 16,200 bodies, and in reality, in two years, there were 48,582 interments there, meaning that if the norm were followed, one would have needed 18 *desiatinas* of land or three times the existing surface.¹⁸⁵

Fedynskij was confident that such excesses were possible only if sanitary norms were significantly violated: graves dug in the spots that had not yet been cleared for new interments, and bodies buried in common graves "in a ribbon-like way or sometimes in two rows one above the other." By his estimate, as much as 20 percent of all interments in communal cemeteries were in common graves – a highly undesired but only possible way. The sanitary doctor blamed these incidents on "years of war and revolutionary havoc, colossal mortality ... and total state of abandonment [*besprizornost'*] of cemeteries."¹⁸⁶

The "state of abandonment" is understandable, considering the post-revolutionary and war conditions. What is more, already in 1919, the future of cemeteries within the city walls was put into question. The "principal approach to the cemetery question," adopted by the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements and the respective commission of the Moscow Soviet, was

¹⁸⁴ V. Fedynskiy, "Kladbischenskij krizis v Moskve i krematsiya" ["Moscow cemetery crisis and cremation"], *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 9-10 (1926), 23–30. Sources from the Department of Communal Services claim that it run nine cemeteries, making the overall number 33 (see f. e. TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 249. List 172).

¹⁸⁵ Fedynskiy, "Moscow cemetery crisis and cremation," 24.

¹⁸⁶ Fedynskiy, "Moscow cemetery crisis and cremation," 25.

that their surface should be progressively diminished so that the grounds "could be used for constructing various buildings, arranging places for promenades, and other useful purposes."¹⁸⁷

The idea of reusing cemetery lands fitted into the broader urban planning debates of the era. Centered around the concepts of functionality and rationality, the new city envisioned by urbanists was supposed to help forward the creation of a new man. By the end of the decade, this approach engendered the creation of new urban plans and even the building of new cities.¹⁸⁸ But while the new cities were a work in progress, urbanists considered refurbishing the existing ones, which, according to Anna Sokolova, "from the Bolsheviks' point of view, have undoubtedly borne the stamp of obsolete social relations."¹⁸⁹ Cemeteries, with their religious associations, were among the first candidates for redevelopment.

Sokolova identified three ways of cemetery rearrangement: the repurposing of the existing cemeteries, using fragments of cemeteries and tombs for other purposes (including construction works, scything, and using the ancillary buildings for housing), and turning cemeteries into public gardens and parks. The latter idea was among the most popular due to the greenery that traditionally was aplenty at Russian cemeteries (this was also the suggestion put forward by the Moscow Communal Services in 1925).¹⁹⁰ And yet, in general, according to Sokolova, "the implementation of these ideas ... was as inconsistent and badly thought out as many other projects of the young Soviet regime."

For one, the repurposing initiatives were often met with opposition from below. In 1920, members of the believers' community and the church council stood against a proposed project of

¹⁸⁷ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 27, 27 rev.

¹⁸⁸ The most frequently cited example is the case of Magnitogorsk described by Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁸⁹ Anna Sokolova, "Novyj mir i staraya smert': sud'ba kladbishch v sovetskikh gorodakh 1920—1930-kh godov" [The new world and the old death: the fate of cemeteries in Soviet cities, 1920s-1930s], *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* no. 1 (2018), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2018/1/novyj-mir-i-staraya-smert.html>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

¹⁹⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 3042. List 67.

turning empty cemetery lands at the Pokrovsky monastery into a playground. The petitioners engaged all possible arguments, from "the sense of awe towards the memory of the deceased shared by people of all nations, all convictions, and all nationalities," with which children's games are incompatible, to the fears for the integrity of tombs and monuments.¹⁹¹

Furthermore, various institutions often had incompatible stakes in the use of cemetery lands. In 1919, the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements petitioned the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet to protect the cemeteries under its jurisdiction from "occupying [them] for various activities ... that not only hinder the Department's systematic work but also violate the natural conditions demanded from cemeteries."¹⁹² Among such activities were pasturing, plowing the land (cemeteries of the Pokrovsky and Preobrazhensky monasteries), using the cemetery grounds as a place for physical exercise (also Pokrovsky monastery), and housing children's institutions in the cemetery ancillary buildings. In 1921, the Moscow Communal Services "definitively protested against the increasing tendency of District Soviets to use the Moscow cemeteries with ends having nothing in common with them."¹⁹³

This wording illustrated the degree to which even the members of Soviet institutions could accept the cemetery lands' possible repurposing. I found no mention of reusing cemetery lands for civil purposes in the two provincial archives I studied. Rather than doing so explicitly, city administrations ended up making half-legged decisions by the end of the decade. Interments in the old cemeteries were being progressively limited or banned. Still, the funeral administrations were eager to discuss building new fences and arranging the grounds so that the cemetery, with pathways swept and monuments cleaned, "looked proper."¹⁹⁴ Simultaneously, new cemeteries were being

¹⁹¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 306. List 3, 3 rev.

¹⁹² TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 14.

¹⁹³ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 463. List 141.

¹⁹⁴ GAIO. Fond R-139. Opis' 1. Delo 17. List 105.

founded outside the city walls to accommodate the increasing number of the deceased (in Moscow, by 1925, it turned out that cemeteries were overcrowded, and four plots were chosen on the outskirts for the new ones).¹⁹⁵ The newly founded cemeteries were to be arranged appropriately: they should have been planned in advance, divided into numbered plots, surrounded by fences, and embellished with trees and bushes.¹⁹⁶

Judging by the internal documents of funeral departments, the idea of appropriate and orderly cemetery maintenance was intrinsically related to fences. Notwithstanding the more pressing matters such as the "funeral crisis" or instances of blatant violation of sanitary norms, members of the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements kept returning to the question of cemetery walls from 1919 up to at least 1926. In 1919, they discussed the "urgent construction of fences;" in 1921, they concluded that "constructing fences around cemeteries is essential because, without them, the Department cannot take any measures for establishing at least minimum order."¹⁹⁷ In 1922, the first step to be taken towards regularizing cemeteries was "building solid fences around cemeteries that would be hard to steal."¹⁹⁸ In 1923, the Funeral subdepartment planned to bring the nine cemeteries under its jurisdiction "to a well-maintained state by restoring fences around them."¹⁹⁹ The same plan was announced for the year 1926.²⁰⁰

In 1926, a top-secret letter to the secretariat of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (*VTsIK*) indicated that things had not changed: "Cemetery fences were not repaired since the war began, and, apart from the natural decay for over ten years, the fences were ruined especially during the years of fuel crisis... Restoring cemetery fences and bringing them to a well-

¹⁹⁵ Report "The Moscow Communal Services and the immediate prospects for their development," late 1925-early 1926. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 3042. List 67.

¹⁹⁶ GARF. Fond R-393. Opis' 81. Delo 22. List 35 rev.

¹⁹⁷ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. List 11; Opis' 1. Delo 463. List 39.

¹⁹⁸ Anserov, "Stages of funeral business in Moscow," 13-14.

¹⁹⁹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 249. List 171.

²⁰⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 3042. List 67.

designed state, and sustaining the security guards in numbers enough for a 300 *desiatinas* surface, demands immense nonrecurring costs."²⁰¹ The ubiquitous fences appeared once more in the cemeteries-related regulations from 1929, in the joint Rules of People's Commissariats for Healthcare, Internal Affairs, and Justice "On arranging cemeteries and the order of internment."²⁰²

Fences were needed to keep strangers away from the graves and protect the cemeteries from inappropriate uses such as cutting grass, hewing trees, and letting cattle pasture. The obsession of various administrations with restoring and rebuilding fences is quite ironic, given the theoretical interest in the pragmatic reuse of cemetery lands. This example illustrates how deep the rationalization in the funeral sphere could (or rather could not) run.

As shown above, France and Russia entered the revolutionary phase facing similar cemetery problems: the existing ones were insufficient in view of the increasing population and rising mortality, and provoked sanitary concerns. Similar solutions were proposed, that is, to create new burial grounds further away from the living quarters while simultaneously repurposing the old ones or at least maintaining them in a state that would make visits pleasant. Despite the intentions, in both cases, during the revolutionary decade, the state of most urban cemeteries was close to disastrous, and it took the authorities several further years to undo the harm that was done to the cemeteries following the revolutions.

²⁰¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 18. Delo 457. List 6.

²⁰² Pravila №198 /B / 197/ mv. NKVD, NKZdr. "Ob ustrojstve kladbisch i poryadke pogrebeniya" [Rules no.198 /B /197/ mv of People's Commissariats for Healthcare, Internal Affairs, and Justice "On arranging cemeteries and the order of interment"], first published in the *NKVD Bulletin* no. 23–24 (1929). Quoted from GARF. Fond R-393. Opis' 81. Delo 22. List 35 rev.

The cremation debate: "The most hygienic way of burial"

Soviet funeral institutions took one further step towards cleanliness, order, and proper sanitary condition of the spaces of death: in the mid-1920s, they brought up the subject of cremation. The ensuing public debate and experiments were a culmination of a long process that began in the Russian Empire before the revolution. From their perspectives, doctors, engineers, and hygienists argued in favor of this way of interment. In 1907, the head of the Saint-Petersburg Sanitary Commission delivered a presentation for the City Duma, pointing to the benefits of cremation for improving sanitary conditions in town.²⁰³ But strong opposition from the Orthodox Church blocked these initiatives. A commission created at the Most Holy Synod formulated the official Orthodox point of view: "The most natural way of internment was burying them in the ground," and committing bodies to flames was a sacrilege.²⁰⁴

The October revolution formally legalized cremation in 1918 through the Decree on cemeteries and funerals. In 1919, the magazine *Revolutsia i tserkov'* [Revolution and the church] announced the opening of several crematoriums across the country in a short time:

The extraordinary sanitary commission in Moscow takes measures to speed up the creation of a crematorium in Moscow.

In order to protect the population against the contagion that spreads from bodies rotting in the ground, the Saratov executive committee suggested the *gubernia* health department consider the project of building a crematorium in Saratov...

²⁰³ *K voprosu ob ozdorovlenii goroda S.-Peterburga. "O Krematoriume". Doklad S.-Peterburgskoj Gorodskoj Dume predsedatelya S.-Peterburgskoj Sanitarnoj komissii doktora meditsiny A. N. Oppengeima* [On improving the health of Saint-Petersburg. On the Crematorium. A report of the head of Saint-Petersburg Sanitary Commission, Doctor of medicine A. N. Oppengeim, before the S.-Petersburg City Duma] (Saint-Petersburg, 1907).

²⁰⁴ M. Shkarovskiy, "Stroitel'stvo Petrogradskogo (Leningradskogo) krematoria kak sredstva bor'by s religiej" [Building the Petrograd (Leningrad) crematorium as a way of struggle against religion], *Klio* no. 3 (2006), 158–162. See also K. Alekseev, "Krematsiya i ozdorovlenie gorodov" [Cremation and improving the cities' health], *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 8-9 (1922), 17.

The question of arranging for a crematorium in Kharkov is close to being realized. A design competition has been announced...

The question of building a crematorium in Petersburg (*sic – a.p.*) was raised again some time ago, and there were several projects. But a whole range of technical difficulties, mainly related to getting the construction materials in the current situation, has pushed back the realization of the building of a permanent crematorium. The recent rise in epidemic diseases and the consequent increase in mortality have once again brought forward the urgent necessity of the immediate construction of at least a temporary crematorium.²⁰⁵

Despite the promises, crematoriums were eventually constructed only in the two capitals. In Petrograd, a Permanent Commission ran two design competitions and selected a project that was referred to as a "Crematorium-Temple," as opposed to a "corpse-burning station" [*truposzhitel'naya stantsiya*], which was also among the options discussed.²⁰⁶ Due to a severe lack of materials, workforce, and technical equipment, only a temporary substitute was eventually built in a former bathhouse on Vasilevsky Island. It started operating in December 1920.

Despite the (somewhat odd) efforts of the Petrograd crematorium director and cremation enthusiast Boris Kaplun, who sought to raise awareness and interest in the new burial method and even organized crematorium excursions, the experiment was a failure. People did not want it: of 379 people whose bodies were cremated between December 1920 and late February 1921, only sixteen were burned following their own last will or their families' decision.²⁰⁷ The crematorium also did not work very well. In the words of Korney Chukovsky, who left descriptions of crematorium visits in his diary, "The furnace was Soviet, the engineers were Soviet, the dead were

²⁰⁵ *Revolutsia i tserkov'* no. 6-8 (1919), 121–122. http://www.odinblago.ru/revolucia_i_cerkov_6-8/14, accessed on May 13, 2023.

²⁰⁶ Ilia V. Sidorchuk, " 'Vmeste s avtomobilem, traktorom, elektrifikatsiej': k istorii krematsii v Rossii" (" 'Along with the car, the tractor, electrification': the history of cremation in Russia"), *Sotsiologia nauki i tekhnologii* 9, no. 3 (2018), 51–67: 58. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/vmeste-s-avtomobilem-traktorom-elektrifikatsiey-k-istorii-krematsii-v-rossii/viewer>, accessed on May 12, 2023.

²⁰⁷ Sidorchuk, " 'Along with the car, the tractor, electrification'," 60.

Soviet – everything was falling apart, working so and so, ever so slowly."²⁰⁸ Technical imperfections ultimately ended this experiment: in late February 1921, the roof of the building overheated, the edifice broke down and was not restored.²⁰⁹

In Moscow, debates and discussions about building the first crematorium began in 1919. In its mid-year information bulletin, the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements pointed to several difficulties related to this enterprise. The lack of materials, finances, and personnel made it "utterly difficult" to set about building such a technically complex structure.²¹⁰ Also, there was the problem of attitudes. Cremation was something "entirely new" for the country, the members of the department admitted; "One part of the population kn[ew] very little about it, and another part consider[ed] it to be something antireligious and reprehensible due to ingrained prejudices." At a medical conference held at Soldatenkovsky hospital in March 1919, the doctors "firmly declared it utterly harmful for the patients' mental health to construct cremation furnaces at the hospital," and the wounded Red Army soldiers whose garrison was not far from the Military hospital "did not approve of the idea of arranging a crematorium in the Hospital building."²¹¹ But the affair was not renounced in principle, and the publication, in December 1919, of sanitary regulations regarding cremation, with the signature of the People's Commissaire for Healthcare Semashko, promised a secure future for the new burial method.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Korney I. Chukovsky, *Dnevnik (1901–1921)*, (Moscow: AST, 2018), 328.

²⁰⁹ Along with the works of Sidorchuk and Shkarovsky quoted above, on the history of this experiment see also: Natalia Lebina, *Sovetskaya povsednevnost': normy i anomalii. Ot voennogo kommunizma k bol'shomu stilyu* [Soviet everyday life: Norms and anomalies. From the war communism to the *grande manière*] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015, Kindle); Mokhov, *Rozhdenie i smert' pokhoronnoj industrii*; Anna Sokolova, " 'Vmesto szhiraniya chervyami trupy lyudej v krematoriyakh budem zhech' ': krematsiya kak tekhnologiya chistoty v rannesovetskom diskurse" ('Instead of them being eaten by worms, we will burn the corpses of people in crematoriums': Cremation as a technology of purity in early Soviet discourse), *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 3 (2020), https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe-literaturnoe-obozrenie/163_nlo_3_2020/article/22226/, accessed on May 12, 2023.

²¹⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. Listy 30-31.

²¹¹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682. Listy 30-31.

²¹² See regulations signed by Semashko in: GARF. Fond R-4390. Opis' 12. Delo 127. List 4, 5.

Over the following few years, the issue of cremation emerged inconsistently in the media, with the discussion focusing on technical and economic aspects. Soviet administrations and publicists were interested in the throughput capacity of the crematorium and its possible fuel consumption. The Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements estimated the furnace capacity in 16 bodies a day in 1919.²¹³ S. Anserov, writing in 1922 for *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* and using data from the Petrograd experimental crematorium, claimed that the daily capacity was maximally 24 bodies a day, or less than 40 percent of Moscow daily deaths, which made the whole enterprise a losing proposition especially given that only the net cost of fuel for one body would be 2,000 rubles with the average cost of traditional burial in the city being ten times less.²¹⁴

The year 1924 saw a slowly growing tempo of cremation propaganda. The death and burial of Lenin in January spurred interest in the topic, as cremation was considered along with other options. While it was ultimately discarded in favor of embalming, the moment was opportune for the advance of this idea. No small role in this process was played by Guido Bartel, engineer, hygienist, and cremation enthusiast. In 1923, Bartel traveled abroad to study cremation as a member of the State Research Institute of Social Hygiene. Then, in early 1924, he spoke to *Vechernyaya Moskva* about the perspective of cremating Lenin's body.²¹⁵ According to Bartel, organizing the cremation process decently without the necessary equipment, which did not exist in Soviet Russia yet, was impossible. Still, he quoted Semashko, who was in favor of cremation, and suggested that "now, of all times, the construction of crematorium will speed up."

²¹³ Continuation of the Information bulletin of the Department for Funeral and Sanitary Arrangements no. 1, February 27 – July 1, 1919. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 12. Delo 682 List 30, 31.

²¹⁴ S. Anserov, "Krematsiya i ee osuschestvlenie" ("Cremation and its realization"), *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 11 (1919), 7–8.

²¹⁵ *Vechernyaya Moskva* no. 20. January 25, 1924.

Bartel began to be known as the leading cremation enthusiast. After publishing an introductory essay on cremation in *Iskusstvo i promyshlennost'* [Art and Industry], he helped organize an exhibition on the same topic in the institute he worked for.²¹⁶ In 1925, the first edition of his brochure *Cremation* was published; it would be republished twice in the following years.²¹⁷ Collecting evidence in favor of the "fiery burial" in the history of humanity and the experience of contemporary Western countries, Bartel argued that this was the most progressive, cleanest, and most aesthetic way of disposing of bodies.

The hygienic argument was taken up in the Moscow Communal Department, which at the same time got down to another round of discussions and preparations for constructing a crematorium. The Department's report from late 1925 to early 1926 stated that "the most hygienic way of burial is burning the bodies, and to gain the population's sympathies for this way of burial, at least one crematorium should be built."²¹⁸ Following a prescription from the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet, which in November 1925, charged the Communal Department with "building a crematorium in Moscow within the shortest time possible," the Department planned construction at the Donskoy monastery territory and estimated the cost of work as 500,000 rubles (they only got 350,000 at the end).²¹⁹

Throughout 1926, the construction works were accompanied by publications in specialized press such as *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo*. These pieces did not differ much from the earlier materials: they told stories of successful foreign experiences, discussed technical specifications of

²¹⁶ Guido Bartel, "Krematsia. Kratkiy ocherk" ["Cremation. A short essay"], *Iskusstvo i promyshlennost'* no. 1 (1924), 65–67. Available online at: <https://electro.nekrasovka.ru/books/6171395/pages/67>, accessed on May 13, 2023; Sidorchuk, " 'Along with the car, the tractor, electrification'," 56. See also Irina Suslova, " 'Nado znakomit'sya s mashinami': materialy o krematsii v gazetakh 'Pionerskaya pravda' i 'Leninskie iskry' (1927 – 1930e gg.)" [" 'One should get to know the machines': Materials on cremation in *Pionerskaya Pravda* and *Leninskie Iskry* newspapers, 1927-1930s"], *Detskoe chteniye* 17 no. 1 (2020), 62–89: 71.

²¹⁷ Guido Bartel, F. Lavrov (ed.), *Krematsiya* [Cremation] (Moscow: M. K. Kh., 1925).

²¹⁸ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 3042. List 67.

²¹⁹ TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 1971. List 22; Delo 3042. List 67.

furnaces, dwelled upon the comparative cost of fire burial as compared to the traditional one, and ended up praising the benefits of the most hygienic way of burial. Among other rational arguments, the benefit of space was often quoted. Cremation, with its thrifty approach to land use, was opposed to cemeteries, which "existed in the city center and hampered the development of city-building" and took up space "that could be more profitably used for other purposes" while also being unpleasant to live by.²²⁰ On the contrary, a crematorium could be placed within the city, and due to its technical perfection, it would not disturb the population.

The author of the report quoted above believed that with the spreading of cremation, "burying the dead in the ground would become history."²²¹ But this could hardly happen in the nearest future; rather, "cremation should be optional, this postulate [wa]s recognized as non-debatable."²²² It would be left to the press to make the idea more familiar to the population. As of late 1926, the success of this campaign was dubious. Bartel complained that despite the importance of media in the absence of pro-cremation societies, "our everyday press, as well as our book publishing houses, have reacted to this question [of propagating cremation – a.p.] indifferently so far."²²³ It gained momentum when, after a few months of tests, the Moscow crematorium was finally put into operation in October 1927.

The crematorium was situated in the territory of the former Donskoy monastery, in a church building reconstructed by the project of Dmitry Osipov; this project won because it looked least like a church.²²⁴ Some scholars have seen this solution as another step in the antireligious struggle,

²²⁰ "Moskovskoe Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo i buduschie puti ego razvitiia" [Moscow Communal Services and the ways of its further development], *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 6 (1926), 9–10: 9.

²²¹ "Moscow Communal Services and the ways of its further development," 10.

²²² V. Fedynskiy, "Kladbischenskij krizis v Moskve i krematsiya," [The Moscow cemetery crisis and cremation], *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 9–10 (1926), 23–30: 28.

²²³ Guido Bartel, "K predstoyaschemu otkrytiyu v Moskve pervogo krematoriya," [To the upcoming opening of the first crematorium in Moscow], *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 19–20 (1926), 37–40: 37.

²²⁴ F. Lavrov, "Moskovskij krematorij i ego znachenie" [The Moscow crematorium and its significance], *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy* no. 5 (1926), 5–7: 7.

where the crematorium would substitute for the church, and the "fiery burial" would replace the funeral service. Indeed, the antireligious organizations and publications used the idea of cremation for their benefit, placing on their banner the motto "Crematorium is the tribune of atheism."²²⁵

However, more recent research tends to contextualize cremation within the general trends to progress, industrialization, and rationalism rather than in the antireligious vein, showing that the propagandist rhetoric was focusing on sanitary-hygienic advantages of the "fiery burial" as compared to the traditional way, and the antireligious message seemed to be secondary. Evgenia Tarasiutina believes that members of the only Russian pro-cremation society (ORRIK, *Obschestvo razvitiia i rasprostraneniia idej krematsii v RSFSR*, est. 1927) were tolerant if not favorable to religion.²²⁶ Ilya Sidorchuk showed that among the champions of cremation in Russia, doctors, hygienists, and engineers were in the lead from the beginning, putting forward economic and hygienic arguments above everything else.²²⁷ Anna Sokolova specifically focused on the idea of cleanliness/purity inherited from the European movement for the spread of cremation, arguing that

Despite the widespread opinion, the majority of these [Russian crematorium-building – a.p.] projects were based not on antireligious ideas nor attempts to curtail the Christian values with the new burial practice but understanding cremation as the perfect way of burial, first of all from the perspective of sanitation and hygiene, widely practical ideas in principle.²²⁸

The same principle was observed even in the press directed at children. As Irina Suslova demonstrated, newspapers for pioneers such as *Pionerskaya Pravda* and *Leninskie Iskry*

²²⁵ See for example: Shkarovsky, "Building the Petrograd (Leningrad) crematorium;" Vladlen Izmozik, Natalia Lebina *Peterburg sovetskij: "novyj chelovek" v starom prostranstve. 1920-1930-e gody. Sotsial'no-arkhitekturnoe mikroistoricheskoe issledovanie* [The Soviet Petersburg. A "new man" in the old space. 1920s-1930s. A social and architectural microhistory study] (Saint-Petersburg: Kriga, 2010), 56; Malysheva, "Red Tanathos," 36.

²²⁶ Evgenia Tarasiutina, "Sozdanie Pervogo moskovskogo krematoriya: problemy dialoga i konfrontatsii s RPTS (1920-e – nachalo 1930-kh godov)" [The foundation of the First Moscow Crematorium: problems of cooperation and confrontation with the Russian Orthodox Church (the 1920s – the early 1930s)], *Elektronnyj nauchno-obrazovatel'nyj zhurnal "Istoriya"* 8, no. 3 (57), 2017. <https://www.academia.edu/38135370/>, accessed on May 28, 2023.

²²⁷ Sidorchuk, "The history of cremation in Russia," 52–54.

²²⁸ Sokolova, "Instead of them being eaten by worms, we will burn the corpses of people in crematoriums."

represented cremation as a progressive technical novelty, a complex invention that is exciting to see, an effective and productive industry, but not as an instrument to struggle against religion.²²⁹

From this perspective, it was perhaps symptomatic that the premises of the first Moscow crematorium, despite having a "totally civic outlook, without any religious emblems," included a stage for placing the coffin "during the performance of ritual" and rooms for the ministers of cult, thus allowing for a goodbye ceremony, at least in theory.²³⁰ (Note also that the approved project of the Petrograd crematorium was the Crematorium-Temple). The preoccupations proved excessive, though: during the first few years, farewell ceremonies, either civic or religious, did not enjoy much popularity among the families of the deceased and amounted only to a few a year.

During the first half-decade of the crematorium's existence, the number of cremations steadily grew. According to figures quoted by Svetlana Malysheva, in 1927, there were only 226 cremations, with a significant rise in 1928 to 4,025 and reaching 8,319 cremations per year in 1931. However, a considerable proportion comprised the so-called "administrative" cremations or burials of those with no one to care for but the state – such as the homeless or stillborn children. The percentage, among all cremations, of those who deliberately chose this way of burial never rose over 8 percent during the period in question.²³¹

These figures demonstrate that the propagandist's effort was not successful. Despite the detailed technical information available to readers and the genuine interest that various innovations attracted in the era, cremation remained a confusing, if not repulsive, technical solution that people were not eager to adopt. Evidence from literature and memoirs throughout the decade show frustration, stress, and distrust towards cremation, seasoned with nervous laughter to hide them.

²²⁹ Suslova, "One should get to know the machines," 73–76.

²³⁰ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 4741. List 1.

²³¹ Malysheva, *Better Together*, 262–263.

Korney Chukovsky's diary is quoted most in this connection. In an entry from January 3, 1921, he described visiting the testing crematorium in Petrograd:

We laugh, no obeisance. Not the slightest hint of solemnity. Everything is bare and explicit. Neither religion nor poetry, not even simple civility, decorates the place of incineration. Revolution took away the old rituals and decorum and did not provide any of its own.²³²

Ten years later, in Il'f and Petrov's novel *Zolotoj telenok* (The Little Golden Calf), published in 1931, the town of Chernomorsk was about to build its crematorium. "This innovation, put forward by the cemetery subdepartment, amused the town's residents for some reason. Perhaps it was for the new words, *crematorium* and *cinerarium*, and perhaps the most amusing was the very thought that a person can be incinerated like a log..."²³³

By the end of the decade, the idea of cremation expanded beyond the circles of the literary elite and art intelligentsia, penetrating some deeper layers of society, but the overtones of sad irony remained. In April 1929, Ivan Vasilievich Komarov, a peasant from Olshany village in the Oryol oblast', sent a letter to Mikhail Kalinin through *Krestyanskaya gazeta*, complaining about his distressful situation:

Here dear Kalinych If only youd come into my hut youd probabli see not only that I reach out for socialisem but that so does my very hut which is crooked but then there is no way out, before I have seen socialisem I guess because of my need I should first get to the crematorium that's where the poor will be satisfied.²³⁴

²³² Kornei I. Chukovsky. *Diary*. In 3 vols. Vol. 1: 1901–1921. (Moscow: ProzaiK, 2011), 312–314.

²³³ Ilya Il'f, Evgeniy Petrov, *Zolotoj telenok* (The Little Golden Calf) (Saint-Petersburg: Zhurnal "Neva", "Letniy Sad," 2000), 39.

²³⁴ Svetlana Kryukova (compiler), *Krestyanskije istorii: Rossijskaya derevnya 1920-kh godov v pis'makh i dokumentakh* [Peasants' stories. The Russian village of the 1920s in letters and documents] (Moscow, Rosspen, 2001), 99.

Conclusion

The French and Russian revolutions set ambitious goals in reorganizing burial, which were driven by the desire to undermine the influence of the church, eliminate or at least limit social differences that manifested themselves during the funeral, and ensure that all stages of the process become more modern, decent, and hygienically tolerable, – a tendency that sometimes required engaging the technical innovations of the age. Administratively, the revolutionary governments managed to transfer death registration from the scope of the ecclesiastical to laic authorities, unlinking the registration of statuses from confessional affiliation and offering all citizens the same procedures independently from their religious beliefs. While the declared intention of the legislators was to free people from the limitations of the approved confessions, this redistribution of responsibilities also led to a tighter grip of the state on the private lives of individuals.

In terms of funeral equality, the reforms in both countries allowed people of different confessional backgrounds to have similar possibilities, such as access to public cemeteries or using simpler and more standardized funeral accessories and decorum. Some of those advances were more successful than others. If civic public cemeteries remained a reality after the revolutionary decade, "funeral equality" never really took hold, and class distinctions were reintroduced almost immediately after the first attempts to eradicate them.

For policies and practices surrounding cemetery management, the ideas of hygiene and sanitation were instrumental. In urban France and Russia, widespread frustration caused by the vicinity of old and overcrowded cemeteries in centers of cities and towns was formulated in terms of insalubrity, harm, disgust, and repulsion – a stark contrast to the Christian vocabulary of the salvation of the soul and respect for the dead. Popular discontent, concerns, and fears were partly behind the authorities' motivation to progressively close old cemeteries and create new ones further

away from the living quarters. The initiatives turned out to be half-legged due to the huge costs of transferring cemeteries and finding suitable lands. Maintaining the old ones in order and tidiness was also unsuccessful during the revolutionary decade in both France and Russia, despite the number of repurposing and improvement projects.

The extreme instances of "funeral crisis" and cemetery disarray did not necessarily signal a turn in norms, though. Ideas of decency and reverence towards the dead were not shattered by the revolutionary events with their skyrocketing mortality rates. Persisting and vocal public discontent at the instances of violating those norms attested to their stability in the minds of contemporaries. Rationalization and technological innovations also had their limits, as proven by the declining image of the guillotine or the fate of the cremation initiative. Despite propaganda campaigns that were sometimes very active, some innovations were just too radical to be accepted.

Comparatively speaking, the results of revolutionary death-related reforms in France and Russia differed – not due to the different intentions but to different post-revolutionary political developments. In France, the church and parishes regained some of their rights and possessions during the Napoleonic era, which also brought back its power in the funeral organization. It took the entire nineteenth century for the private suppliers of funeral accessories to challenge the church's monopoly and establish themselves as equal and independent participants in the process. In Russia, an official restoration of the church's role never happened. Thanks to the revolutionary reform, dying outside of a confession became and remained a real option, notwithstanding the sheer numbers or percentages of the population willing to select this option over a religious one. Furthermore, the Soviet state also eventually managed to take over the church's supply function in the urban settings, or at least substitute it as an umbrella for smaller providers that continued

operation from pre-revolutionary times – a substitution that allowed to run the entire funeral process as a secular one.

This change can be considered one of the successful radical – indeed revolutionary – changes in funeral organization. Some other measures, such as the administrative reform or the cemetery closure and re-opening, were in part building upon the pre-existing tendencies that had been brewing already under the *ancien régimes*. These reforms could not have happened without the revolutions, but a certain continuity cannot be denied either. The more groundbreaking solutions – such as cremation, for example – were met reservedly, and their secure implementation took longer than the enthusiasts expected. As long as the traditional forms of burial and funeral could exist alongside the novelties, the people could turn a blind eye to the innovations. In contrast, state attacks against the ritual side of the funeral could not go unnoticed and often provoked stark – and starkly different – reactions, as will be shown in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Revolutionary funerals: aesthetics and symbolism

Introduction

Rethinking death-related practices in revolutionary France and Russia concerned not only their legislative and economic foundations (which were necessary to undermine the influence of the church and introduce new, more equal foundations of burial). A very significant and very noticeable component in the process was reimagining the symbolic and aesthetic side of the funeral. In the area of death-related ceremonies, state efforts were threefold: to mark the passage from pre-revolutionary to the revolutionary order, to review the existing practices in the spirit of justice and egalitarianism, and to ensure the immortality of revolutionary heroes. God absent, the nation – represented by selected figures in the leadership – was to become the ultimate judge that could reward the worthy.

New rites of passage bore double significance. For one, assuming the absence of the other world, eternal salvation or damnation, or the immortality of the soul, the role of actions in this world grew immeasurably. In a secular universe, there could be no postmortem existence other than the national memory, hence the importance of public commemorations, national funeral shrines, and remaking the rituals to reflect the new character of life and death. Second, funerals could and did assume political weight, and the dead – martyrs and heroes, but also victims and casualties – often became symbols of the regime. All conflicting side in the revolutionary turmoil used their dead and their memory to collect strength, mobilize supporters, intimidate enemies, and draw a clear demarcation line between "us" and "them."

This chapter focuses on the invention and implementation of revolutionary death-related rituals, their differences from the pre-revolutionary ones, and for whom they were meant. I analyze

aesthetic influences in their design, use of symbols, places, colors, and music, roles of the participants, and selection of those who could receive the last honors in a revolutionary way. In the French context, I pay special attention to the funeral ceremonies, processions, and festivals that took place in Paris: the funeral festival at Champ de la Fédération, organized to honor the fallen during the Nancy mutiny in late August 1790 (September 1790); the Jacobin Festival of Liberty in honor of the members of the Chateaufvieux regimen (April 1792); the Festival of Law arranged by the Feuillants in June 1792 to honor the memory of Simonneau, mayor of Étampes, who had been killed several months previously; and the funeral ceremony for those who fell during the storming of Tuileries in August 1792. Occasionally, the funeral ceremony in honor of Lazare Hoche (October 1797) is brought in to illustrate how some traits survived through the decade. Burials in the newly created Pantheon, or pantheonizations, and planned pantheonizations that did not occur, are analyzed separately. During the decade in question, pantheonization ceremonies were held for Honoré Gabriel Riqueti de Mirabeau (April 1791), Voltaire (July 1791), Michel Lepeletier – alternatively spelled in the sources as Lepeletier, Lepelletier, or Le Pelletier – de Saint-Fargeau (January 1793), Jean-Paul Marat (September 1794), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (October 1794). I also point to the debates surrounding the possible creation of civic rituals for all Frenchmen.

In the Soviet section of the chapter, I describe the grand revolutionary funerals of March and November 1917 and subsequent ceremonies for the prominent figures of the revolutionary movement and the Bolshevik party. Then, I address the discussion about "red rituals," an initiative that was supposed to offer an alternative to the Christian ritual for the broader population. Examples from atheist propaganda press are then quoted to illustrate the specifics of implementing the initiative in the countryside.

Treating first the French and then the Soviet death-related rituals, I show that there were more differences than similarities. I hypothesize that one reason behind these differences was that in France, experimenting with revolutionary funerals began only after the revolution. In contrast, in Russia, a long tradition of civic funerals existed in the leftist underground during the last decades of the Romanov regime. This tradition came to the surface in March 1917 and was further solidified by the Bolsheviks. Aesthetically, the myth of republican antiquity provided a repertoire of images and references for the French revolutionaries; personal and political controversies between events' organizers and decorators (such as Quatremère de Quincy and David) only added to the variety. The Bolsheviks took inspiration from contemporary Russian culture and/or sought to propose novelties that would reflect the character of the October revolution.

Another reason behind the differences between the French and the Soviet cases is that the state outlook on religion and related questions was more unified in the latter case. In France, the changing clubs in power did not share a common ground regarding religion throughout the decade in question, which led to experimenting with alternative religions and cults. In Russia, materialism and atheism were a more prominent part of revolutionary ideology from the beginning, which supported the formation of a recognizable revolutionary funeral style.

I also show that in both cases, stylistic and ritualistic innovations with which the revolutionary governments and enthusiasts experimented did not come to substitute the pre-existing forms of the funeral ceremonial, or not entirely. Some suggested features took root, some stylistic innovations blended with the traditional forms of the Christian funeral, and some solutions were forgotten after the conscious efforts to impose them stopped. The dynamic and mixed nature of the funeral ceremony during the first revolutionary decade made the period stand apart and added to the formation of distinctive revolutionary cultures.

La Patrie reconnaissante. Funeral ceremonies in revolutionary France

In 1790-1799, public funeral ceremonies, commemorative festivals, thanksgiving masses for the souls of the dead, and inaugurations of monuments and memorials in their honor were abundant in France. The utmost expression of the country's gratitude to its great sons was granting the dead the honors of Pantheon – a ceremonial novelty designed and implemented by the revolutionary government. Changing forces in power, from the Constituent Assembly to the Directory, Jacobins and Feuillants, all engaged the dead in public events, making funeral and death-related ceremonies a permanent feature of French revolutionary culture.

The list of people whose death and posthumous fate had a special significance for revolution and the republic was varied, and so was the funeral decorum. Each event was unique, and decorations differed depending on the deceased's person, the manner of death, the political agenda, and the aesthetic fashion of the moment. The composition of funeral processions, their audiovisual elements, and the choice of places and participants became recognizable as parts of the revolutionary ritual. However, for most of the country's population, this ritual did not end up substituting for the traditional religious funeral.

Funerals and the city. Grand mass events in Paris, 1790-1799

The very first day of the French revolution cost lives. On July 14, 1789, over eighty men fell in the attack against the Bastille garrison, and about a dozen more later died of wounds they had suffered that day.¹ Theirs was the act of foundational heroism: after the storming, the castle-

¹ Richard D. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Cornell University Press, 2001): "Violent Origins: The Taking of the Bastille, July 1789," 29–33.

prison was taken, and the era of Liberty began. But it was not until 1790 that the revolutionary authorities started to engage in funeral arrangements for the victims and heroes of the revolution, nor did they make haste in designing a specifically "revolutionary" ritual. For the stormers of the Bastille, it was local communities of families, neighbors, and friends that organized funeral ceremonies for the fallen, not the national government.² As Joseph Clarke demonstrated, these "simple people" who had participated in the foundational event received more pompous funerals than what they could otherwise expect. High masses were said in their honor, sometimes in the presence of city officials, in Parisian district churches, where cenotaphs were decorated with laurel wreaths *à l'antique*. National guards lowered their arms, and clergymen pronounced eulogies to praise their patriotism of the *vainqueurs*. But except for several symbols that carried a whiff of ancient Rome, these ceremonies reproduced the traditional Catholic funeral ritual.

As revolutionary events unfolded, accents began to shift. Between August 1789 and July 1790, several steps were taken to delimit the influence and power of the Catholic church, to culminate, on July 12, 1790, in the adoption of the Civil constitution of the clergy. This process helps explain why, from the summer of 1790, laic authorities took a closer interest in organizing funerals and commemorations for the victims of revolutionary battles. The National Assembly and its successors used funeral ceremonies to symbolically express their gratitude to those who fell because of and for the revolution while highlighting their connection to the dominant political current. Grand city ceremonies, with their unbeaten potential to show things to large audiences, became an instrument to educate the population in civic virtues, as the organizers understood them, and to mobilize supporters (this would become crucial in the years of war).

² Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, Chapter 2.

The politicized use of funerals meant that the emphasis shifted compared to the Catholic ceremony. Instead of the funeral service that had been the key element of the ritual, the procession was now central. All aspects of the funeral march – from starting and ending points and stops on the way to artifacts carried along and participants bearing them – were carefully selected to explain who the deceased were and why they were being honored. These individualized elements were complemented by references to the republican (rather than "revolutionary") character of the event. The forms of the ritual did not highlight the rapid and violent nature of the political and social transformation that had taken place, rather, it referred to the more equal and just system that came to replace the *ancien régime*. Roman antiquity, with its rich republican traditions, provided a repertoire of recognizable artifacts and symbols to be invoked during the French revolutionary funeral events. Crowns of laurel and oak, girls in white dresses representing allegories of virtues, carriages pulled by bulls, and other references to antiquity decorated events and processions that otherwise combined the customary forms of the Catholic funeral and grand parades during the revolutionary decade.

The Catholic funeral usually started at the dead person's home.³ The revolutionary funeral ceremonies usually took off from a spacious square in the city, often charged with special significance in relation to the feats of the deceased. A funeral ceremony for the loyalist troops fallen during the Nancy mutiny took place on September 20, 1790, at Champs de la Fédération (Champs de Mars).⁴ During Voltaire's pantheonization in July 1791, the philosopher's remains were placed for the night among the ruins of the Bastille, where he had once been imprisoned. On

³ For the detailed description of the French Catholic funeral traditions during *ancien régime*, see Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton University Press, 1993). Nuances and novelties of the Enlightenment age are discussed in : Robert Favre, *La mort au siècle des Lumières* (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1978).

⁴ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 78 ; *Pompe funèbre au Champ de la Fédération le 20 7.bre 1790, en l'honneur des soldats citoyens morts à Nancy* (Paris : Bureau des Révolutions de Paris, 1790), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8411198q/f1.item.zoom>, accessed on May 14, 2023.

the day of the funeral, the procession toured the city, stopping for short performances at a few spots relevant to Voltaire's life and oeuvre: the house where he had died, the Opéra and the Comédie Française where he had acquired his glory.⁵ In August 1792, after about three hundred citizens had fallen during the storming of the Tuileries palace, the funeral ceremony for them started in the Tuileries gardens to mark the place of their sacrifice.⁶ In 1794, during the pantheonization of Rousseau, the procession also started in Tuileries, but for a different reason: to pay tribute to Rousseau's love of nature and recreate the scenery of Ermenonville, where he had spent his final days. The scene was decorated with poplar trees, reminding the spectators of the *Ile des Peupliers*, where Rousseau's tomb used to be situated. "Garlands, crowns, branches, flower bouquets, fruits and trees, bushes and plants" enforced bucolic associations.⁷

Floral decorations, especially with references to antiquity, were among the usual funeral adornments. Typical choices included cypress trees, as the ones decorating an altar and a mausoleum erected in the Champs de la Fédération for the 1790 Nancy ceremony; oak leaves or wreaths, as the ones that crowned the dead heads of Lepeletier and Marat; or branches of oak, cypress, and laurel that decorated both the 1790 event in honor of Nancy fallen and the 1797 funeral ceremony of general Lazare Hoche.⁸

⁵ See for example James A. Leith, "Les Trois Apothéoses de Voltaire," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 236 (1979), 161–209: 199; Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789-1996* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 34 ; Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 106–107.

⁶ Estimate of the number of dead is given in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/008916/2014-02-25/>, accessed on May 21, 2023. See also *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 164 (August 25 – September 1, 1792), 369–374: 371. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051336h/f5.item>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁷ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 49; AN F / 4 / 1246 Dossier 12.

⁸ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 78 ; Jacques Guilhaumou, "La mort de Marat à Paris," in Lise Andriès, Jean-Claude Bonnet (eds.), *La mort de Marat* (Paris : Flammarion, 1986), 62; *Gazette nationale ou Moniteur Universel*, no. 27, (27 janvier 1793), 1. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/27-janvier-1793/149/1722985/1>, accessed on May 13, 2023 ; AN F/17/1065 A, Dossier 6 "Organisation de la cérémonie funèbre du 10 vendémiaire an 6 en mémoire de général Hoche."

The starting point of the procession often featured a monumental construction. Examples included a symbolic altar that stood at the Champs de la Fédération during the 1790 ceremony: inscriptions warned "enemies of the motherland" to tremble because the heroes of Nancy had paved the way for the new heroes to come and protect it.⁹ A pyramid surrounded by burning incense was erected for the *pompe funèbre* for the victims of the Tuileries storming in 1792, and an Altar of the motherland stood on an artificial mountain at Hoche's funeral ceremony.¹⁰

Other symbolic objects were carried along with the procession. During the 1790 event for the memory of Nancy, there was "a reduced model of the Bastille, another one of galleys." These models were chosen because part of the city garrison, the Chateauxvieux regiment, was particularly loved for having refused to shoot at the people during the storming of the Bastille, and the surviving mutineers were initially sentenced to the galleys. Other objects included for the memory of Nancy were Phrygian caps and the balance of justice, as the event was an attempt at "imposing the official account of Nancy as a triumph of legitimate authority."¹¹ During Voltaire's pantheonization in July 1791, the hearse was surrounded by symbolic figures and objects referring to Voltaire's life and works. A broken lyre as a sign of mourning, an allegoric figure of Immortality crowning the effigy with a crown of stars, planches and medallions with inscriptions from Voltaire's works, his collected writings carried along the catafalque – all materialized the reasons for which the great man was being honored.¹² Similarly, at the pantheonization of Rousseau in 1794, the moveable

⁹ AP T. 19, 108. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1884_num_19_1_8370_t1_0108_0000_5, accessed on May 14, 2023.

¹⁰ *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 164 (August 25 – September 1, 1792), 369–374 : 371. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051336h/f5.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023; AN F/17/1065 A, Dossier 6.

¹¹ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 78.

¹² Leith, "Les trois apothéoses," 200–202; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 34–36; Suzanne Glover Lindsay, "Mummies and Tombs: Turenne, Napoleon, and Death Ritual," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2006), 476–502: 480.

symbols included a copy of *The Social Contract* carried on a cushion, busts of Voltaire, Franklin, and Rousseau himself, and inscriptions with quotes from Rousseau's works.¹³

References to philosophers – precursors of freedom, interchangeably with abstract allegories and very concrete references to real-life situations, were used at other "funeral festivals" as well. In April 1792, the forty soldiers of the Chateaufvieux regiment, previously sent to the galleys, triumphantly returned after their case was reviewed and they were acquitted.¹⁴ The Jacobins organized a Festival of Liberty to honor them and their fallen comrades. The procession included symbolic objects like the Declaration of the Rights of Man on stone tablets, busts of Voltaire, Rousseau, Sidney, and Franklin, the chariot of Liberty embellished with images of Brutus and William Tell, a pyramid as a symbol of death and immortality, and a model of a ship representing the galleys (now having the meaning opposite to the Champs de la Fédération event of 1790).¹⁵ During the Festival of Law in honor of the assassinated mayor of Étampes Simonneau, organized in June 1792 by the Feuillants to counterbalance the Festival of Liberty, the objects included the book of the law in the hands of Minerva's figure, the sword of the law, and, curiously, an effigy of a shark meant to represent the respect of the law.¹⁶

The year 1793 saw the rise of the cult of martyrs. The artifacts carried during the funeral ceremony became less abstract: they were now directly related to the martyrs' deaths. In January,

¹³ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 49.

¹⁴ *Décret concernant les soldats du régiment de Chateaufvieux*, https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1888_num_31_1_12781_t1_0444_0000_12, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹⁵ *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 145 (April 14–21, 1792), 97–102. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051424n/f1.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹⁶ Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez, Pierre-Célestin Roux-Lavergne (eds.), *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, ou Journal des assemblées nationales depuis 1789 jusqu'en 1815 : contenant la narration des événements... précédée d'une introduction sur l'histoire de France jusqu'à la convocation des États-Généraux*. Tome 13 (Paris, Typographie d'Everat, 1834), 417; Ozouf, *Festivals and the French revolution*, 66. See also: Nicolas Mariot. "Qu'est-ce qu'un "enthousiasme civique" ? : Sur l'historiographie des fêtes politiques en France après 1789." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 63, no. 1 (2008), 113–39; *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 152 (June 2–9, 1792), 450–455; 451–453. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051438p/f26.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023; *Ordre, marche et détail de la cérémonie ... dans laquelle on honorera la mémoire de J.G. Simonneau*, in: *Journal de Paris*, de l'imprimerie de Quillau, 1792.

during Lepeletier's pantheonization, the martyr's bloodstained shirt and the fatal blade that killed him were carried around along with the Statue of Liberty and a copy of the *Declaration of Rights*. On a banner, audiences could read his last words: "I am satisfied to have shed my blood for my country; I hope it will serve to consolidate Equality and Liberty and to identify its enemies."¹⁷ During Marat's funeral ceremony in July same year, his bloodstained shirt was shown to the public and, later, carried on top of a pike, along with the bathtub and the inkstand that had been there at the moment of assassination.¹⁸ Marat's deathbed was on display as well, with an inscription on it calling the "enemies of the people" to be moderate in their joy and threatening them with revenge.¹⁹ The impression made by these objects should have been all the more powerful given their exceptional character: compared to the rather abstract allegoric and symbolic items typical for the earlier funerals of the era, bloodstained shirts and assassination weapons stroke with the brutality of acts they reminded of.

The exposition of these lethal objects went along with the equally exceptional display of the dead bodies of the martyrs. Lepeletier's corpse was plain to see during the pantheonization ceremony, half-naked, the fatal wound visible to the public along with "sheets stained with blood and the sword with which he had been struck."²⁰ Marat's body, half-embalmed, was open for the veneration of the public, his wound visible.²¹ Later that year, the severed head of Chalier, the third

¹⁷*Gazette nationale ou Moniteur Universel*, no. 27, (27 janvier 1793), 1. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/27-janvier-1793/149/1722985/1>, accessed on May 14, 2023.

¹⁸ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 42.

¹⁹ "Marat, l'Ami du Peuple, assassiné par les ennemis du peuple. Ennemis du peuple, modérez votre joie, il aura des vengeurs." See Jacques Guilhaumou, "La mort de Marat à Paris," in Lise Andriès, Jean-Claude Bonnet (eds.), *La mort de Marat* (Paris : Flammarion, 1986), 62.

²⁰ *Gazette nationale ou Moniteur Universel*, no. 27, (27 janvier 1793), 1. "Politique. France. De Paris," <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/27-janvier-1793/149/1722985/1>, accessed on November 28, 2022.

²¹ Antoine de Baecque, "Le corps meurtri de la révolution: Le discours politique et les blessures des martyrs (1791-1794)," *Annales historiques de la révolution française*, no. 267 (1987), 17–41 : 26. The impression made by this spectacle on the public must have been further reinforced due to the transformations the body suffered because of the nature of Marat's illness, the incomplete embalmmnt of the body, and the hot weather. See also note 63 to Suzanne Glover Lindsay, "Mummies and Tombs: Turenne, Napoleon, and Death Ritual," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2006),

"martyr of liberty" from Lyon, was transported to Paris to participate in civic ceremonies, such as the festival of December 20, 1793, where it traveled across the city on a triumphal chariot "to instruct the people of the virtues of this famous patriot."²²

This practice was relatively short-lived. As Antoine de Baecque demonstrated, exposing dead bodies or severed body parts of revolutionary martyrs peaked in 1792-94, and it was rather a deviation from the Enlightenment's tendency to separate the dead and the living.²³ According to de Baecque, it was meant to underline the extremity of the period the republic was going through and the radicalism of the response the revolutionaries were ready to show to their enemies, at home and abroad.

Usually, though, during the revolutionary funeral ceremonies, the dead body was either not visible or not present at all. During Mirabeau's pantheonization, the coffin was closed as it was customary, even though it was covered with a tricolor flag.²⁴ At Voltaire's pantheonization, although the philosopher's body was said to be surprisingly well-preserved after thirteen years in the tomb, it was not shown to the public. Instead, on a pompous hearse, Voltaire's giant effigy was placed.²⁵ During the Festival of Liberty in April 1792, two cenotaphs reminded the audience of the Chateauxvieux soldiers and those from the pacifier troops who had fallen in battle; the surviving members of the regiment followed along and did not occupy center stage. The Festival of Law in

476–502. Lindsay quotes the story of "a separate arm from the morgue, included so mourners could kiss "his" (Marat's – a.p.) hand (his own limbs being too stiff with *rigor mortus* to bend)", that fell off in the jostle.

²² "... Instruire le peuple des vertus de ce patriote célèbre," *Fête civique en l'honneur de Châlier*, 8; 1.

²³ De Baecque, "Le corps meurtri de la révolution," 19.

²⁴ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 94; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 32; Gaston Maugras (ed.), *Journal d'un étudiant (Edmond Géraud) pendant la Révolution, 1789-1793* (Paris, 1935), 90. See also BNF NAF 312 No. 3101, list 41.

²⁵ See for example James A. Leith, "Les Trois Apothéoses de Voltaire," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 236 (1979), 161–209: 199; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 34 ; Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 106–107.

June 1792 featured the bust of Simonneau.²⁶ During the *pompe funèbre* of August 1792, a sarcophagus of the fallen was pulled by bulls to remind of antiquity. At the funeral ceremony of 1797, General Hoche's bust was carried on a bed of honor, surrounded by the attributes of his rank – a saber, a baldric, and "everything that characterizes a general" - while his remains reposed on the Rhine where he had fought.²⁷

Empty cenotaphs, busts, or other symbolic representations of the deceased could be present at the funeral ceremony alongside the bodies of the deceased or as a substitute for them. In either case, they highlighted the difference between a funeral and a funeral ceremony. Whereas the first was a rite of passage marking the separation of an individual soul from an individual body, the second was a manifestation of the national recognition of a life or a death devoted to the common cause. As such, the latter were promoted by the authorities and bore political functions. The contesting parties in the government found it necessary to pull the dead to their side to support their rivaling causes, as proven, for example, by the organization of counterbalancing death-related festivals in the summer of 1792.

Participants in the funeral ceremonies reflected their political rather than familial character. Marching troops – the army or the National Guard – were present almost every time. Participation of elected officials depended on the occasion. Sometimes, it was a deputation of the National Assembly, as during the funeral event on Champs de la Fédération.²⁸ Sometimes, the participation was wider, as during Mirabeau's pantheonization when the coffin was followed by ministers, the

²⁶ *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 152 (June 2–9, 1792), 450–455 : 451–453. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051438p/f26.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023 ; *Ordre, marche et détail de la cérémonie ... dans laquelle on honorera la mémoire de J.G. Simonneau*, in : *Journal de Paris*, de l'imprimerie de Quillau, 1792.

²⁷ AN F/17/1065 A, Dossier 6 "Organisation de la cérémonie funèbre du 10 vendémiaire an 6 en mémoire de général Hoche."

²⁸ AP T. 19, 108, *ibid.* ; *Pompe funèbre au Champ de la Fédération le 20 7.bre 1790, en l'honneur des soldats citoyens morts à Nancy* (Paris: Bureau des Révolutions de Paris, 1790), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8411198q/f1.item.zoom>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

Assembly in full, representatives of municipalities, departments, and the Paris commune, along with members of various political clubs.²⁹ At the pantheonization of Voltaire, political delegations (representatives of the state, the Assembly, the department, the city and the Commune of Paris, and various clubs) were accompanied by men of letters, students, actors, and musicians, supposed to be especially appreciative of the philosopher's work, and stormers of the Bastille along with workers who helped destroy it – in memory of the time Voltaire spent in the prison.³⁰ During the pantheonization of Rousseau, botanists stood among people's representatives and deputies of the Convention to highlight the philosopher's respect for nature. Mothers with children "dressed in a classical style" and war orphans pointed to the sentimental and humanist aspects of Rousseau's work.³¹ There was also a column of Genevans to honor his provenance and celebrate friendship between nations.

One group of participants might have had special significance: the priesthood. A Catholic funeral could not be deemed to have happened without their lead and their performance of the last rites. The clergy was also present during some revolutionary ceremonies, and religious rituals were performed. Thus, at the Champ de la Fédération event in September 1790, a funeral mass was pronounced.³² During the pantheonization of Mirabeau in April 1791, the procession made a stop at the Saint-Eustache church for a eulogy and a funeral mass. The religious connection was further enforced over the months following the pantheonization when people across France held masses for the rest of Mirabeau's soul.³³ But at the pantheonization of Voltaire just a few months later, the

²⁹ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 94 ; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 32 ; Gaston Maugras (ed.), *Journal d'un étudiant (Edmond Géraud) pendant la Révolution, 1789-1793* (Paris, 1935), 90. See also BNF NAF 312 No. 3101, list 41.

³⁰ BNF NAF 312 l. 297; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 36; Leith, "Les trois apothéoses," 200.

³¹ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 49.

³² Description of the ceremony by Heurtault-Lamerville, *Archives Parlementaires de la Révolution française*, 1^{ère} série (1787-1799) (hereinafter AP), T. 19, 108. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1884_num_19_1_8370_t1_0108_0000_5, accessed on May 23, 2023.

³³ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 96–100.

situation was radically different. During the spring and early summer of 1791, Pope Pius VI issued the anti-revolutionary *Charitas* encyclical, and the French royal family attempted to flee the capital – an aborted move that was said to have profoundly shattered people's confidence in the monarch and increased popular fears and suspicions.³⁴ Against this tense background, the Assembly was initially reluctant to engage the controversial legacy of Voltaire, who was widely known as anticlericalist and secularist, if not outright atheist.³⁵ When the ceremony finally took place, the clergy was deliberately and visibly absent, and instead of visiting a church for the funeral mass, the cortège made stops in places relevant to Voltaire's life and work.³⁶

When Rousseau was pantheonized three years later, the priesthood was also absent; however, its absence hardly had the same effect in 1794 as it did in 1791. The three years in between saw an antireligious struggle far more open and violent than the symbolic absence of the priesthood at a funeral ceremony. Clerics were being executed, exiled, imprisoned, and forced to marry or abdicate; places of worship and religious artifacts were destroyed and vandalized while governments experimented with dechristianization and alternative religions such as the Cult of the Reason and the Cult of the Supreme Being – processes that peaked in 1793-1794.³⁷ Against these fresh memories, the absence of priests at the pantheonization of Rousseau in the fall of 1794 did not have such a shocking effect as during Voltaire's pantheonization in 1791, and it was not specially highlighted either. Rousseau's ceremony was focused rather on the unity of souls that the

³⁴ See for example James A. Leith, "Les Trois Apothéoses de Voltaire," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* no. 236 (1979), 161–209: 199; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 34; Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 106–107.

³⁵ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 107–111.

³⁶ Stéphanie Sauget mentions an additional tax that existed at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the funeral cortege to stop at the church on its way to the cemetery. Stéphanie Sauget, "La mise en place d'un marché funéraire du cercueil à Paris au XIX^e siècle," *Annales de démographie historique* 133, no. 1 (2017), 117–43: 129.

³⁷ See for example Michel Vovelle, 1793, *La révolution contre l'église : de la raison à l'être suprême* (Paris : Complexe, 1988), among many others.

philosopher's figure was able to inspire – a consolation much needed after the end of the Reign of Terror.

Other ceremonies combined Christian and republican symbolism. During Lepeletier's pantheonization, a religious choir was performed at the Pantheon, followed by a republican discourse and an oath sworn by the Conventionnels to stay united and save the *patrie*.³⁸ Marat, after his death, was often compared to various personages from Jesus and saints to Caton, Cincinnatus, Hercules, or Prometheus, as Franck P. Bowman showed.³⁹

The coexistence of republican and Christian references was perhaps most noticeable from the audial perspective. A traditional Catholic funeral ceremony would be accompanied by prayers and the tolling of church bells.⁴⁰ During the revolutionary ceremonies, a variety of sounds were to be heard. The 1790 Champs de la Fédération ceremony featured Gossec's *Marche lugubre*, written for the occasion – a tune that would become the signature for revolutionary funerals over the decade to come.⁴¹ Gossec's music was performed again during the pantheonizations of Mirabeau and Voltaire, yet in the latter case, it was not the somber *Marche lugubre*.⁴² The composer created two optimistic pieces for the occasion, one to Voltaire's lyrics (*Peuple, éveille-toi!*), the other to

³⁸ *Gazette nationale ou Moniteur Universel*, no. 27, (27 janvier 1793), 1. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/27-janvier-1793/149/1722985/1>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

³⁹ Franck Paul Bowman, "Le "sacre-cœur" de Marat (1793)," in : Jean Ehrard, Paul Viallaneix (eds.), *Les Fêtes de la révolution : colloque de Clermont-Ferrand, [du 24 au 26] juin 1974 : actes* (Société des études robespierristes, 1977), 155–179: 160.

⁴⁰ On traditional pre-revolutionary funeral in France, see for example: Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton University Press, 1993), or John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).

⁴¹ Description of the ceremony by Heurtault-Lamerville, *Archives Parlementaires de la Révolution française*, 1^{ère} série (1787-1799) (hereinafter AP), T. 19, 108. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1884_num_19_1_8370_t1_0108_0000_5, accessed on May 13, 2023 ; Michelle Biget, "Le filigrane révolutionnaire," *Études Normandes* 33 no.2 (1984), 71–78 : 73 ; Guillaume Mazeau, "La Révolution, les fêtes et leurs images Spectacles publics et représentation politique (Paris, 1789-1799)" *Images Re-vues. Histoire, anthropologie et théorie de l'art* Hors-série 6 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.4000/imagesrevues.4390>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁴² Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 94 ; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 32 ; Gaston Maugras (ed.), *Journal d'un étudiant (Edmond Géraud) pendant la Révolution, 1789-1793* (Paris, 1935), 90. See also BNF NAF 312 No. 3101, list 41.

Chenier's hymn that proclaimed that "it was a day of triumph, not that of regrets."⁴³ Instead of psalms and *De Profundis* that would accompany a Catholic funeral, verses and optimistic hymns filled the air. Other musical options could include singing hymns, exclaiming mottos such as *Vive la République!* or playing music that would change its character from reserved or belligerent to "melodious music that would be gentle and calm as to refer to immortality," as was the case during Marat's pantheonization.⁴⁴

Among the many features combining traditional practices with non-Catholic imagery and symbolism in the French revolutionary funerals, one solution stood aside. Starting from 1791, the grateful nation started honoring worthy citizens by laying them to rest in the national Pantheon.

The Pantheon: Immortality limited

The Parisian Pantheon became one of the brightest symbols of the French revolutionary funeral culture. Its creation was discussed, designed, and planned long before the revolution. The reason for that creation was the increasing significance of the figure of a *grand homme* for the French intellectuals of the second half of the eighteenth century. The merits and achievements of such a person were not due to noble birth or military glory; it was his talents, public virtues, and devoted civil service that earned him the recognition and gratitude of his compatriots. The nation was expected to express and eternalize such gratitude, sometimes posthumously.⁴⁵ Already in the

⁴³ François-Joseph Gossec, *Choeur patriotique exécuté à la translation de Voltaire au Panthéon français en 1791. Paroles de Voltaire.... N° 1 avec les accompagnements* (Paris, 1791), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9057609n/f1.item>, accessed on May 16, 2023; Marie-Joseph de Chenier, François-Joseph Gossec, *Hymne sur la translation du corps de Voltaire au Panthéon* (Paris, 1791), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9057574w.image>, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁴⁴ "...Musique mélodieuse, dont le caractère doux et tranquille peindra l'immortalité". *Moniteur Universel* (Septembre 19, 1794), <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/19-septembre-1794/149/1286029/1>, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁴⁵ Jessica Goodman, "Le Néant de ce qu'on appelle gloire" : Post-Revolutionary Cultural Memory and the *Dialogue des Morts*", *Romance Studies* 33 no. 3–4 (Jul. – Nov. 2015), 177–189 : 181; Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 21–23.

1760s, educated circles in France were discussing the idea of creating a mausoleum for the most distinguished individuals in the country. The church of Sainte Geneviève, built in 1764-1790, was suggested as a place for the future "temple of the *patrie*."⁴⁶ But it was only during the revolutionary era, in 1791, that Sainte Geneviève was inaugurated as the national Pantheon.

Pantheonization, or the act of admitting an individual into the national shrine, was meant to be the highest death-related honor a citizen could hope for, as this act immortalized a person in the national memory. As hard to achieve as any ideal would be, the prospect of pantheonization was a reference point very much present in the minds of the elected representatives of the nation who were responsible for making decisions about who should be included in the Pantheon. Suggestions to award the honors of the Pantheon to this or that man were many during the revolutionary decade, but changing political currents within the authorities often made the decision-making inconsistent and contextual. Suggestions and discussions were many, but during the decade this study focuses on, only five *grands hommes* were pantheonized: Mirabeau, Voltaire, Rousseau, Lepeletier, and Marat. Furthermore, of those, only Voltaire's and Rousseau's graves remained in the Pantheon beyond the revolutionary era - a marker of fundamental uncertainty and conflicting understanding of who exactly was worthy of the honors.

The first man admitted to the Pantheon after the 1789 revolution was Honoré Gabriel Riqueti de Mirabeau, writer, orator, politician, and a member of the National Assembly. He had long suffered a grave medical condition, which allowed him and his contemporaries to prepare for his imminent end. The Parisian public and Mirabeau's colleagues from different governing bodies closely followed his last days, visiting him in his chambers or waiting under his windows to hear

⁴⁶ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 21. Mona Ozouf, "Le Panthéon. L'École normale des morts", in : Pierre Nora (dir.), *Les lieux de mémoire. La République*. T. 1 (Paris : Gallimard, 1984), 139–196.

some news.⁴⁷ The press published reports on his health as if he were royalty.⁴⁸ Following his death on April 2, 1791, the National Assembly deputies were eager to conclude that he deserved a unique funeral ceremony.

Choosing the burial place took some time: Champ de Mars/de la Fédération was offered as his last resting place. Following the proposition of Marquis de Pastoret, representative of the department of Paris, the Assembly agreed to re-baptize the recently finished church of Sainte Geneviève as the temple and tomb of "great men, starting from the era of our liberty." Mirabeau was judged worthy of the honor to lay there, and his grave was to become "the altar of liberty," giving "a grand lesson to posterity."⁴⁹ The decision of pantheonization was against Mirabeau's last will (he wanted to be buried in Argenteuil).⁵⁰ But "the remains of an illustrious man belong[ed] – as his very person during his lifetime – to the *patrie*."⁵¹

As mentioned above, Mirabeau's pantheonization followed a Catholic funeral ritual, only that the immortality of his soul in heaven was to be matched by the immortality of his name in French people's memory. This was not the case with the pantheonization of Voltaire in July 1791, which became not only the first pronouncedly non-religious public funeral but also the first public reburial – a measure provisioned for by the pantheonization decree. According to the Assembly's decision, the Pantheon was meant to host those who died "during the era of our liberty," however,

⁴⁷ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 90. Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 32.

⁴⁸ Health bulletins were published by Versailles during the last illness of the king Louis XV. Anne Byrne, "The Deathbed Ceremonies of Louis XV, May 1774," in *Death and the Crown*, 23–53.

⁴⁹ AP, T. 24, 536–537. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1886_num_24_1_13210_t1_0536_0000_8, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁵⁰ See the detailed story of Mirabeau's last days and death in: P. Hillemand, J. Di Matteo, E. Gilbrin. "La mort de Mirabeau (1749–1791)," *Histoire des Sciences Médicales* no. 4 (1977), 211–219, <https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/sfhm/hsm/HSMx1977x011x004/HSMx1977x011x004x0211.pdf>, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁵¹ AP, T. 24, 543. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1886_num_24_1_13215_t1_0543_0000_1, accessed on May 16, 2023.

exceptions could be made by the legislative body "... for a few *grands hommes* who died before the revolution."⁵² Voltaire became the first such exception.

The second exception during the revolutionary decade was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In August 1791, the Assembly decided that the philosopher, who had died in 1778, was worthy of the honor and that his ashes should be transferred.⁵³ But the decision was not implemented for a few years, not least because Rousseau's memory was well preserved and worshiped outside of the Pantheon.⁵⁴ In the ensuing debate, some argued that his wishes would be violated should he be taken away from Ermenonville.⁵⁵ It was only in 1794, just a few days after the elimination of Hebertists and Dantonists, that a further request for Rousseau's pantheonization was presented to the Convention. It might have helped to move forward that a permanent representation of the Genevan Republic had been recently established in France.⁵⁶ Finally, the Thermidorian Convention organized the ceremony of transferring Rousseau's ashes on October 11, 1794.

These two philosophers who had influenced the cultural landscape of the French revolutionary era might have had a controversial legacy, and their reburials at the Pantheon were

⁵² Article 5 of the Assembly's decree on pantheonizations provided for "exceptions ... for a few *grands hommes* who died before the revolution"; these exceptions could be made only by the legislative body. *AP*, T. 24, 543. https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1886_num_24_1_13215_t1_0543_0000_1, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁵³ On the debates surrounding this decision see f. e. David Higgins, "Rousseau and the Pantheon. The Background and Implications of the Ceremony of 20 Vendémiaire Year III," *The Modern Language Review* 50 no. 3 (1955), 274–280.

⁵⁴ René-Louis de Girardin, an admirer of Rousseau's, organized the tomb of *ami de la Nature* in Ermenonville in accordance with the philosopher's principles and ensured that other devotees could visit the place to contemplate the life of the great writer and cherish his memory. Since 1778, Ermenonville was a popular pilgrimage destination, and the revolution had not put an end to this devotion. See more in Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 10–48.

⁵⁵ Clarke, *Commemorating the dead*, 123.

⁵⁶ See Higgins, "Rousseau and the Pantheon;" Pierre Serna, "Politiques de Rousseau et politiques de Robespierre : faux semblants et vrais miroirs déformés," *La Révolution française* [En ligne] no. 9 (2015), 1–20, <https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/1413#toc>, accessed on May 16, 2023 ; Raymonde Monnier. "L'apothéose du 20 vendémiaire an III (11 octobre 1794)," in : *Rousseau revisité par la République. Rousseau visité, Rousseau visiteur : les dernières années (1770-1778)*, Groupe d'études du Dix-huitième siècle (Université de Genève) ; Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau ; Département de Français moderne et d'Histoire générale (Faculté des Lettres), (Genève, Jun 1996), 403–428 : 405. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01620986/document>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

debated at length. But they eventually proved to be the ones who preserved their spots in the national shrine, unlike *grands hommes* whose glory was due to the revolution.

In 1793-1794, two political assassinations led to two pantheonizations. In January 1793, on the eve of Louis XVI's execution, a former member of the royal guard, Nicolas Paris, assassinated Michel Lepeletier (alternatively spelled in the sources as Lepeletier, Lepelletier, or Le Pelletier) de Saint-Fargeau, the Convention deputy from Yonne, for voting in favor of a death sentence for the former king. Lepeletier was solemnly interred in the Pantheon a few days later. After Marat was assassinated in July of the same year, he was initially laid to rest in the garden of the Cordelier convent, only to be judged worthy of the honors of the Pantheon in late autumn 1793.⁵⁷

This decision was brought to life in September 1794 in what became one of the first Thermidorian festivals. But Marat's solemn entry into Pantheon could not happen before the "impure remains of the royalist Mirabeau" (*Moniteur Universel*) would be carried out of the building in a far less solemn manner through the back door. The first depantheonization was explicitly decided in connection with the prospect of immortalizing Marat. The Friend of the People had opposed the idea of pantheonizing Mirabeau already in 1791.⁵⁸ The discovery, in November 1792, of Mirabeau's secret letters to the king in the notorious case of "armoire de fer" added weight to Marat's accusations, casting suspicion on Mirabeau's revolutionary affiliations. In 1794, the Convention had to take Mirabeau out before Marat could get it. But for the posthumous fate of Marat, Mirabeau's depantheonization did not ensure long-term security either. Within half a year after entering the Pantheon, Marat and Lepeletier were depantheonized, following the

⁵⁷ AP T. 79, 211. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k49595v.texteImage>, accessed on May 16, 2023.

⁵⁸ *L'Ami du peuple*, no. 421 (April 6, 1791).

Convention decree from 20 Pluviôse Year III (February 8, 1795) that banned pantheonizing citizens within ten years after their death.⁵⁹

Several other candidates were suggested in the National Assembly for pantheonization but never received the actual honor. Among the philosophers, Descartes and Montesquieu were named along with Mirabeau, Voltaire, and Rousseau but were never pantheonized. Several others distinguished themselves in the fields of revolutionary battles. Thus, on the very day of Mirabeau's pantheonization, deputy de Crillon demanded that the same "splendid recompense" intended for talents was also accorded to "the virtue most heroic and the devotion most generous," such as the act of self-sacrifice of the unfortunate André Desilles, an officer of the Roi-Infanterie regiment, who tried to stop the shooting during the Nancy mutiny and was mortally wounded.⁶⁰ The suggestion was not supported, as "he only distinguished himself by one action."⁶¹

Never pantheonized were generals Nicolas-Joseph Beaurepaire, who committed suicide to avoid captivity when forced to surrender to Prussians in September 1792, "preferring death to capitulation to the tyrants," and Auguste Marie de Dampierre, lethally wounded in May 1793.⁶² Beaurepaire's body was never transferred to the Panthéon from its resting place in Sainte-Menehould.⁶³ As for Dampierre, after a heated debate, the Convention decreed his

⁵⁹ Jean-Baptiste Duvergier, *Collection complète des lois, décrets d'intérêt général, traités internationaux, arrêtés, circulaires, instructions, etc.*, Tome 8 (Paris, 1825), 18.

⁶⁰ AP T. 24, 543, https://www.persee.fr/doc/arcpa_0000-0000_1886_num_24_1_13215_t1_0543_0000_1, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁶¹ Jourdan, "Du sacré du philosophe au sacré du militaire," 408. Desilles received a funeral service in both Nancy and his native Saint-Malo, in the presence of military and city officials and with the bishop pronouncing his eulogy (Ferdinand Hoefer (ed.) *Nouvelle biographie générale depuis les temps le plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*, T. 13 (Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, 1855), 830–831 ; Corpart, "*Fête émeutière, fête populaire*", 174–175.

⁶² Emile de la Bédollière, *Le Panthéon* (Paris, Gustave Havard, 1854), 30. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6465635n/f38.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁶³ Goodman, "Le Néant de ce qu'on appelle gloire," 182.

pantheonization, but barely a week later, Couthon came close to accusing Dampierre of treason, and the ceremony did not take place.⁶⁴

Another military commander and the ex-member of the Committee of Public Safety, Thomas-Augustin de Gasparin, distinguished himself at the siege of Toulon. When he died in late fall of 1793, the Convention discussed granting him the honors of Pantheon but never decreed it. Similar was the fate of Beauvais, a *conventionnel* taken prisoner by the English and dead in late March 1794 due to inadequate treatment: his suffering could have made him a national martyr, but the Convention eventually decided otherwise.⁶⁵ In the winter of 1794, the Convention was almost ready to pantheonize two children-heroes, Joseph Agricol Viala and Joseph Barra (or Barra) – a discussion both tardive and quite random, as Michel Vovelle demonstrated.⁶⁶ Viala and Barra were boy soldiers who presumably died in Vendean battles in July and December 1793, respectively; over a year passed between their deaths and the debate regarding the possible postmortem honors.⁶⁷ Robespierre finally advocated for their pantheonization, but the ceremony, postponed several times and eventually planned for 10 Thermidor Year II, did not take place.⁶⁸

During the first decade after the 1789 revolution, the *grands hommes* proved to be one of the three: philosophers, politicians, or military men. Pantheonizations of the latter were the most likely to be suggested but the least likely to happen, in full accordance with the conception of a

⁶⁴ AP T. 64, 417. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k49579m/f420.item.texteImage>, accessed on May 13, 2023; *Moniteur Universel*, May 12 and 13, 1793; Arthur Chuquet, *Les guerres de la Révolution*. T. 10 (Paris, L. Chailley, 1886–1896), 72, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6365621c/f92.item>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁶⁵ Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory*, 40–41. See also Pierre-Joseph Alexis Roussell, *Histoire secrète du Tribunal révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1815), 225.

⁶⁶ Michel Vovelle, "Agricol Viala ou Le héros malheureux," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* 52 no. 241 (1980), 345–364.

⁶⁷ Posterior descriptions of their deaths include such scenes as Viala's last words being "I die for liberty," and Barra being shot while pressing a tricolor cocarde to his heart. See Charles Mullié, *Biographie des célébrités militaires des armées de terre et de mer de 1789 à 1850*, Vol. 2 (Paris, 1852), 572, and Vol. 1 (Paris, 1851), 39.

⁶⁸ "Rapport sur la fête héroïque pour les honneurs du Panthéon à décerner aux jeunes Barra et Viala, par David," *Moniteur Universel* (23 July 1794), 1–2. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/gazette-nationale-ou-le-moniteur-universel/23-juillet-1794/149/1285991/2>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

great man being, above all, a virtuous citizen and not a fortunate soldier. Politicians reached the Pantheon more often, but before the decade ended, all three great men whose political careers peaked after 1789 were depantheonized. Only two philosophers, Voltaire and Rousseau, maintained their tombs in the national temple. The immediate political character of pantheonizations and their ephemeral nature eroded the idea of immortality, which was to be granted along with the honors of the Pantheon. Two hundred years later, it gave Mona Ozouf the reason to label the Pantheon a failure.⁶⁹

Rituals for all?

However impaired the honors of Pantheon might have been, they still were immeasurably more unique than what was in store for the less illustrious dead. Those who had not distinguished themselves by their civic or military service or special talents were unlikely to get an expression of gratitude from the nation, and the recognizable style of grand national funerals could hardly be reproduced during the more usual ceremonies.

One telling example was the story of the Bastille stormers, or the *vainqueurs*. Despite them being immediate participants of the foundational event in the history of revolutionary France, recognizing their feat proved a complicated task for the Assembly (who had a hard time even identifying and counting them). Finding a place for armed commoners among saints, heroes, and other existing models of honorable dead was, to quote Clarke, "uncharted territory in 1789, and neither the conventional *oraison funèbre* nor the Enlightened *éloge* offered much guidance on the

⁶⁹ Mona Ozouf, "Le Panthéon. L'École normale des morts," in : Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire. La République*. T. 1 (Paris : Gallimard, 1984), 139–196. Interesting additions to the issue of heroization and its repercussions in the provinces can be found in : Nathalie Alzas, *La liberté ou la mort : L'effort de guerre dans l'Hérault pendant la Révolution*. Nouvelle édition [en ligne] (Aix-en-Provence : Presses universitaires de Provence, 2006), <https://books.openedition.org/pup/7405>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

matter." Orators were forced to find refuge "in hazy generalizations about the sublime glory of "mourir pour la patrie" or the courage "ces citoyens vertueux" had displayed for the sake of Liberty," rather than praising stormers for their individual contribution.⁷⁰

But even as a group, the Bastille stormers were not celebrated for long at a national level. Prudhomme, the editor of *Révolutions de Paris*, rightly pointed to the short-lived character of the ceremonies in their honor: "The solemnities that had taken place in all districts have undoubtedly contributed to making their memory sacred for all citizens; but oblivion will soon devour their names and these ceremonies alike."⁷¹ The closest *vainqueurs* and their heirs have ever come to national honors was getting engraved sabers and uniforms for the Festival of Federation in June 1790; the Assembly has also accorded the surviving stormers an honorable place in subsequent republican ceremonies. Families of the fallen waited long years for any financial compensation for the sacrifice of their husbands, fathers, and sons.⁷² But the Assembly did not push too hard for any recurrent commemorations of the *vainqueurs*. As discussed above in Chapter 1, unsanctioned crowd violence was a menacing factor in the already complicated political situation; a rowdy crowd destroying buildings and killing the king's officials was hardly an example to give to the youth.

For the less illustrious dead across France, republican commemorations could hardly ever be achieved at their fullest; however, in the spirit of equality and overcoming the downsides of *ancien régime*, attempts were made to offer a new, republican funeral ceremony that would eliminate the differences between various categories of population. Thus, in May 1791, the Society

⁷⁰ Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead*, 60, 61.

⁷¹ *Révolutions de Paris* no. 9 (September 5, 1789), 26. Available online at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051138n/f28.item>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁷² *Décret concernant les vainqueurs de la Bastille, du 19 juin 1790, séance du soir.* <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56571611/f2.item>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

of the Friends of the Constitution of the Department of Ain sent an address to the National Assembly, observing that they would like it that "all differences in the Ceremonies of Sepulture would be abandoned" and "the tolling of bells would be the same in all perishes for all individuals."⁷³ A more consistent project related to civil statuses was proposed by deputy Gohier in June 1792 within the framework of developing an alternative revolutionary religion.⁷⁴

According to Gohier, all critical events in a citizen's life – such as civic baptism, marriage, and death – should happen by the Altar of the *patrie*, with municipal officials present instead of priests.⁷⁵ After a community member died, a cortege "worthy of a free man" should accompany him to the Altar, and a speech about his life and achievements was to be pronounced there. The Legislative Assembly adopted Gohier's proposition and decreed that altars should bear the following inscription: *Le citoyen nait, vit, et meurt pour la Patrie* ("The citizen is born, lives and dies for the Motherland"). This formula of a citizen's life was in line with the dangerous situation in France in 1792, where the country's defense became crucial for the very existence of the revolutionary regime.

Several other religious schools came up with their ideas of civil sacraments. Maurice Dommanget and Albert Mathiez pointed to the fact that such ceremonies were envisioned "not only by the cults of Reason and the Supreme Being, but also by the cult of worshippers of Daubermesnil (Year IV), the social cult of Benoist-Lamothe (Year IV), the conspiracy of Equals

⁷³ AN DXXXIX bis 26, Dossier 265. Pièce 27, May 12, 1791. "... (Les vrais amis de la Constitution) voudraient encore que toutes distinctions fussent anéanties dans les Ceremonies de Sépulture, que le son des cloches fut le même dans chaque paroisse pour tous les individus."

⁷⁴ This fragment follows the description by Albert Mathiez, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789-1792)* (Paris, 1904), esp. 133–136. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5442625k/f141.item>, accessed on May 15, 2023.

⁷⁵ The idea of substituting religious ministers by laic ones overlived the period of the most intense revolutionary turbulence. Daniel Ligou quotes a decision of the Council of Five Hundreds from Year VII that proclaimed that at every inhumation, a representative of municipality, instead of a priest, should be present. Ligou, "L'évolution des cimetières," 73.

and, finally, Theophilanthropy."⁷⁶ Dommanget also speculated that, especially in the era of Terror, new practices were being extended to the whole country and covered all population strata as "Christian ceremonies were rare and generally only existed in a clandestine form, and, on the other hand, the respect of the dead was unanimously accepted, and funerals were considered indispensable."⁷⁷

Despite the popularity of civil sacraments and the rarity of Christian ceremonies argued by Dommanget, his study was among the very few scholarly writings to mention them, and even he did not go into much detail about how the decrees were implemented. With that, there are reasons to expect that the implementation of these ideas was at least controversial. Even though religious funerals in the 1790s bore marks of republican influence, they still had recognizable traditional principles at the core. Alain Joblin, for example, cited a few examples of secularized sacraments in the department of Pas-de-Calais. In 1793, it was decided that cults should only be practiced within temples, houses and churches were not to be decorated for funerals, and crosses not be carried in front of funeral processions. Such a decision delimited religious presence at the funeral but did not eliminate it completely. Similarly, authorities in Boulogne decided to unify the Catholic and Protestant parts of the local cemetery to establish "perfect equality" – certainly a blow to the Catholic dominance from the republican angle, but in no way a secular solution.⁷⁸

Legislators' suggestions regarding the new rituals bore an imprint of antiquity, as did the national funerals of *grands hommes*, politicians, and generals. Republican oaths, references to citizenship and the beloved homeland for which a man should live and die, and allegoric images

⁷⁶ Dommanget, "La déchristianisation à Beauvais. Les sacrements civiques," 163. Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 54, 59, 99, 100, 150, 338, 364, 365.

⁷⁷ Dommanget, "La déchristianisation à Beauvais. Les sacrements civiques," 180.

⁷⁸ Alain Joblin, "Religion populaire et révolution française dans le Nord-Ouest de la France (1789-1799)," *Annales historiques de la révolution française* 316 (1999), 271–99: 285-286.

embellished revolutionary funerals on the national and local scale. However, it was virtually impossible for an ordinary man to become raised to national glory in his death and receive honors of the Pantheon or a comparable ceremony. The ordinary citizen should have demonstrated civic virtues, political achievements, heroism on the battlefield, or an extraordinary talent to have a slight chance to be rewarded by the nation. This system, while pretending to be more meritocratic than those based on estates or wealth, still left out the majority of people who gave their lives for the revolution.

You Have Fallen Victims. Funeral rituals in revolutionary Russia

Unlike its French predecessor, the Russian revolution started honoring its dead almost immediately after the overturn of the monarchy. The grand funeral ceremony for the victims of the February revolution on March 23, 1917, in Petrograd became a reference point for the further developments of Soviet death culture. This ceremony incorporated a few earlier influences to process them and engender the subsequent public funeral ritual that would consolidate over seven to ten post-revolutionary years. While the forms of the ceremony crystallized, its content was subtly changing in line with the changes in the political and cultural life of the country.

Even though the revolutionary funeral canon had several recognizable and relatively simple features, its extension outside the capital encountered opposition. The desire to remake the funeral ritual from scratch was not shared by everyone, even within the Bolshevik camp. It provoked a debate in the press – one of several big debates of the decade, among them the discussion of "proletarian culture," for example. But even after it, attempts to introduce a "red funeral" stumbled upon difficulties, ranging from church opposition to the unwillingness of even the Communists to

abandon the Orthodox rite. As a result, during this decade, the funeral ritual was susceptible to variations and experiments that are addressed in this chapter.

Revolutionary funerals: Aesthetics and symbolism

When the monarchy suddenly fell in Russia in early March 1917, the first mass public ceremony of the triumphant revolution became a grand funeral for those who were killed during the days of fighting in Petrograd. The ceremony was designed as a one-of-a-kind event, a festive celebration of revolutionary triumph rather than a somber funeral of the fallen.⁷⁹ It was also the first occasion to display the symbols of the new regime publicly, openly, and officially, and as such, it was a political manifestation more than obsequies. But still, obsequies it was. Over a thousand people were injured or killed during the week of the "bloodless" revolution.⁸⁰ If not for the revolution, these people would have lived; now, they were victims of the social and political transformation that promised a bright future for their fellow citizens. The ceremony was a symbolic compensation that the new regime could offer to those who died during its establishment.

In form, the March ceremony was not entirely new. It relied upon several traditions that can be traced back to the 1870s.⁸¹ During that decade, amidst the growing tensions between the

⁷⁹ On the festive tone of mass events after the February revolution, see: Boris Kolonitsky, *Simvoly vlasti i bor'ba za vlast'. K izucheniyu politicheskoy kul'tury rossijskoj revolyutsii 1917 goda* [Symbols of power and struggle for power. Towards the study of the political culture of the Russian revolution of 1917] (St. Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2012).

⁸⁰ The exact number of casualties is unknown till this day. Even the number of dead and wounded together range from the "official" number of 1382 published in *Pravda* to the more recent scholarly estimates of over 1400, over 1600 and even up to 2000 people who suffered one way or another in the days of the revolution. The numbers are quoted in: Olga A. Shashkova (compiler), *Fevral'skaya revolyutsia 1917 g. : sobranie dokumentov i materialov* [The February revolution of 1917. A collection of documents and materials] (Moscow: RGGU, 1996), 319.

⁸¹ Richard Stites even quotes the 1861 Bezdna massacre as the "first public revolutionary funeral in Russian history": "In his treatment of the Bezdna revolt and massacre of 1861, Klibanov devotes some moving and vivid pages to the funeral panegyric paid to the martyrs by the democratic publicist and radical ethnologist, Afanasy Shchapov. It was one of the first visible links between the aspirations of popular revolt and the radical sensibility of the intelligentsia in Russia, made the more vivid in being perhaps the first public revolutionary funeral in Russian history, giving birth to the well-known revolutionary funeral march, "You Fell Victim." Richard Stites, *Revolutionary dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 18.

tsarist regime and underground political activists, funerals of prominent political, literary, or public figures became opportune moments for challenging the existing power relations. Funerals of Narodnik Pavel Chernyshev (1876), poet Nikolay Nekrasov (1877/8, depending on the calendar style), political prisoner Anton Padlewski (1878), writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1881), and others turned into massive public events where participants not only paid their respects to the dead but also manifested their political sympathies.⁸²

During these semi-improvised manifestations, the Orthodox ritual blended with revolutionary symbolism. During Chernyshev's funeral, for example, the priest fled, "leaving lay men and women to occupy the symbolic center of this religious procession."⁸³ Similarly, at Nekrasov's funeral, students with memorial wreaths occupied the priest's place in the head of the procession that still, in general, was an Orthodox funeral cortege. The tradition of funeral manifestations was further solidified after the 1905 revolution, becoming a recognizable feature of the workers' movement culture. According to the examples quoted by Stites, the ritual continued to mix Orthodox and revolutionary traits, perhaps with a stronger inclination towards the former:

In Poltava Province in 1905, inhabitants of a village (having forsaken God and the tsar, in the opinion of the reporter) greeted city agitators with red flags and church bells. At Easter in 1905 in Kaluga Province, peasants returning from Moscow openly agitated at the church service about labor conditions. In Moscow Province in the same year, local peasants bearing icons joined a church procession and sang the "Workers' Marseillaise." In Simbirsk Province, peasants forced a priest to say a memorial mass for Sten'ka Razin, the seventeenth-century rebel. In other places, people invaded the church with red flags and demanded funeral services for fallen comrades.⁸⁴

⁸² Ninel' S. Polischuk, "Obryad kak sotsial'noye yavleniye (na primere "krasnykh pokhoron")" [Ritual as a social event. The example of the 'red funeral'], *Sovetskaya etnografiya* no. 6 (1991), 25–39: 34–35. See also Tom Trice, "Rites of Protest: Populist Funerals in Imperial St. Petersburg, 1876–1878," *Slavic Review* 60, no. 1 (2001): 50–74.

⁸³ Trice, "Rites of Protest," 58.

⁸⁴ Stites, *Revolutionary dreams*, 104.

In March 1917, this tradition took center stage in the capital. Already on March 5, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet agreed that the fallen deserved a national funeral ceremony and organized a Funeral Commission to run it.⁸⁵ This decision was also typical for workers' and revolutionaries' funerals. According to anthropologist Ninel' Polischuk, after the failure of the 1905 revolution, "initiative regarding the organization of funerals-demonstrations [of the victims] usually came from the[ir] comrades-in-arms ... Initiators and organizers of the funerals (usually special commissions) designed the funeral ritual, decided about the order and the route of the procession, informed the public about the date of the funeral and the time and place of the start of the cortege...."⁸⁶ In 1917, the Funeral Commission had similar responsibilities. Its members controlled the organizational aspects of the funeral procession: timing, routes, directions, and the structure of marching columns – while relying on engineers, architects, artists, doctors, and military men to deal with respective specificities.

The key element of the funeral was to be a gigantic procession, going from district hospitals and morgues to the place of interment at the Field of Mars. It was a noticeable deviation from the Orthodox ritual in which the most significant element was the funeral mass marking the passage of the soul to the other world. The first public ceremony of the revolutionary era was pronouncedly civil. This decision was twice as provocative. First, imperial Russia was a country where any event of national significance was accompanied by a solemn Orthodox mass, and opening the new era with a civic ceremony was a statement. But even more importantly, this ceremony was a funeral, and funerals were, for the believers, virtually unthinkable without the participation of the clergy.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ P. Volobuev (ed.), *Petrogradskiy sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 godu: protokoly, stenogrammy i otchety, rezolyutsii, postanovleniya obshchikh sobraniy, sobraniy sektsiy, zasedaniy Ispolnitel'nogo komiteta i fraktsiy 27 fevralya - 25 oktyabrya 1917 goda* [The Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldier Deputies in 1917. Protocols, verbatim records, reports, resolutions, decisions of general, section, Executive Committee and fraction meetings, 27 February – 25 October 1917]. In 5 vols., Vol. 1 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991), 132. *Izvestia*. No. 22 (March 23, 1917), 3.

⁸⁶ Polischuk, "Ritual as a social event," 30.

⁸⁷ See more on that in Chapter 4.

This attitude explains why there *were*, in fact, church services for the victims of the revolution. Although on March 5, the Petrograd Soviet decided that the official funeral ceremony should have a civil character, it allowed families of the deceased to organize religious services if they wanted to.⁸⁸ The Orthodox clergy were eager to offer their services as well, even though their petitions to accompany the procession officially were turned down.⁸⁹ Papers reported that "in churches of the workers' districts of the capital, funeral services were conducted early in the morning. In cathedrals of the central parts of the city, funeral litanies and services for the victims of the revolution were held in usual time, and local clergy participated in church-office in council."⁹⁰ On March 24, public prayer was organized at the burial site, attended by crowds of believers. But the church service was not there on the day of the funeral, which came to be remembered as a purely civil one. Later, this aspect became a distinctive trait of the Soviet funeral ceremony.

The march was to begin from several places throughout the city and pass by the burial place in the Field of Mars, where the victims of the revolution were to be laid to rest. To orchestrate the elaborate procession, the Funeral Commission published a detailed Ceremonial.⁹¹ It was reprinted in most newspapers and posted as posters across the city. The public was familiar with this type of publication: before the February revolution, most newspapers systematically published Ceremonials describing imperial celebrations. According to Chris Chulos, "ceremonials enumerated critical directions about where and when official participants were to gather for a church service or procession, sequence of events, processional order, required dress, lists of groups

⁸⁸ *The Petrograd Soviet...*, 144.

⁸⁹ Kolonitsky, *Symbols of power*, 46.

⁹⁰ *Vechnyee Vremya*. no. 1778 (March 24, 1917), 3.

⁹¹ "Tseremonial pokhoron zhertv revolyutsii" [Ceremonial for the funeral of the victims of the revolution], *Izvestia* no. 21 (March 22, 1917), 1–2.

that were to receive commemorative medals, and receptions and balls marking the conclusion of the official program."⁹²

The earlier versions of the Ceremonial contained recommendations on the structure of the march, but the final version omitted these details, and the order of columns varied from district to district.⁹³ The choice of accessories and decorations was outsourced to various actors, from the command staff of the Petrograd military district to representatives of city districts and self-organized groups of participants. This shared responsibility contributed to the funeral ceremony being a syncretic event where various actors could express themselves.

The assembly points for columns, from which marching was to begin, were situated in or near the hospitals, morgues, and chapels where bodies of the fallen had awaited the funeral. To note, those were bodies of people not claimed by families, some unidentified (those claimed by families were buried privately before the official ceremony). They had remained in hospitals and morgues for about a month – a timespan that significantly surpassed the normal period of one to three days.⁹⁴ The exact number of the dead was unknown. Each contemporary source had its counting strategy, and some manipulated the numbers according to their political agenda. For instance, *Pravda* – the Bolshevik newspaper *par excellence* – did not include the dead police

⁹² Chris Chulos, "Celebrations of the Empire and Collective Memory in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian History* 35, no. 1/2 (2008), 99–112: 100.

⁹³ Columns should have opened with a banner, substituting for the icons and cross of the Orthodox funeral. Coffins should have been carried in the head, followed by families; after them, orchestras and/or choirs should have proceeded. Organized ranks of workers, soldiers, and other organizations, from universities and colleges to professional unions, party cells, and national unions, should have closed the columns, and after them, the public should have followed. ("Nakanune" [The Day Before,] *Birzhevye Vedomosti* no. 16151 (March 24, 1917), 2). For further details, see Ilya Orlov, *Traur i prazdnik v revolyutsionnoj politike. Tseremoniya 23 marta 1917 goda v Petrograde* [Bereavement and festival in revolutionary politics. The ceremony of March 23, 1917, in Petrograd] (MA Thesis, St. Petersburg, 2007), 45. Online at: <http://net.abimperio.net/files/february.pdf>, accessed on May 2, 2023.

⁹⁴ Firsov, Kiseleva (eds.), *Daily life of Great-Russian peasants*, 287; Bulgakov, *Handbook for Priests*, 1310.

officers in its count of the victims of the revolution.⁹⁵ According to various reports, there were 180, 181, or 184 coffins during the final grand ceremony.⁹⁶

It is hard to say whether any rituals were performed over the dead during the waiting time. Supposedly, they were washed; new and identical clothing was ordered for them in undertakers' offices.⁹⁷ Dressing the deceased in new, clean, preferably fine clothes was one of the fundamentals of the Russian funeral tradition.⁹⁸ This is perhaps why the initial decision to bury the bodies "in the clothes in which death has taken them" was reconsidered. Identical clothes also highlighted the idea of equality and justice among the deceased.

Several days before the funeral, the bodies were put in metal zinc-lined coffins (the *Den'* correspondent saw them on March 16), the coffins – in wooden boxes covered with red cloth. Pieces of paper indicating name, profession, and, less often, the region of origin of the deceased were pinned to the boxes, and when the body was not identified, the inscription simply read "Unknown." Most boxes were decorated with traditional fir branches, live flowers, or professional attributes of the deceased, such as soldiers' caps; some had more elaborate decorations.⁹⁹

The coffins were publicly displayed, and, at least in some places, the guard of honor surrounded them.¹⁰⁰ Families and strangers could say their goodbyes on the eve of the funeral and the early morning on its day.¹⁰¹ Then, the coffins were taken up the shoulders of participants. This

⁹⁵ On the difficulties in estimating the number of victims see Orlov, *Bereavement and festival*, 8–14.

⁹⁶ *Novoe Vremya* estimated the number of bodies as 181 (no. 14735, March 25, 1917). The number 184 appeared in *Birzhevye vedomosti* (no. 16151, March 24, 1917, 2) and *Rech'* (no. 71, March 25, 1917, 4). *Izvestia* counted 180 coffins (no. 22, March 23, 1917, 3), as did the authors of the memorial publication *Al'bom velikikh pokhron zhertv revolyutsii v Petrograde. 23 marta 1917 goda* [The Album of the great funeral of the victims of the revolution in Petrograd, March 23, 1917] (Petrograd: Sobchinsky i Plevkovsky, 1917), 3.

⁹⁷ *Den'*, no. 10 (March 16, 1917), 3.

⁹⁸ Zelenin, *Ethnography of Eastern Slavs*, 345, 347; *Daily life of Great-Russian peasants*, 145, 287–288. See also Warner, "Russian peasant beliefs and practices concerning death," esp. pp. 259–260, 265.

⁹⁹ *Novoe Vremya* no. 14735 (March 25, 1917), 4. *Vechnoe Vremya* no. 1778 (March 24, 1917), 1; *Den'* no. 17 (March 25, 1917), 2; *The Album of the great funeral*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ *The Album of the great funeral*, 11.

¹⁰¹ *Novoe Vremya*. no. 14735 (March 25, 1917), 4; *Vechnoe Vremya* no. 1778 (March 24, 1917), 1.

way of bringing bodies to the resting place was traditional. Another option would be hiring a funeral cart, but the Funeral Commission openly refused to order horses and carriages: "The fallen will be carried to the tombs by that very people for whose freedom they fell." The duty of carrying coffins was considered very honorable, and those willing to participate were many.¹⁰² The procession started moving towards the Field of Mars.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the entire city was present for the march: estimates of the number of participants vary between 800,000 and 1,500,000 people.¹⁰³ Along with families of the deceased and their brothers in arms, the majority of organized columns were workers of Petrograd factories and plants, soldiers, and members of various professional organizations. The Petrograd Soviet declared the funeral day a day off so the proletariat could join.¹⁰⁴ Businesses did not open, and streetcars did not run. Representatives of the authorities also attended the ceremony: the Petrograd Soviet had a right to be present in full, the Provisional Government, State Duma, city government, diplomatic corps, and delegations from military regiments and other cities had to apply for a limited number of passes.¹⁰⁵

In the procession, workers, soldiers, students, and other representatives of society vastly outnumbered the family members of the deceased. In the press reports about the event, the families' role was further diminished. Newspapers tended to represent relatives of the dead as types rather than individuals. The reader would learn about "an elderly mother" shedding tears on the coffin of her son who died way before time or about a hysterical woman throwing herself upon a coffin and crying loudly, asking the traditional rhetorical questions of the funeral lament: "Where are you

¹⁰² Orlov, *Bereavement and festival*, 40.

¹⁰³ Kolonitsky, *Symbols of power*, 49. The figure 800,000 is mentioned in a report by S. Ippolitov, correspondent for *Utro Rossii* (no. 79, March 24, 1917, 3). Zinaida Gippius who witnessed the ceremony believed that there were up to two million people. Zinaida Gippius. *Dnevnik* [Diaries] Vol. 1 (Moscow: Intelpak, 1999), 504.

¹⁰⁴ *The Petrograd Soviet*... 146, 148.

¹⁰⁵ "Ceremonial," 2.

going, my dear, who are you leaving me to?" These stereotypical figures were predominantly female, reminding the audience of the traditional wailers and their exclusive right to ritually express all due emotions: sadness, grief, and a sense of loss.

The blood relatives of the deceased – unorganized, crying, and few – were virtually invisible during the grand funeral ceremony of March 23, overshadowed by the endless "organized ranks" of workers and soldiers. Their private grief was so insignificant that the *Den'* correspondent, describing the moment of interment, wrote with surprise: "Relatives of the deceased cry loudly. Only now, as if for the first time, does the crowd remember that it is a funeral. Everything that was before looked more like a solemn march of a free people."¹⁰⁶

The People, in their turn, became a substitute for family. Just as the comrades of the fallen had earlier taken up families' responsibilities in organizing the funeral, now they were seeing them off, acting as quasi-relatives again. Contemporaries underlined the feeling of brotherhood: each district was burying "their brothers fallen for the common cause," and the proletariat was putting "their brothers fallen in the fight " into the grave.¹⁰⁷ This rhetoric focused on the male fighter figures and came close to applying the family metaphor to the entire revolutionary movement.

Along with the extent of the funeral procession, the visual and audial accompaniment was its brightest aspects, and it was through colors and sounds that the revolutionary symbolism manifested itself. Columns of workers had banners in front of them and orchestras in the rear. Mottos and subjects of "artistic images" on the banners varied greatly in extension and content.

¹⁰⁶ *Den'* no. 17 (March 25, 1917), 2. Vladimir Charnolusky wrote in his memoirs: "It was notable that in the bulk, the relatives of the fallen were completely invisible, even though they probably accompanied each coffin." Vladimir Charnolusky, *Ot Fevralya k Oktyabryu. Listki vospominaniy (1927–1930)* [From February to October. Sheets from memoirs (1927–1930)]. Published online at http://biblio.narod.ru/gymal/publicat/1917_tharn..htm by the manuscript from the Scholarly archive of Russian Academy of Education. Fond 19. Opis' 1. Delo 265. Listy 28–45. Accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Charnolusky, *From February to October*, http://biblio.narod.ru/gymal/publicat/1917_tharn..htm, accessed on May 13, 2023; "Nad bratskoj mogiloj" [Over the brotherly grave], *Izvestia* no. 22 (March 23, 1917), 3.

Some banners only had names of regiments or districts, phrases, and mottos; others had symbolic pictures sewn on them. But most of them had one thing in common: the color red.

News reports and eyewitness accounts mention the "endless chain of red banners" (*Novoe Vremya*) at the funeral procession. The Menshevik I. Tsereteli wrote that "countless banners had the most different inscriptions that manifested the strivings of different groups, classes, professions; but all those were red banners."¹⁰⁸ Red was everywhere: on ribbons and bows of organizers, on coffins, on banners. The impression was striking not only because the red color had political symbolism (by 1917, it was strongly associated with the revolution). The effect was even more intense given that the traditional funeral color scheme did not include red, which, in the countryside, was rather a festive color. Usually, funerals limited themselves to black, white, and sometimes yellow. At the funeral ceremony of March 23, the traditional blacks and whites were also present; for instance, the graves were surrounded by black silk banners.¹⁰⁹ But red, as the dominant color of the funeral, was among the most significant novelties noted by most spectators and participants.

Songs and music accompanying the ceremony were also specific enough to become a signature trait of revolutionary funerals. The traditional Orthodox funeral was not silent: sounds of prayers, recited or sung, and ringing church bells accompanied it. But it was outright prohibited to play non-religious music, and military orchestras were only to play at the funerals of military personnel.¹¹⁰ So when the Petrograd Soviet announced that "the funerals of the victims of the revolution should be celebrated ... with the participation of all Petrograd garrison units in full,

¹⁰⁸ Irakly Tsereteli, *Vospominaniya o Fevral'skoj revolyutsii* [Memoirs of the February revolution] Vol. 1 (Paris, 1963), 59.

¹⁰⁹ *Den'*, no. 17 (March 25, 1917), 1.

¹¹⁰ Bulgakov, *Handbook for Priests*, 1331.

with banners and music," it was a demonstrative decision.¹¹¹ Playing military music at the funeral symbolically placed the victims of the revolution among other fallen soldiers. With organized marching ranks of the proletariat and canon salute accompanying the interment of each coffin, the funeral ceremony became a parade of revolutionary forces indeed.¹¹²

Another source of musical inspiration was the Russian revolutionary tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Singing *The Workers' Marseillaise*, *You Have Fallen Victims*, *Varshavyanka*, and other revolutionary songs accompanied various semi-clandestine events, funerals included, long before the February revolution.¹¹³ Importantly for the current study, *Workers' Marseillaise* sung in Russia should not be confused with Rouget de Lisle's *La Marseillaise*. As Rustam Fahretdinov demonstrated, the Russian text of the song written by Narodnik Petr Lavrov in 1875 "was not related to the text and poetic rhythm of *La Marseillaise* by Rouget de Lisle and its Russian translations. The established melody of the "Russian Marseillaise" had some features of the French anthem, but it is impossible to sing one of these songs to the tune of the other."¹¹⁴ Lavrov's text combined with the modified melody was, however, an extremely popular Russian revolutionary song since at least 1905. Boris Kolonitsky demonstrated that singing these songs along with playing Chopin's funeral march signaled the clandestine tradition coming out into the open.¹¹⁵

To the sounds of revolutionary songs and *Funeral March*, the columns arrived at their destination: the Field of Mars in central Petrograd. This choice was yet another novelty,

¹¹¹ *The Petrograd Soviet...*, 146.

¹¹² "Ceremonial," 2. Also, *Izvestia*. no. 22 (March 23, 1917), 2.

¹¹³ Find more examples in Polischuk, "Ritual as a social event."

¹¹⁴ Rustam Fahretdinov, "Russkaya Marseljeza: Zhestokij romans Petra Lavrova" [The Russian Marseillaise: A cruel romance by Petr Lavrov], *Antropologicheskij Forum* no. 36 (2018), 117–153: 118. Fahretdinov further demonstrates that by the 1870s, Rouget de Lisle's tune was less popular among educated Russian, because *La Marseillaise* has lost the status of French national anthem in 1804 and did not regain it before 1879 (Fahretdinov, "The Russian Marseillaise," 120).

¹¹⁵ Kolonitsky, *Symbols of power*, 260–275.

problematic and widely debated both in the Petrograd Soviet, in artistic circles, and among the Petrograd citizens. The decision ran against at least two funeral traditions. First, the vast field was not a cemetery, and burying dead bodies outside cemetery grounds was generally unacceptable; it could even signalize the marginal social standing of the deceased.¹¹⁶ Moreover, digging a grave in the city center, disconnected from any church or chapel, was unprecedented in Petrograd.

The choice of burial place was preceded by lengthy debates, and different ideas of the future interment place were put forward, including the suggestion to bury the bodies in Palace Square. The Field of Mars was chosen partly because of its military associations ("the soldiers wanted it") and partly by the interference of artists and cultural figures who argued strongly against the Palace Square option on artistic grounds.¹¹⁷ The choice of a central and unconnected place was also, in part, didactical. According to a certain F. Matveev, the soldier deputy to the Petrograd Soviet from the 176th infantry regiment, there was a plan to erect a building for the future Russian parliament "at the burial place of the victims of the revolution, according to all the rules of science, technology, and art."¹¹⁸ The main governing body of reborn Russia should have faced the tomb of its founding fathers, constantly reminded of their sacrifice. Other events the tomb might have reminded about were the Bloody Sunday of January 9, 1905, or the victory over the "Romanov

¹¹⁶ A decent burial could only happen at a consecrated cemetery. Rare exceptions were burials of those who died an "unclean," unnatural death: suicides, brigands, those frozen or starved to death. the belief persisted that those who died unnaturally desecrated the cemetery land and should not be granted the right to a Christian burial. This conviction led, as late as the late nineteenth century, even to exhumation and reburial of unwanted bodies. See more in: *Daily life of Great-Russian peasants*, 144–145; Zelenin, *Ethnography of Eastern Slavs*, 352; *Essays on Russian mythology*, 95–129.

¹¹⁷ See for instance Alla A. Smirnova, "Natsional'nye pokhorony zhertv Fevral'skoj revolyutsii i deyateli russkoj kul'tury" [The national funeral of the victims of the February revolution and Russian cultural figures], *Vestnik SPbGUKI* no. 4 (2016), 27–31.

¹¹⁸ *The Petrograd Soviet*, 152.

hydra."¹¹⁹ The parliament was never built, but the Field of Mars was eventually selected as the grounds for the future tomb.

During the ceremony, individual coffins were placed in one communal, or brotherly, tomb.¹²⁰ This could also be problematic: according to the Russian funeral tradition, individual graves were strongly preferred to communal ones, and communal interments could only be tolerated in extreme circumstances such as wars or epidemics. The mass interments became more widespread in the years of the First World War; however, they were hardly normalized. Historian Svetlana Malysheva believed that at the front, the fallen soldiers were buried in mass graves without any accompanying rituals, and this lack of respect for each body, along with the often anonymous character of the burial, was connected, in the popular consciousness, to the idea of "unclean" dead.¹²¹ But the revolution was extreme enough for such interment to be tolerated.

The endless march of district columns lowering their dead to the ground overshadowed, in the audience's perception, any graveside oration that might have taken place. Enumerating the achievements and merits of the deceased and calling for revenge or continuation of his work in a graveside speech was a typical trait of the revolutionary funeral tradition.¹²² But on March 23, orations, speeches, or oaths were not planned. The marching columns were to pass the tombs with a brief check and then leave to make place for others. Apparently, this decision was dictated by

¹¹⁹ Orlov, *Bereavement and festival*, 17–26. See also *Izvestia* no. 7 (March 6, 1917), 4; *The Petrograd Soviet*, 144, 148.

¹²⁰ Boris Kolonitsky believed that there were four communal graves. M. Chertilina, referring to visual documents from the Russian State Archive of Cinematic and Photographic Documents, argued that they were, in fact, one grave in the form of the letter "I". See: M. Chertilina, "Pokhorony zhertv Fevral'skoj revolyutsii v Petrograde 23 marta 1917 g. v kinofotodokumentov RGAKFD" [Funerals of the victims of the February revolution in Petrograd, March 23, 1917, in the cinematic and photographic documents from the Russian State Archive of Cinematic and Photographic Documents], *Vestnik Arkhivista* 2011, <https://www.vestarchive.ru/dokumentovedenie/1512-pohorony-jerty-fevral'skoi-revolucii-v-petrograde-23-marta-1917-g-v-kinofotodokumentah-rgakfd.pdf>, accessed on May 23, 2023.

¹²¹ Svetlana Malysheva, " 'Bratskie mogily' i 'vrazheskie mogil'niki': Simvolicheskoe oznachivanie massovykh zakhoroneniij v Sovetskoj Rossii/SSSR 1920-kh–1940-kh godov" ['Brotherly graves' and 'landfills of enemies': the symbolic denotation of communal burials in Soviet Russia/USSR, 1920s–1940s], *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 44, no. 3 (2017), 233–263.

¹²² Trice, "Rites of Protest," 59; Polischuk, "Ritual as a social event," 27.

the sheer number of participants: the enormous crowds risked jamming if there were a longer stop for listening to the speeches. But eventually, the ceremony, stripped of an official church service and closing speeches, was the procession itself.

After the ceremony, the graves were cemented and later served as a foundation for the monument to the fallen that opened in 1919. The Field of Mars was renamed the Square of the Victims of Revolution to commemorate them. Also, the Petrograd Soviet planned to make the funeral anniversary a permanent celebration day. As *Izvestia* put it, it should have become "the day of remembrance of the victims of Revolution and a national festival of the Great Russian Revolution forever."¹²³

The Petrograd ceremony of March 23, 1917, continued several funeral traditions. In the prominent absence of the clergy, choice of audial and color scheme, and closeness to political demonstrations, it drew upon the Russian revolutionary underground that used funerals to assert its political views and call for the continuation of the struggle. The military influence was also visible, manifesting in the organized marching, firing of canons, and lowering of banners by the graveside, occupying the central streets of the capital with a procession organized by a Ceremonial referred to as the imperial celebrations. Still, with all these influences, the funeral of the victims of the February revolution was innovative enough to become a model for other revolutionary funeral ceremonies.

Half a year later, in November 1917, the funeral for the victims and heroes of the October revolution in Moscow closely reproduced the Petrograd example. The Moscow Military Revolutionary Committee nominated a commission to organize it; as in Petrograd, this commission

¹²³ *Izvestia* no. 7 (March 6, 1917), 4. As Kolonitsky shows, in many places across the country, March 10 was celebrated as the festival of revolution, and all works were stopped; however, this aspect was up to the local authorities who might decide not to stop the works, despite their support to the celebration. (Kolonitsky, *Symbols of power*, 47–48).

struggled to identify the bodies and figure out the political sympathies of the dead.¹²⁴ It also decided to bury the fallen in a communal grave in the city center by the Kremlin wall.¹²⁵

Unlike the Field of Mars in Petrograd, the Moscow Kremlin had long served as a place of rest: before the eighteenth century, Russian tsars and their families were traditionally buried in the Arkhangelsky Cathedral. Burying revolutionary fighters across the old royal tombs was underlined by the press as an act of justice returned to the nation long deprived of it. Still, the bodies of victims of the revolution were interred in a non-consecrated ground, and contemporaries met the decision with doubts and bafflement, if not irritation. Nikita Okunev, an employee of the steamship line in Moscow and son of a peasant, noted in his diary: "Graves are dug solemnly in a square, not somewhere in the quietness of a cemetery. All this does not fit a simple Russian man."¹²⁶

The funeral ceremony took place on November 10, 1917. Enterprises were closed, and streetcar traffic stopped. The Ceremonial published in central papers prescribed the procession structure. First, district columns marched, holding red banners, and choirs accompanied them, singing *Marseillaise* and *You Have Fallen Victims*. Then, comrades of the deceased carried coffins, and victims' families followed.¹²⁷ To note, those family members who wanted to be present at the Red Square for the interment had to have applied for a special permit from the local Soviet of Workers' Deputies – a step towards bureaucratization of revolutionary funerals.¹²⁸ In the rear, orchestras played the familiar Chopin funeral march. Representatives of local committees, soviets, factories and plants, and professional and military organizations carried banners, red flags, and

¹²⁴ *Sotsial-Demokrat* no. 202 (November 7, 1917), 2.

¹²⁵ Unlike the Petrograd case, this decision was made without much debate. See Aleksey Abramov, *U Kremlevskoj steny* [By the Kremlin wall] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1980), <https://coolib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-stenyi-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹²⁶ Nikita Okunev, Diary. 1917. November 23, <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/17079>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹²⁷ *Sotsial-Demokrat*, no. 204 (November 9, 1917), 4. See also Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 39–45.

¹²⁸ *Izvestia* no. 203/210 (November 12, 1917), 4.

wreaths. The dominant color was red, with injections of black. Music and singing overshadowed the funeral orations.¹²⁹ Church bells did not ring. The Soviet authorities virtually blocked the participation of the Orthodox church, and Patriarch Tikhon's attempt to conduct a funeral service despite the Bolsheviks' opposition largely failed.¹³⁰

As Frederick Corney observed, the official press opposed the "genuine emotions" in Moscow to "hypocritical tears, deep sighs, and lamentation with which in March the Rodziankos, Miliukovs, and Guchkovs approached the graves of the fallen warriors" in Petrograd.¹³¹ But contemporaries did not always share this sentiment. Olga Sheremeteva (née Chubarova, b. 1885, a noble-born and well-educated woman) noted in her diary: "November 10, the solemn funeral of the Bolsheviks. Red coffins, crowds of workers, especially women, the Red Guard that does not know how to hold a rifle, red banners with hoary [*prievshimisya*] mottos, and red wreaths. But enthusiasm is somewhat lacking."¹³² Mikhail Prishvin described a similar sentiment on a different occasion. On November 15, there was "a funeral of the Jew Vera Slutskaya, in a red coffin, and with an orchestra; public watched with disgust and made remarks: 'Another show, who needs that!', 'They are burying devils.' Compare this to the April funerals."¹³³

Whatever the sentiment, by November 1917, the new ritual introduced during the Petrograd ceremony solidified. During the Civil War years, its essential elements – processions, speeches, extensive use of red color, and revolutionary music – were reproduced across the country and made funerals immediately recognizable as both ritual and political events. The choice of burial grounds

¹²⁹ S. Eremeeva, " 'V vikhre velikom ne sginut bessledno ... ': Novaya smert' dlya bortsov za novuyu zhizn' " [In the great whirlwind, they will not perish without a trace: A new death for the fighters for a new life], *Vestnik Omskogo universiteta. Seriya "Istoricheskie nauki"* 4 no. 4 (2014), 23–34: 28.

¹³⁰ Abramov, *By the Kremlin wall*, <https://coollib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-steniy-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹³¹ Corney, *Telling October*, 42.

¹³² Olga Sheremeteva, *Diary*. 1917. November 11. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/126611>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹³³ Mikhail Prishvin, *Diary*. 1917. November 15. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/18248>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

was also significant: instead of cemeteries, the heroes and victims of the revolution were being buried at the city center, as if for edification, or in some place charged with revolutionary memories.

In Western Siberia, for example, solemn burials and reburials of the 'victims of Kolchak' began in 1919. Historian Ekaterina Krasil'nikova argued that "by the moment the Soviet power was restored, there already were mass graves of victims of battles and resurrections of 1918-1919 in the cities of Western Siberia, not marked with any memorial signs but valuable for those who fought against 'kolchakovshina'".¹³⁴ Funerals took place in city centers and not in the cemeteries. In Novonikolaevsk, now Novosibirsk, the victims were buried at the central square (named Bazarnaya before the revolution, it was rebaptized the Red Square in 1920 and is now known as Lenin square); in Barnaul, at the central Lenin Avenue; in Omsk, in a garden square by the House of the Republic.¹³⁵ Huge processions with red and black flags carried coffins upholstered with red cloth to the sounds of *Marseillaise* and *You Have Fallen Victims*. Members of local professional units and party organizations followed the coffins, and at the graveside, speeches and orations were followed by oaths "to remain loyal to the cause the heroes had given their lives for."¹³⁶

Similarly, in Ekaterinburg, as François-Xavier Nérard has shown, there were two revolutionary funerals in 1918. "Twice, at the end of January and at the beginning of April, the

¹³⁴ Ekaterina Krasil'nikova, "Kommemorativnoe znachenie massovykh pokhoron zhertv grazhdanskoy vojny v gubernskikh gorodakh Zapadnoj Sibiri" [Commemorative significance of mass funerals of victims of the Civil war in Western Siberia gubernia cities], *Gumanitarnye nauki v Sibiri* 2 (2014), 71–75.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, researcher Olga Blinova demonstrated the mixed nature of the public garden: "While the plot of land before the building (of the Gubernia Executive Committee – a.p.) was allotted for the necropolis, the city youth required its other part in 1921 for a sports ground. This did not happen because in the summer of 1921, the territory was passed over to Omsk gubernia department of public education for the creation of a playground for children." This pragmatic use of cemetery lands was typical for common cemeteries in the 1920s, and it is interesting to note that memorial tombs were not an exception. Olga Blinova, "Kommemorativnaya praktika v Omske v pervyye gody sovetской vlasti (1919 – 1945 gg.)" [Commemorative practice in Omsk during the first years of the Soviet regime, 1919-1945], *Izvestia Omskogo gosudarstvennogo istoriko-kraevedcheskogo muzeya* no. 22 (2019), 98–106: 99.

¹³⁶ Krasil'nikova, "Commemorative significance of mass funerals," 74.

bodies of Red fighters who had died in the fights against Dutov were shown and buried with pomp in the city."¹³⁷ In the presence of crowds, of which relatives of the fallen constituted but a small part, "the coffins, wrapped in red fabric, were moved through half of the city to the municipal soviet (on Pokrovsky Ave.) and then back to Cathedral Square" – a site associated with the old regime due to a cathedral and a monument to Alexander II (demolished during the February revolution). There, a mass grave for the red soldiers was dug to overwrite the history of the place and substitute the former rulers with the memorial of the foundational sacrifice for the new regime.

These two burials were not the end of the story. In July 1918, when the Whites took Ekaterinburg back, "One of the first things they did was to erase the [Bolshevik] mass graves... The corpses were exhumed the next night and reburied in an unknown place at the order of the new commandant of the city."¹³⁸ Victims of the Bolshevik terror were buried in the same spot. When the city changed hands yet again in 1919, the first burials of "heroic fighters who died for the liberation of the proletariat" took place only five days after the Bolsheviks regained control of the city. Nérard described the ceremony the following way:

City dwellers were called ("all to the funerals, all outside, death to the White Guard!") to take part in a demonstration bringing the corpses from the city hospital to the square in front of the Verkh-Iset factory. The meaning of this moment was, however, very different from those that took place in 1918, as close as they might have seemed. The materiality of the corpses this time played a central role. ... Showing mutilated corpses was a political act. The materiality of wounds, the stigmata they displayed were part of the discourse of sacrifice and victory.¹³⁹

The demonstration of wounds and mutilations of heroes' bodies at the height of the Russian Civil War highlighted the importance of how the martyrs died and evoked rage against the enemy.

¹³⁷ Francois-Xavier Nérard, "Red Corpses: A Microhistory of Mass Graves, Dead Bodies, and Their Public Uses," *Quaestio Rossica* 9, no. 1 (2021): 138–54: 142.

¹³⁸ Nérard, "Red Corpses: A Microhistory of Mass Graves," 146.

¹³⁹ Nérard, "Red Corpses: A Microhistory of Mass Graves," 147.

This practice echoed the demonstration of heroes' bodies during the most dangerous period of the French revolution described above, exposing martyrs' bodies with lethal wounds to mobilize the spectators against the enemy. The local Bolsheviks in the Urals were not reproducing the French examples: they similarly acted in comparable circumstances, sending a similar message.

In Petrozavodsk (Karelia, some 400 km northeast of Petrograd), the first three Communists who had fallen in revolutionary battles were buried in the town's central Square of October 25, previously Petrovskaya, in June 1919.¹⁴⁰ Automobiles decorated with greenery drove coffins covered with red cloth to the square to the sounds of *Internationale* and oaths to continue the cause of the dead.¹⁴¹ The burial place was near the city administration, reminding the authorities of the sacrifice that had established the new regime (the same logic was behind the project of erecting the new all-Russian parliament building against the Field of Mars in Petrograd). In the following weeks, other Communists were buried in the same communal grave, one by one, and a year later, the bodies of workers shot by the Whites in 1919 were reburied alongside them.

In Cherepovets (Vologda region, about 500 km north of Moscow), there was no fighting, but several local Communists who died away from home in 1919-1921 were brought back and buried with honors at a newly organized cemetery of the Victims of the Revolution. The cemetery was founded in the city center, across from the Resurrection cathedral – a demonstrative counter-symbol that enforced the opposition between the Bolshevik power and Orthodox values.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Valentina Volokhova, "Istoriya bratskoj mogily kommunistov v kontekste politicheskoy zhizni Petrozavodskaya v gody Grazhdanskoj vojny," [History of the Communists fraternal grave in the context of Petrozavodsk political life during the Civil War years], *Uchenye zapiski Petrozavodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 3 no. 164 (2017): 19–26.

¹⁴¹ Volokhova, "History of the Communists' fraternal grave," 21.

¹⁴² Olga Solodyankina, "Kazusy identichnosti: novaya guberniya, novyye geroi, novyye inostrantsy i novyye kommemorativnyye praktiki," [Special cases of identity: a new gubernia, new heroes, new foreigners, and new commemorative practices], in: *Revolutsia 1917 goda v Rossii: sobytia i kontseptsii, posledstvia i pamyat'. Materialy Mezhdunarodnoj nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii, SPB, 11-12 maia 2017 g.* [The Revolution of 1917 in Russia: events and concepts, consequences and memory. Materials of an International research and training conference, Saint-Petersburg, May 11-12, 2017] (Saint-Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin, 2017), 314–322.

These and other examples from across Soviet Russia demonstrate that already in 1918-1919, the revolutionary funeral was a recognizable practice with marked rituals consecrating new sacred places in the urban context. The necropolises legitimized the new regime and inspired the revolution's soldiers. As many scholars have shown, in Moscow, all citywide manifestations and parades on the dates of the revolutionary calendar (January 9, May 1, November 7) stopped by the Kremlin wall tomb to lay wreaths, and revolutionary troops took their oaths there before leaving for the front.¹⁴³ In the first post-revolutionary years, when fighting was intense, such gestures could have a powerful emotional impact on the participants and mobilize them. Soldiers laying wreaths at fraternal tombs could easily identify with the fallen: any day, they could join their predecessors in the fraternal grave.

The ritual belonged to the first years of the revolution, when it was crucial to make a strong statement regarding the fundamental nature of the transformation and the new regime. Like the extraordinary character of the ongoing events, this ritual was exceptional, unique, and often decided *ad hoc*. When the situation stabilized, the war ended, and life started returning to normal, the revolutionary authorities faced a new question. Could that ritual be expanded to the broader strata of the population, and if yes, should it?

"Red rituals": debates and alternatives

As shown above, the revolutionary funeral ritual before and during 1917 included elements of the Orthodox funeral, in different proportions depending on the time and place where the ceremony took place. Speaking more generally, in 1917–1921, the relationship between the

¹⁴³ Abramov, *By the Kremlin wall*, <https://coollib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-stenyi-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023; Ereemeeva, "A new death for the fighters for a new life," 29.

revolution and the church was uneasy and uneven but still allowed certain liberties in both directions. In some places, the Orthodox clergy made overtures to the new authorities. Thus, in March 1920 in Kerensky *uezd* of Penza *gubernia*, "the clergy tried to march in step with the Soviet authorities, on January 9, they performed a funeral service to commemorate the Bloody Sunday victims ... and on February 12, there was a service to mark the third anniversary of the February revolution."¹⁴⁴ Some ministers of religion even attempted to join the party ranks, according to a much-surprised publication in *Revolutsia i tserkov'*. Some adherents of the new regime, in their turn, "still held fast to the old rites, visiting the church on every holiday, singing along in the church choir, and even reading the 'Apostol.' "¹⁴⁵ Despite the long debates on "whether a Communist can, at the same time, be a believer," no definitive solution existed for several years. According to Mikhail Gorev (real name Galkin), an Orthodox priest turned atheist and one of the leading figures in the early stage of the Soviet antireligious struggle, "the discussion has not yielded positive results, and the question remained somewhat open" because there was no coherent guidance on how to act.¹⁴⁶

"Godless," or secular, rites of passage were especially hard to organize. The grassroots demand for civic marriages, baptisms, and funerals remained low, and people maintained their religious practices despite the sometimes harsh measures the party members directed against those who adhered to the old ways of life. Thus, in 1919, the Maloarkhangel'skaya organization of the Communist Party discussed "the issue of party members who had participated in the religious rite

¹⁴⁴ M. Chernov, "'Moskva. Kreml'. Leninu'. Ezhenedel'nye svodki VCHK o religii, tserkvi, veruyuschikh" ['Moscow, Kremlin, to Lenin': All-Russian Extraordinary Commission weekly reports on religion, Church, and believers"], in: *Svoboda sovesti v Rossii: istoricheskij i sovremennij aspekt. Vypusk 12. Sbornik statej* [Freedom of conscience in Russia: historical and contemporary aspects. Issue 12. Collection of articles] (Saint-Petersburg, 2016), 199–208: 203. Source quoted: GARF. Fond R-130. Opis' 29. Delo 49. List 266 rev., 267.

¹⁴⁵ Mikhail Gorev, "Kommunizm i religioznye obryady" [Communism and religious rites], *Revolutsiya i tserkov'* no. 6-8 (1919), 15. http://www.odinblago.ru/revolucia_i_cerkov_6-8/2, accessed on May 6, 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Gorev, "Communism and religious rites," 15.

of the so-called church marriage." Five men were excluded from the party because "they went as far as to bow down before the ministers of religion in order to contract a marriage to please politically ignorant women."¹⁴⁷ But this solution was not the only one possible. Even within the Soviet camp, opinions were divided on the reasons for such commitment and possible alternatives for definitively secularizing everyday life and eradicating the vestiges of religion.

Revising the rules of daily life took on added urgency in the context of broader cultural tendencies of the early twentieth century. The *fin de siècle* sentiment of pessimism, decadence, and decline of civilization was matched by unprecedented optimism and high hopes related to the prospects of technology and science. New inventions and discoveries in physics, biology, and chemistry, paralleled by tectonic sociopolitical events, such as the World War and the revolution, created a sense that, indeed, everything that had previously existed could be revised. According to Michael Hagemester, in the 1920s Russia, "There was a widespread expectation that science, art, and technology, freed from the ties of conflicting particular interests and for the first time functioning for the benefit of all humanity, would take an unprecedented upswing, pave the way for a "bright future," and transcend the final barrier blocking the gate to the realm of freedom."¹⁴⁸

Among the various bright ideas that influenced this worldview in Russia, the current that became known as "Russian cosmism" stood apart.¹⁴⁹ It was based on the teachings of an obscure Russian philosopher Nikolay Fedorov (1829 – 1903), who argued in favor of the complete dominance of man over nature and insisted that "it was the ethical duty of scientists and politicians

¹⁴⁷ "Kak provoditsya dekret ob otdelenii tserkvi ot gosudarstva na mestakh" ["How the decree on separation of church and state is put into practice locally"], *Revolutsia i tserkov'*. no. 2 (1919). http://www.odinblago.ru/revolucia_i_cerkov_2/9, accessed on May 6, 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Hagemester, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and Today," in: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet culture* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 185-202: 188.

¹⁴⁹ See Boris Groys, *Russian Cosmism* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 2018) for an anthology of the key texts of this current.

everywhere to work together and focus their resources on the common task of resurrecting all people who had ever lived."¹⁵⁰

Fedorov's ideas, both before and after the revolution, stimulated engineering imagination and gave a push to technological innovations. For example, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857 – 1935), an engineer and space visionary, was influenced by Fedorov's ideas, and some believe he envisioned building rockets to send resurrected humans into space.¹⁵¹ According to Hagemeister, in the 1920s, Fedorov's followers and disciples "were mainly fascinated by the technical aspects of Fedorov's ideas on the resurrection of the dead and the transformation and colonization of the universe, and tried to combine them with the latest scientific and technological achievements, paying special attention to the resurrection of the dead."¹⁵²

Fedorovism existed within the context of other philosophical tendencies that were close to it in some respects. Some scholars point to the proximity of Fedorov's ideas to the movement of "God-builders," an ethical and philosophical current in Russian Marxism that was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century with the aim of integrating the ideas of Marxism and religion and based on the similarity between the socialist and Christian worldviews.¹⁵³ In the 1910s, Maxim Gorky, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and Alexander Bogdanov (discussed below) were among the God-builders or experimented with this approach, being most probably knowledgeable, at least to some extent, in the Fedorovian ideas as well. After the revolution, in 1920-1922, in Petrograd and Moscow, Fedorov's followers formed philosophical and poetic circles of "biocosmists-immortalists", advocating for the abolition of death and resurrection of the dead.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Holly Myers, "Boris Groys, ed. Russian Cosmism. New York: e-flux; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018. 264 pp.," *Ulbandus Review* 19, (re)writing history (2022), 187–190: 188.

¹⁵¹ Myers, "Boris Groys, ed. Russian Cosmism," 189.

¹⁵² Hagemeister, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and today," 190.

¹⁵³ Hagemeister, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and today," 188.

¹⁵⁴ See for example Sergey Udartsev, "Biocosmism," in: *Russkaya filosofiya. Maliy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* [Russian philosophy. Small Encyclopedic Dictionary]. (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), 61-62.

There is also an opinion that Fedorov's ideas influenced the totalitarianizing of the Soviet regime already in the mid-1920s. Dmitry Shlapentokh, for example, sought to show that the Fedorovian concepts of humanity's mastery over nature and common labor were influential in the process of "militarization of labor" put forward by Trotsky (however, he only offered indirect evidence in support of this hypothesis).¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, bold Fedorovian projects carried little weight when it came to everyday death-related practices. Thus, among the supporters of the Bolshevik leadership whom the fedorovians sought to influence, scholars often named Gorky, who "hated death and called for its abolition."¹⁵⁶ However, even if this influence existed, Gorky was never among the key participants of the death-related rituals debate, and neither did he come up with practical suggestions.

Furthermore, in their rush toward progress, Fedorov's disciples sometimes took one step forward and two steps back. Thus,

In expectation of the future resurrection of the dead, the Fedorov adherent Nikolai Setnitsky (1888-1937), an economist, philosopher, and writer, demanded the abolition of the modern practice of disposing of corpses by cremation or burial outside the towns, and a return to more traditional forms of funerals based on the belief in resurrection and so requiring the preservation of the dead body. As a model worthy of imitation he cited the embalming of Lenin's corpse and its preservation in the center of Moscow. According to Setnitsky, less prominent contemporaries could look forward to their eventual resurrection in a "world cemetery" (*mirovoi nekropol'*), which was to be located in the permafrost regions of the North.¹⁵⁷

Despite the scope and boldness of Fedorov's ideas, they were not too influential politically in early Soviet Russia. The period of philosophical pursuits of the 1900s-1910s came and passed; biocosmists' journals did not survive half a decade, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that

¹⁵⁵ Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Bolshevism as a Fedorovian Regime: Fedorovism in the Context of the Russian Culture: The Problem of Interpretation," *Cahiers de monde russe* 37 no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1996), 429-465: 436.

¹⁵⁶ Hagemeister, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and today," 192.

¹⁵⁷ Hagemeister, "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and today," 190-192.

for the death-related practices of the 1920s, "while to various degrees influencing the Bolsheviks and their sympathizers, Fedorov's teachings were not too popular among Marxists" not only "at the very beginning of the twentieth century,"¹⁵⁸ but after the October revolution as well.

The question of everyday life and its rituals in early Soviet Russia was also related to the discussions of proletarian culture that continued, with uneven intensity, since the early 1900s. Among the several people who stood at the origin of the debate, philosopher Alexander Bogdanov occupied an especially prominent position. Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, he wrote extensively on creating proletarian culture that, coupled with the proletariat's developments in politics and economics, was supposed to ensure complete class victory. He even attributed, to an extent, the failure of the 1905 revolution to the absence of antecedent cultural and ideological developments "similar to the Enlightenment movement that had preceded the Great French revolution" – a failure that could only be overcome with the development of proletarian culture proper.¹⁵⁹

Bogdanov imagined proletarian art, science, and philosophy, but he was also one of the first to pay attention to everyday life, which needed a makeover as well. In particular, Bogdanov regarded the family and the hearth as vestiges of the old system, whose rigidity delayed the development of socialism. As early as 1910, he wrote:

Old habits are especially strong and enduring in family life. The domineering attitude [*vlastnoe otnoshenie*] of the husband toward his wife, the demand for blind [*nerassuzhdayuschee*] obedience from the children to their parents, are the foundations of the old family structure... In general, the slavery of women retards the growth of the working class strength, narrowing the ranks of comrades, making women a delay and a burden to the worker in his revolutionary aspirations; and the slavery of children harms the socialist education of future fighters. Socialists must, therefore, vigorously

¹⁵⁸ Shlapentokh, "Bolshevism as a Fedorovian Regime," 433.

¹⁵⁹ Jutta Scherrer "Pour l'hégémonie culturelle du prolétariat: aux origines historiques du concept et de la vision de la "culture prolétarienne"", in: Marc Ferro, Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Culture et révolution* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1989), 11–23: 14.

fight, by word and example, against all remnants of family slavery, not considering them a private or unimportant matter.¹⁶⁰

By 1918, when the revolution had won, and the construction of the proletarian ways of life had begun, Bogdanov specified that "The new culture should encompass all areas of life and creativity, and to do so not superficially and partially but deeply and broadly."¹⁶¹ However, the complete and profound makeover of all aspects of culture and life was certainly easier called for than done.

For one, the picture of everyday life that Bogdanov and his followers had was not detailed enough to be taken as a guide for action. For sure, the theorists of Proletkul't (short for *Proletarskaya kul'tura*, proletarian culture) – a movement that grew, to a significant extent, out of Bogdanov's writings – considered some cultural factors that were broader than "art" in the strict sense of the term. Thus, according to Lynn Mally, they "revealed a clear understanding of the influence of the family on social behavior," regarding family "as a negative force that posed a powerful threat to proletarian collectivism," which they suggested to reshape by "drawing all family members into the public, collective world of the labor movement."¹⁶² However, the solutions were too vague to be successful. What is more relevant to the current study is that these debates did not cover such specificities as the reorganization of the rites of passage.

Moreover, the question arose very quickly about who should create the proletarian culture. Proletkul't insisted that only the "real" proletariat could do it. The journal *Proletarskaia kul'tura*

¹⁶⁰ Alexander Bogdanov, "Sotsializm v nastoyaschem" [Socialism in the present], 1910, first published 1911 in Geneva, quoted from: *O proletarskoj kul'ture (1904-1924)* [On proletarian culture, 1904-1924] (L.-M.: Izdatel'skoe tovarischestvo "Kniga," 1924), 98. Available online at: <https://traumlibrary.ru/book/bogdanov-proletkult/bogdanov-proletkult.html#s003>, accessed on May 20, 2023. Notably, according to James C. McClelland, it was the time when the concept of proletarian culture was created. See James C. McClelland, "Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: The Proletarian Culture Debate," *Slavic Review*, 39 no. 3 (1980), 403–425: 407.

¹⁶¹ Alexander Bogdanov, "Ot redaktsii" [Editorial] published in the first issue of *Proletarskaya Kul'tura* [Proletarian Culture], July 1918. In: *On proletarian culture, 1904-1924*, 102.

¹⁶² Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia (Studies on the History of Society and Culture)* (University of California Press, 1990), 173.

demanded that "the proletariat start right now, immediately, to create its own socialist forms of thought, feeling, and daily life, independent of alliances or combinations of political forces. And in this creation, political allies—the rural and urban poor—cannot and must not control [the proletariat's] work."¹⁶³ This position was rooted in Bogdanov's thought: he believed that "it did not matter that both the working class and the peasantry had been exploited under capitalism. They still engaged in very different labor processes that engendered two different worldviews, two opposing class ideologies." On the other hand, the party was willing to list the poorest peasants among possible bearers and creators of proletarian culture, as they had been oppressed during the tsarist times no less than the urban proletariat and deserved similar rights now that the old system was gone.¹⁶⁴

Discussions about how to deal with the existing "bourgeois" culture were structured similarly. Should the bearers of that culture share it with the proletariat? Should it be discarded altogether, made available to new audiences in its entirety, or sifted for the best and most useful samples? Can the new proletarian culture incorporate bits and pieces of the old culture, and if so, to what extent? While Bogdanov called for the creation of proletarian culture and Lunacharsky also admitted the universalist values of art and culture produced under capitalism, Trotsky's position was on the other end of the spectrum. In the words of James McClelland, he "flatly rejected the concept of proletarian culture. "It is fundamentally incorrect," he wrote," to contrast bourgeois culture and bourgeois art with proletarian culture and proletarian art. The latter will never exist."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 38.

¹⁶⁴ Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 65–85. See also Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 56–61.

¹⁶⁵ McClelland, "Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy," 422.

Paradoxically as it may seem, Trotsky stood at the origin of another cultural debate – the discussion regarding the revolutionary rituals that peaked in the press during the years 1923 to 1926.¹⁶⁶ In 1923, Trotsky published *Voprosy byta* [Questions of daily life], in which the problem of "religious rites" in everyday life was publicly addressed for the first time.¹⁶⁷ Trotsky admitted the role of religious rites accompanying birth, marriage, and death: "A working family life was too monotonous," and in the absence of bright and emotionally charged revolutionary alternatives, the religious rituals persisted. To eliminate them, Trotsky suggested inventing alternative rituals. At the end of this brochure, he encouraged "collective creativity of the widest circles of population and the engagement of artistic fantasy, creative imagination, the artistic initiative" in designing new forms of everyday life.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the first regional publications reporting the so-called "red rituals" started to appear in late 1923; judging by the sources I consulted the coverage was most intense in 1924–25. Descriptions of "red baptisms," or *oktyabriny*, were most detailed, with all actors and aspects of the familiar baptism substituted with symmetrical analogies.¹⁶⁸

While a non-ceremonial marriage and alternative baptism could be adapted relatively easily to the Soviet ways, "the issue of the funeral was incomparably more difficult."¹⁶⁹ Trotsky himself

¹⁶⁶ On this polemics, see also: Anna Sokolova, " 'Nel'zya, nel'zya novykh lyudej khoronit' po-staromu!': Evolutsiya pokhoronnogo obryada v Sovetskoj Rossii" ['No, we should not bury the new men the old way!' Evolution of the funeral rite in Soviet Russia], *Otechestvennye zapiski* no. 5 (2013), <https://magazines.gorky.media/oz/2013/5/nelzya-nelzya-novykh-lyudej-horonit-po-staromu.html>, accessed on May 5, 2023.

¹⁶⁷ The first edition came out in July, the second extended edition – in September 1923. The following quotes are taken from: Leon Trotsky, *Voprosy byta. Epokha "kul'turnichestva" i ee zadachi* [Questions of daily life. The era of 'kul'turnichestvo' and its tasks]. Second augmented edition. (Moscow: Krasnaya Nov', 1923). See especially "Semya i obryadnost'" [Family and rites], 57–61. See also Alexander Reznik, "Byt ili ne byt? Lev Trotsky, politika i kul'tura v 1920-e gody," [Everyday life, that is the question. Leon Trotsky, politics, and culture in the 1920s] *Neprikosnovennyj zapas* no. 4 (2013), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2013/4/byt-ili-ne-byt-2.html>, accessed on May 20, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ According to various press descriptions, the usual actors in a red baptism were, along with the parents and the newborn, the "red parents," substituting for godparents; sometimes the head of a local party cell substituted for the priest and ran the ceremony, and representatives of society, such as young pioneers or best workers, joined in to say their instructions for the parents and the baby. The newborn was named under the red banner instead of being christened in a font basin, and a revolutionary song, usually *The Internationale*, closed the ceremony.

¹⁶⁹ Trotsky, *Questions of daily life*, 59.

could not overcome this difficulty: while admitting that it was "unusual, odd, and disgraceful [zazorno]" to bury the body without the church funeral service, he only described the attributes of a "politically significant" Soviet funeral that included red banners, processions, speeches, "the revolutionary funeral march," and a farewell gun salvo.¹⁷⁰ It would be up to the creative imagination of the masses to offer a funeral rite for an average citizen.

Trotsky's position was not unanimously supported. In line with intensifying antireligious and antibourgeois tendencies, some party members argued for completely eradicating all rituals, funeral ceremonies included. The extreme position was formulated by Mikhail Ol'minsky, the prominent revolutionary intellectual and man of letters, who wrote in 1924:

I am a long-time supporter of the funeral ritual for which the Party advocates. I think that all remnants of religious practice (coffins, funerals, the leave-taking from the corpse or cremation, and all that) are nonsense. It is more pleasant for me to think that my body will be used more rationally. It should be sent to a factory without any ritual, and in the factory, the fat should be used for technical purposes and the rest for fertilizer.¹⁷¹

Ol'minsky's stand was intentionally provocative and hardly intended to be put into practice. Ironically, when he died in 1933, his remains were buried with honors at the Kremlin wall. But he had made his point, speaking for those who denied the rites, religious and Communist alike. That such position was widespread enough can be illustrated by another comment by Trotsky who, in his lecture at the Moscow *uezd* Komsomol conference in April 1924, openly polemized with "the

¹⁷⁰ Trotsky, *Questions of daily life*, 59.

¹⁷¹ Translation quoted from: Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 179. On Ol'minsky's struggle against pompous Bolshevik funerals, see also: L. Tereschenkov, "Dokumenty iz fondov RGASPI kak istochnik o vzglyadakh deyatelej RKP(b) na problemu reprezentatsii smerti geroev revolyutsii," [RGASPI documents as a source on Communist prominent figures' views on the problem of representation of death of the heroes of revolution], *Istoricheskie dokumenty i aktual'nye problem arkheografii, otechestvennoj i vseobschej istorii novogo i novejshego vremeni. Sbornik tezisev dokladov uchastnikov konferentsii molodykh uchenykh i spetsialistov 'Clio 2012'* (Moscow, 2012), 235–238.

left and the leftiest wings" of local Komsomol organizations that "sa[id] that no rituals whatsoever were needed."¹⁷²

While admitting the need to struggle with religious ritualism and praising efforts in this direction, Trotsky once again called for substituting it with "new, revolutionary, Soviet rituals." Otherwise, he warned that life stripped of aesthetics, solemn assemblies, singing, and music "would be boring, tasteless." "Should we, revolutionaries, Communists who want not to rob human life but to enrich it, elevate it, embellish it, improve it, should we throw the raisin out of our kvas? Certainly not!"¹⁷³

Emelyan Yaroslavsky, chair of the Union of Militant Atheists, took the middle-ground position in the debate. In his address at the first congress of the Friends of *Bezbozhnik* newspaper in April 1925, he criticized the extreme forms new rituals could take. Thus, he quoted a story of a young Komsomol member who had killed himself, leaving a note "with a whole plan on how to bury him, who should deliver speeches, and so on. This is, of course, nonsense we should struggle with. But when people say: After I die, bring me to the soap factory and make soap out of me – this is another extreme [*peregib*] to struggle with."¹⁷⁴

While admitting the "organizing and political significance" of revolutionary funerals, Yaroslavsky warned against fixating a ceremonial of red baptisms, marriages, and funerals: "In some places ... people almost create a Communist prayer book ... When those who perform

¹⁷² Leon Trotsky, *O zadachakh derevenskoj molodezhi i o novom byte (Doklad na konferentsii RKSM Moskovskogo uezda, 28 aprelya 1924)* [On the tasks of village youth, and on the new daily life. Address at the conference of the Russian Communist Youth Union of the Moscow uezd, April 28, 1924] (Moscow, Novaya Moskva, 1924), 11–12.

¹⁷³ Trotsky, *On the tasks of village youth*, 14.

¹⁷⁴ Emelyan Yaroslavsky, *Kak vesti antireligioznuyu propagandu. Doklad, pročitannyj 20 aprelya 1925 g. na I vsesoyuznom sjezde korrespondentov gazety "Bezbozhnik" i obschestva družej gazety "Bezbozhnik"* [How to conduct antireligious propaganda. An address given at the first all-Union congress of correspondents of the *Bezbozhnik* newspaper and the society of friends of the *Bezbozhnik* newspaper]. Quoted from: Yaroslavsky, *Protiv religii i tserkvi. Proletarskaya revoliutsiya v bor'be s religiej* [Against religion and the church. The proletarian revolution and its struggle against religion]. Vol. 3 (OGIZ, GAIK, 1935), 233–234.

*oktyabrin*y want to develop a ritual that would excel the priestly one, this is no good."¹⁷⁵ Instead of imposing formalized ritual schemes, Yaroslavsky, like Trotsky before him, expected the revolutionary creativity of the masses to invent ways to mark the important moments in life.

Counting on the creativity of the masses did not return impressive results, though. In 1926, writer Vikenty Veresayev published a bitter account of contemporary funeral rituals. He complained that the old religious ritual was eliminated only to be substituted "with the first thing that came in handy. And these new rituals strike, kill the soul with their deficiency and mediocrity."¹⁷⁶

While singular political funerals were grand and moving events, the ordinary ceremonies were dull and inexpressive. "Look at the funeral of ordinary, simple citizens: what utter mediocrity, what a dull and sober ritual! And what baffled confusion of those present! People come [to the funeral] and positively have no idea what they should do." Even the most elaborate funerals did not include much more than lying in state to the sounds of Chopin's funeral march and "pathetic" speeches.

Veresayev believed that such ceremonies could only make some impression as long as they were "new, unusual, the first step in overriding the religious ritual."¹⁷⁷ In the long term, however, Veresayev suggested introducing "fixed, solid rituals" to help direct people's feelings of grief and joy, insisting that rituals should not necessarily have religious connotations. His suggestions were never implemented, and to no surprise: the ceremonies he proposed included hymns, young girls dressed in white holding green branches in their hands, and a dramatic act with semi-choruses and coryphees exchanging "genius simple" verses and rhymes (p. 14–15). Still, he was the only

¹⁷⁵ Yaroslavsky, *How to conduct antireligious propaganda*, 233.

¹⁷⁶ Vikenty Veresayev, *Ob obryadakh starykh i novykh* [On rituals old and new]. (Moscow, Novaya Moskva, 1926), 8–9.

¹⁷⁷ Veresayev, *On rituals*, 11, 12, 24.

participant in the public discussion to suggest some new ritual forms. Others expected the masses to come up with creative solutions, and no detailed ceremonial existed for those willing to organize the funeral in a new way.

Despite these high hopes, "the masses" proved less creative in inventing new rituals to express their class spirit. In fact, they had difficulties incorporating even the existing rituals, tried and tested on a national scale, into their daily lives, as examples from propaganda press show.

Red rituals in the propaganda press

A source I use to cover the functioning of death-related practices in the province in the early 1920s is the antireligious press, which satirically described the traditions and rituals it sought to eradicate. The journal I cite most is *Bezbozhnik u stanka* [Atheist at the Workbench]. Issued by the Moscow Party Committee in 1923-31, it was among the most prominent "local" antireligious propaganda organs of the League of Militant Godless.¹⁷⁸ The journal "provided communist activists with the material needed to promote atheism and secular values among the populace."¹⁷⁹ As it was openly agenda-driven, I could not verify whether the stories published there were original, i. e., coming from village correspondents and describing facts, heavily edited in the editor's office, or simply invented. It is also noteworthy that some oppositions highlighted in the journal pages – such as the juxtaposition between old and young people, males and females – were at least as stereotypical as perhaps reflecting reality. Nevertheless, these stories could only serve

¹⁷⁸ Other titles included the weekly newspaper *Bezbozhnik* (Atheist, 1922-34), journal *Bezbozhnik* (1925-41), *Antireligioznik* (The Anti-religious one, 1926-1941), and *Derevenskij Bezbozhnik* (Village Atheist, 1928-32). According to Daniel Peris, "Atheist at the Workbench was originally a monthly and then a biweekly. Its print run ranged from 35,000 to 70,000" (Daniel Peris, *Storming the heavens: the Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 74).

¹⁷⁹ Robert Weinberg, "Soviet Images of Jehovah in the 1920s," in: Claire Jean Kim (ed.), *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture* (Yale University Press, 2008), 152.

their propaganda purpose if they were familiar enough for the readers and local activists to apply them to their daily lives. Letters to the authorities often tell stories similar to the articles from *Atheist at the Workbench*. With that in mind, I will refer to these sources interchangeably, as they painted corresponding pictures of implementing death-related practices and innovations.

Grand state-supported funerals with their recognizable features – the absence of the priest and skipping funeral mass, the abundance of red color in the decorations, playing orchestra music, beating drums, or gun salvos instead of tolling bells and saying psalms and prayers – served as a model for "red funerals" in towns and villages. In Pikalovo (Serpukhovskij *uezd*, Moscow *gubernia*), a non-party peasant woman Zhiguleva asked to bury her without priests and "with music and a funeral march."¹⁸⁰ In Lukha (Blagoveschensk *volost'*, Ivanovo-Voznesensk *gubernia*), the first "priestless" [*bespopovskie*] funeral followed the death of an orphan boy: "A lot of people turned up for the funeral. The funeral cortege stopped at the Youth Association club, where speeches were pronounced. Not priests' singing but the firing of guns accompanied the little decedent to his grave."¹⁸¹ In Krasnoyarsk, a group of Komsomol members sabotaged an Orthodox funeral, meddling with non-religious music, a funeral march, and a mourning banner.¹⁸²

There was also a more modest version of a new-style funeral. Those who could not organize a proper march, music, and speeches could skip the invitation of the priest and the church service. Such was the decision of T. Kulagina from Karacharovo (Mozhajskij *uezd*, Moscow *gubernia*). When her little son died, "she dug a grave herself and, having informed the *volost'* executive committee, buried her son without the church rite."¹⁸³ The same happened in Blagoveschenskoe (Yurievets *uezd*, Ivanovo-Voznesensk *gubernia*). A malnourished schoolteacher decided not to

¹⁸⁰ "Vera vydykhaetsya" [Faith is running out of steam], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 4 (1925), 29.

¹⁸¹ "Vpervye bez popa" [Without a priest for the first time], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 4 (1924), 23.

¹⁸² "Proschaj zarabotok" [Goodbye earnings], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 6 (1925), 22.

¹⁸³ "Mat'-bezbozhnitsa" [Godless mother] *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 1 (1924), 21.

pay the priest 80 kg of rye for his mother-in-law's funeral. Instead, "he dug the grave in the cemetery and buried her without a priest." Despite the pressure from the clergyman who performed a funeral service at the grave without being asked to, the schoolteacher refused to pay anyway, which constituted, according to the correspondent, "the first battle for the priestless funeral" in the village.¹⁸⁴

These examples were perhaps as bleak and somber as those that Vikenty Veresaev had in mind, arguing for the necessity of a more elaborate ritual. No embellishments accompanied the grim simplicity of the act, and only rational considerations were quoted to justify the decision. The starving schoolteacher refused to waste precious flour on a ritual, and the sensible mother Kulagina, "liberated from religious toxin," responded to "hysterical village women" warning her that a baby buried without a priest will go to hell: "My baby will not go to hell, but will turn into earth, as will you, women, when you are buried."¹⁸⁵ Similarly, in Vvedenskoe (Mishkinsky *rayon*, Chelyabinsk *okrug*, in Siberia), "many thought that without the priest burning incense, the earth would not accept the dead woman, and she would haunt. But others loved this funeral very much. You'd save money, they say; rather than paying the priest, you better buy a new harrow."¹⁸⁶

The economic argument was indeed fundamental in deciding what funeral ritual to follow. Since imperial times, when it was impossible to bury a person without a church service, securing a decent ceremony was a persistent concern, especially for the poorest. It was not always possible to save enough for the funeral in advance. The exact sum for interment and the service was not fixated, and the time pressure to bury the body added to the already significant financial burden. The clergy's financial demands were thus a source of irritation well before the revolution. A

¹⁸⁴ "Boj za pervye bespopovskie pokhorony" [Fight for the first priestless funeral], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1924), 23.

¹⁸⁵ "Godless mother," 21.

¹⁸⁶ "They managed without a priest," 9.

correspondent of the *Atheist at the Workbench* recalled the following story from 1907: "The priest tried to rip me off by charging fifteen rubles for the funeral mass. I offered one and a half. We haggled over the price for a long time and agreed on three rubles and half a bottle of wine to the bargain."¹⁸⁷

The revolution did not bring much change, as abstaining from church service was still unusual, and priests used people's adherence to rites as a lever of financial pressure. In April 1920, the Cheka reported from the Vyatka *gubernia* that "the clergy provoke[s] public outrage, charging high prices for religious rites: church weddings cost 1000 to 1500 rubles, to bury someone costs 100 to 1000 rubles."¹⁸⁸ In 1923, a priest from Khoroshovo, Moscow *gubernia*, set up "exorbitant prices for religious rites. For example, he had recently forced a deceased peasant's widow to pay 600 million for the funeral. She had to sell her belongings to pay the priest." In Troitskoe village near Moscow, priest Nikolay "tells us to go to church, to bring him goods, and threatens us: 'I will excommunicate those who disobey, I will not baptize, nor bury, nor marry them, I will not let them to the church.'"¹⁸⁹ In 1925, in Lyudkovskaya *volost'* (Mosal'skiy *uezd*, Kaluga *gubernia*), the priest charged five rubles, one towel, and a measure of flour for the funeral rite.¹⁹⁰ In the Nameskovo parish, Tverskaya *gubernia*, in 1926, the priest Sergiy "held six rogation services a year ... and got 400 rubles for these services only, and there were additional payments for baptisms, funerals, and other rites."¹⁹¹ A satirical verse portrayed a priest who refused to perform services and baptisms unless he was given back his vegetable garden and forty-eight *desiatina* of land.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ "Pyanaya panikhida" ["The drunken funeral service"] *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 4 (1924), 23.

¹⁸⁸ Chernov, "Moscow, Kremlin, to Lenin," 203.

¹⁸⁹ "Nam pishut" ["Letters"], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 3 (1923), 18, 15.

¹⁹⁰ "Ponevole za sokhu voz'mesh'sya" ["Willy-nilly you will take up your plow"] *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 7 (1925), 19.

¹⁹¹ "Nashli khoroshie kharchi" ["They found good foodstuffs"], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1926), 19.

¹⁹² *Desiatina* is a traditional land measure equivalent to 2.7 acres. "Vetluzhskie chastushki," [Vetluga satirical verse], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 6 (1925), 10.

The clergy accepted payments in provisions or other goods if money was not in stock. During the 1921 famine, a peasant from Makaryevskoe village (Glushkovskaya *volost'*, Vetluzhsky *uezd*, Nizhegorodskaya *gubernia*) paid for the funeral of his starved baby son with a wooden harrow.¹⁹³ The arguments the priests used were not always dogmatic. A story from Malaya Pisarevka village (Senyansky *rayon*, Akhtyrskiy *okrug*) depicted two orphaned boys who could not pay the priest for their mother's funeral. A few years later, the priest met the older boy and attempted to force him to pay the debt, saying: "Your mother comes to me in my dreams every night. She tells me to ask you to pay me back, as you are old enough now. You should sell 80 kg of flour and pay me...."¹⁹⁴

Substituting religious funerals with the Soviet ones did not necessarily ease the financial burden. As peasants of Shatrovo (Krissenskaya *volost'*, Polotsky *okrug*, Vitebsk *gubernia*) complained in a letter to *Bednota* newspaper, "one must pay more taxes everywhere: if you want to marry, pay rubles, the same for divorce, pay for registering a newborn in a book, and if someone in the family dies, you have to pay as well... Wherever you go, they ask for money, makes me wanna scream bloody murder [*khot' karaul krichi*]."¹⁹⁵ Still, the economic argument was among the most powerful for inducing doubts and deterring people from traditional funerals. Thus, in Moscow, a railroad worker used the financial pretext to convince his mother to abstain from the religious funeral. When the father of the family died, the mother's first intention was to go to the priest, but the latter asked for a payment of ten rubles. The woman found it unfair: "You charge everyone five rubles, and you want ten from me!" She did not have the money and was irritated.

¹⁹³ Extract from a letter by peasant I. N. Razumov. RGAE. Fond 396. Opis' 2. Delo 16. List 163-163 rev., original manuscript. Quoted from: *Golosa krestyan: Sel'skaya Rossiya XX veka v krestyanskikh memuarakh* [Peasants' voices. Twentieth-century rural Russia in peasants' memoirs] (Moscow: Aspekt-Press, 1996), 169-170.

¹⁹⁴ "Popovskij son" ["Priest's dream"], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 6 (1925), 22.

¹⁹⁵ After 1923. RGASPI. Fond 17. Opis' 84. Delo 825. List 207. Quoted from: *Peasants' stories*, 76.

Her son used the occasion to hint that "father had not been a believer anyway so that we can bury him without a priest."¹⁹⁶

"Bringing the greedy 'father' down a peg" was represented, in the antireligious media that was *Atheist at the Workbench*, as a conscious political decision, even if perhaps it was not always one.¹⁹⁷ The schoolteacher from Blagoveschenskoe might not have known that he was giving "a fight for the first priestless (*bezpopovskie*) funeral in the village." He did not have the necessary 80 kg of rye and thought that religious ritual was not about the soul's salvation but the priest "willing to rob both the living and the dead."¹⁹⁸

But political decision it was, and all variants of the secularized ritual were intentionally provocative. The priest's absence was a powerful enough marker: in the words of I. Gutsev, a Komsomol cell secretary from the Gomel' *gubernia*, "Everyone thought, well, [skipping] the baptism is not new, whatever, but there is no way a funeral could go without a priest."¹⁹⁹ Consequently, even the simplest ceremonies organized in a new way attracted heightened attention. Press reports are rich on stories from across the country of peasants coming to see the "first priestless funerals," sometimes from afar.²⁰⁰ Champions of the new ritual did not hesitate to pour oil into the flames, highlighting the political overtones of the ceremony and forcing the already simmering conflicts to the surface.

¹⁹⁶ "Vesti s mest": "Zazhila po-novomu," [Local news. She started living her life the new way], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 3 (1926), 6.

¹⁹⁷ "Nam pishut" ["Letters"], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1923), 18.

¹⁹⁸ "Fight for the first priestless funeral," 23.

¹⁹⁹ I. Gutsev, secretary of a Komsomol cell. RGAE. Fond 396. Opis' 3. Delo 234. List 61. Quoted from: *Peasants' voices*, 173–174.

²⁰⁰ The first civic funeral "produced a big impression" in town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk ("Without a priest for the first time"); "first such funerals attracted a lot of people" in Orudyevo, Dmitrov *volost'* and *uezd* ("Poslushalis' popa" [They listened to the priest], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1925), 29); "Peasants were very much interested in the funeral" in Pogost, Boldinskaya *volost'* ("Starikov na novyj lad povernuli" [They turned the old folks their way] *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 3 (1925) 25); people "came to see the first priestless funeral from several *versta* (~kilometers) away" in the village of Vvedenskoe, Mishkinskiy rayon, Chelyabinsky okrug ("Bez popa oboshlis" [They managed without a priest] *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 8 (1926), 9), and so on.

The question of old and new funeral rites became a stumbling rock, especially in the village. The controversy had several dimensions, opposing generations, genders, and political currents. The most evident opposition was between the youth and the older generations: the latter was believed to maintain older customs, traditions, and superstitions if not profound religious beliefs.²⁰¹ The younger people were generally more eager to doubt the traditional ways. Their doubt, heated by the propagandist effort, sometimes took aggressive forms, including the physical destruction of cemeteries, crosses, and memorials.²⁰² In less extreme cases, younger people refused to partake in Orthodox ceremonies. For example, a "young peasant Gudkov" from Gusevo (Shansko-Zavodskaya *volost'*, Medynsky *uezd*, Kaluga *gubernia*) "asked to bury him without a priest, and his parents agreed." During the funeral, the old folks were reported to point out that "youth manages without priests now."²⁰³ In Moscow *gubernia*, "religious belief was losing steam among the poor people, and especially among youth."²⁰⁴

Some representatives of the younger generation managed to persuade their parents to switch to the new ways. This was the case of the peasant family Koukhov from Pogost, Boldino *volost'*. The old Koukhov "lived till old age and never doubted religion" until his son Alexander, a Communist and "a cultivated fellow," returned from the Red Army. It took the son quite some time to make the father doubt the existence of God: the two had lengthy discussions and arguments

²⁰¹ See for instance quotes from questionnaires on religiosity in the village performed by the Russian Academy of the history of material culture: Larissa V. Lebedeva, *Povsednevnyaya zhizn' penzenskoj derevni v 1920-e gody: traditsii i peremeny* [Everyday life of Penza villages in the 1920s: Traditions and changes] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 100. See also *Golos naroda. Pis'ma i otkliki ryadovykh sovetskikh grazhdan o sobytiyakh 1918-1932 g.* [The voice of the people. Letters and reactions of ordinary Soviet citizens on the 1918-1932 events] (Moscow, Rosspen, 1998), 169.

²⁰² A letter to *Krestyanskaya gazeta* from Gomeľ' gubernia told a story of a party member Ivkin who "chose the cemetery to practice shooting and started shooting crosses and icons hammer and tongs and scored quite well, getting four bullets into an icon..." May 1925. RGAE. Fond 396. Opis' 3. Delo 234. List 29. Quoted from: *The Voice of the people*, 169.

²⁰³ "Bez lishnej traty" [No extra cost], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 3 (1925), 26.

²⁰⁴ "Faith is running out of steam," 29.

that often continued late into the night. Ultimately, the old man agreed that "god was only for the rich" (sic! – a.p.) and asked to be buried without priests.²⁰⁵

Others chose a different strategy, opting for physical violence and open controversy with "parents." In Krasnoyarsk, a virtual fight happened over the body of a certain Sharomov, whose family had organized a traditional Orthodox funeral. The procession headed by the priest came across a rival group of marching Komsomol members; they had a mourning banner, and their appearance was preceded by "music and a funeral march." Komsomol members first joined the Orthodox procession in the rear, then offered their help carrying the coffin, and finally refused to stop at the church for the funeral service, saying: "We will not let priests jeer at the body of comrade Sharomov. We don't care if his parents are believers; he is like us, an atheist." The priest was said to have given up, shaking his head and looking after the youth procession marching to the cemetery.²⁰⁶

For the young males, it was the affiliation with various Soviet structures that helped them adopt the new ways of life and convert their fellow countrymen. Party membership or candidacy, Komsomol, and Red Army experience were typical for the champions of priestless funerals and the new everyday. The Shansko-Zavodskaya Komsomol cell "participated actively" in organizing the funeral of Gudkov from Gusevo (see above).²⁰⁷ When a baby died in the Sushanov family in the village of Zhgun' (Dobrushskaya *volost'*, Gomel *uezd* and *gubernia*), it was the Komsomol bureau assembly the parents turned to. The father "asked, on behalf of his wife and himself, to arrange the red funerals." The ceremony on the following day "went quite lively" (sic – a.p.).²⁰⁸ In Nalimovo (Egorshinsky *rayon*, Sverdlovsk *okrug*), where a non-party peasant Nalimov asked "not

²⁰⁵ "They turned the old folks their way," 25.

²⁰⁶ "Goodbye earnings," 22.

²⁰⁷ "No extra cost," 26.

²⁰⁸ *Peasants' voices*, 173–174.

to bring him to church after he was dead," a party cell member was present at the funeral and delivered a speech about the "new everyday" for an audience of about a thousand people from neighboring hamlets.²⁰⁹

For females, Komsomol membership could also be a life-changing experience. Surai Babaeva, a female correspondent from Belaya Rechka (region unknown), quoted a controversy between the effendi and young Komsomol girls who "did not need prayers ... When we die, our dear comrades, the Communists, Komsomol members, and pioneers, will bury us with drums and music. It will be fun."²¹⁰ (Note also that this story attacked a religious denomination other than Orthodox Christianity.) For most females, however, the revolution did not change much: "They maintain[ed] customs such as church marriage, baptism, and other religious rites."²¹¹ Girls and young women were the usual target of the old folks' pressure and often needed help from their male partners to liberate themselves from religious superstitions and traditions, as did a young peasant woman from Zhgun' who took ikons off her wall "following the advice of her husband, the village top performer."²¹²

A combination of old age and female gender made people especially vulnerable to the grip of old practices and old beliefs widely condemned as irrational and superstitious. S. Apolosina (region unknown), in her letter to *Krestyanskaya gazeta* pointed out that "old folks" hamper the way to the new life, and "old nannies and mammies adhere strictly to the ancient traditions. For instance they do not recognize marriage registration without the church ceremony. They threaten with all possible misfortunes in this and the other world."²¹³ The priest of Pikalovo village

²⁰⁹ "Pop morschtsiya" [The priest screws his face], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 7 (1925), 19.

²¹⁰ "Efendi i komsomol" [Effendi and the Komsomol], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 10 (1925), 17.

²¹¹ Letter from S. D. Apolosina, April 1925. RGAE. Fond 396. Opis' 2. Delo 29. List 280-280 rev. Quoted from: *Peasants' stories*, 185.

²¹² *Peasants' voices*, 173–174.

²¹³ *Peasants' stories*, 185.

(Serpukhovskiy *uezd*, Moscow *gubernia*) was reported to spread superstitious rumors through "ignorant old women." Notably, he said that the "godless" Zhiguleva, buried without a funeral service, "returned to visit her husband every night."²¹⁴ In Kupros (Yusvinsky rayon, Kudymkorskiy Komi *okrug*, Komi *oblast'*), a poor man died who had never interacted with the priest in his lifetime. His widow organized a religious funeral, giving the clergyman the opportunity to take revenge on the atheist. He forced the woman to have not only the funeral service but also a forty-day commemoration [*sorokoust*], which cost her a cow. Otherwise, the priest said, the deceased stood no chance of salvation.²¹⁵ In Orudyevo (Dmitrov *volost'* and *uezd*), a peasant was buried without a funeral service. The local priest was reported saying that his widow "saw her husband in a dream. It should be that devils had pushed him against the wall in the other world. He asked her: Dig me out, woman, let the priest perform a funeral service."²¹⁶

Experimenting with the new forms of funeral rituals and practices apparently peaked in 1924-25, at the height of the campaign for *novyj byt*. Variations of the funeral ceremony included some extravagant designs, among which a particular place was occupied by the practice of children burying children without the participation of the adults.²¹⁷ But mainly, experiments with funeral practices exploited some combinations of the familiar forms, mixing the Orthodox, the Communist, and the traditional folklore. Throughout the decade, the story of funeral practices was that of coexistence and partisan struggle rather than of a quick and definitive victory.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ "Faith is running out of steam," 29.

²¹⁵ "Batyа glotku deret – emu bog podaet" [The 'father' cries out loud and god giveth him], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 4 (1926), 17.

²¹⁶ "They listened to the priest," 29.

²¹⁷ The case was described by S. Maslinskaya (Leontieva), " 'Po-pionerski zhil, po-pionerski pokhoronen': materialy k istorii grazhdanskikh pokhoron 1920-x gg." [He lived as a pioneer, he is buried as a pioneer: materials for the history of civic funerals in the 1920s], *Zhivaya starina* no. 3 (2012), 49–52.

²¹⁸ The preference for the Orthodox ceremonial as the base of any funeral persisted in the rural areas up to the late 1960s. See Anna Sokolova, "Pokhorony bez pokojnika: transformatsiya traditsionnogo pokhoronnogo obryada," [Funeral without a dead man. Transformations of the traditional funeral rite], *Antropologicheskij forum* 15 (2010), 187–202: 192–193.

Thus, it was apparently somewhat admissible to rebury the bodies following a different funeral tradition. Just as peasants dug up the unwanted bodies wrongly buried in the consecrated cemetery land, they could rebury the bodies of those who did not receive a funeral service. The priest from Blagoveschenskoe insisted that the schoolteacher dug up the body of his mother-in-law to perform a ritual (after which she would be properly put back in the ground again).²¹⁹ In Orudyevo (Dmitrov *volost'* and *uezd*), a "conscious" non-party peasant Zabotin asked to be buried without a priest, and it was done. "But the priest pressed his widow, saying: "Without a funeral service, he will not leave you alone in all your lifetime. He will turn into a serpent and fly to visit you." After two weeks of such pressure, "they dug Zabotin out, ripped the red cloth off the coffin, and buried him with the priestly service." The priest received 25 rubles.²²⁰

Symmetrical cases existed as well. Archpriest Mikhail Elabuzhsky, in his diary, noted a story of Vassily Gorodilov, who "used to be a Communist, but believed in God and came up to me to arrange a church marriage with his second wife... He asked his parents before his death to bury him with bells tolling and pray for him. But the local Communists did not let them bring him to the church, put him on the stove in the People's House, and today, organized a civil funeral with the singing of "You Have Fallen Victims" and "Tormented by Grievous Bondage," glorifying him as a hero of duty."²²¹

Alternatively, some representatives of the new order chose to follow the old ways of funerals. The head of Mosal'sky *uezd* land authority, Kaluga *gubernia*, lost a child in 1925. "He invited the priest, carried the coffin to the cemetery himself, and the priest followed, smiling: "You say, hey you Orthodox believers, there is no god. Look, here comes a responsible party member,

²¹⁹ "Fight for the first priestless funerals," 23.

²²⁰ "They listened to the priest," 29.

²²¹ Mikhail Elabuzhsky. *Diary*. 1924. May 28 (15). <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/272843>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

and even he does not want to tuck his child into Satan's hell." The case virtually stopped antireligious propaganda in the village: "Stop trying to baffle us, – peasants say, – look, people smarter than you still believe in god."²²²

Believers, in their turn, used convenient cultural currents for their benefit. Mikhail Prishvin quoted a story of a woman who "agreed to bury her husband "with the drums" even though he was no Communist and she was a believer. For this, she received allocations for the funeral and a pension. Everyone in the quarter [*v slobode*] approved of it very much and bragged about a woman who has so successfully conned the Communists: the husband was dead anyway, and she had to live on...."²²³

Perhaps the most detailed example of the syncretism of death-related practices in the 1920s is given in *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1926) (see Appendix 1 for the extract in Russian and an English translation). The story is told from the perspective of an ex-Red Army soldier turned atheist who tried to build his family life upon the new foundations. Against the opposition from village females, especially his mother-in-law, he manages to get his newborn daughter registered at ZAGS without baptism and named Klara, evidently for Klara Zetkin. When the child dies, he faces an even stronger opposition over the funeral: the older females threaten the young family with revenants and try to dissuade them from burying the baby "with banners." The parents do it anyway, covering the coffin with red cloth, and everything seems to go as envisioned by the father. After a while, however, it turns out that the young atheist had been deceived: his wife, her mother, and the priest performed the Orthodox rites behind his back, re-baptizing the baby Klavdia and arranging a nocturnal funeral service at the cemetery.

²²² "Blagochestivjy zemotdel'schik" [Pious head of the land authority], *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 10 (1925), 22.

²²³ Prishvin. *Diary*. 1924. June 12. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/98165>, accessed on May 15, 2023.

This story, be it a factual account or a piece of fiction, illustrates the uneasy existence of the red funeral ritual in the Russian province. Even during the years of intensive propaganda and press debates, it was not straightforward to implement the newly invented rituals and make them substitute for the traditional ones.

Conclusion

Revolutionary regimes in France and Russia went to significant lengths to immortalize their revered figures in a new way, legitimize their rule, and symbolically reward the individuals who had played a pivotal role in their establishment. But of the three directions of their efforts – creating a pantheon of revolutionary heroes, celebrating and honoring them in a revolutionary way, and establishing just and equal funeral practices for all to substitute the pre-revolutionary ones – hardly any brought the intended result during the decade.

In French and Russian contexts, state-supported revolutionary funerals were remarkable public events, catching contemporaries' eye and sending a clear message of change, although the two regimes diverged in the aesthetic approaches they chose to mark the passage from the old system to the new one. France found inspiration in the ancient world, whereas Russia drew upon the recognizable underground tradition that had developed for almost fifty years under the tsarist regime and came into the open in March 1917, solidifying over the following years.

In both countries, revolutionary pantheons of heroes came into existence, and special places were set apart in cities and towns to hold the ashes of the fallen and remind the living of their foundational sacrifice. Elaborate, changing, and sometimes vague considerations motivated the selection of fighters, thinkers, and leaders worthy of these final honors, but the honor itself was high.

In the spirit of egalitarianism, attempts were made to make funerals more accessible and similar for people of all backgrounds, or at least to move "common" funerals further away from the religious rite they were intrinsically connected to under the old regime. To adjust the forms of grand revolutionary funerals to the more modest circumstances of more ordinary lives (and deaths), some recognizable features, such as the choice of colors and sounds, the selection of participants, and the content of the ceremony itself, were utilized.

With that, the distance between the old and the new was sometimes shorter than the revolutionaries had hoped. In both contexts, the grandeur of revolutionary funerals was such that the contemporaries could not help but compare it to the old regime's luxury and splendor, only to observe that the pomp did not disappear even if the figures changed. Bold innovations – such as the absence of priesthood or the unusual choice of burial grounds – did not completely substitute for the traditional solutions, and without targeted political will, funeral practices tended to slip back to the usual. In France and Russia, the attempts to expand the recognizable traits of a revolutionary funeral outside the larger cities were noteworthy but swift. It seemed more successful in the Soviet context, but the Orthodox ritual still held fast, and the experiments of the 1920s did not eradicate it completely.

As for revolutionary heroes, changing political situation and shifting priorities led to the transformation of their status already over the first post-revolutionary decade. People honored with national funerals by the end of this period differed significantly from those buried in revolutionary shrines shortly after the overturn, as will be demonstrated in more detail for the Soviet case in the following chapter.

Lastly, as shown, even though the two revolutionary regimes followed similar thinking in principle, upon a closer look, we cannot speak of a direct connection, borrowing, or "learning from

the French" in the Soviet case. French historical precedents did not provide the Bolsheviks with models to reproduce. Rather, the French revolution and some of its cultural manifestations served as a basis for a constructed myth of lineage that did not necessarily require detailed knowledge or direct quotes from historical precedents.

Chapter 4. Early Soviet death in alternatives

Introduction

Debates and experiments surrounding the new ways of burial brought out some extremes in approaching the subject. There was no unanimity regarding the implementation of the rituals, either. Even though the revolutionary funeral had a range of recognizable characteristics – the absence of the clergy, dominance of red color, orchestra music, and a particular choice of burial grounds – there was no strict protocol to follow, and each case was unique. In the early 1920s, decisions about specific aspects of the ceremony were often situational. The ways these decisions were made and carried out referred to some implicit elements of social and cultural norms of the time, as well as to the political dynamics of the decade.

This chapter addresses several variations of the "red funeral" ritual to reveal concomitant principles and norms that coexisted with the explicitly declared intentions of the Bolshevik leadership and press and that subtly influenced their respective decisions. Unlike previous chapters, this one does not invoke the French parallels but remains comparative within the Soviet context. I address deaths and funerals of party figures along the lines of anonymous-famous, Russian – non-Russian, male-female comparisons to show how, over a few years in the 1920s, the variability and accessibility of the ritual diminished, mirroring similar process of tightening and stiffening in other areas of culture.¹ I also point to subtle elements of the 1920s funerals that could testify to the limits of innovation that the Bolsheviks were ready to accept and promote. Albeit

¹ Richard Stites observed the same effect in his study of political festivals: " The transformation of Soviet public holiday celebration from a festival of revolution to a panegyric ritual of power and solidarity was the public emblem of the changing nature of the system and its supporting myths. Already present in the 1920s, the stiffening elements of ritual tightened from 1928 onward. ... This style migrated to other forms of public show, making Soviet Russia a kind of political spectacle state." Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 228.

implicit, these limits could already be seen as a turn away from the radical experimentation of the Civil War years and towards the formation of the Stalinist "big style" of the next decade.

I pay attention to the other side of the story as well, analyzing the deaths of the regime's opponents and the posthumous fate of their bodies. Against the broader context of the formation of the Bolshevik secret police, I address the variants of treating the bodies of enemies, from public abuse to, increasingly, secret executions. In the focus of my attention are the figures of the Romanov family, admiral Alexander Kolchak, warlord Baron Roman von Ungern, the alleged attacker of Lenin Fanny Kaplan, and a few others. I argue that the simultaneous narrowing of the pool of "red heroes" and suppression or concealment of deaths and funerals of even the most prominent figures in the opposite camp, including the Romanov family, worked towards strengthening the Soviet myth of socialist victory and national unanimity in the years to come.

Funerals for the friends

The grand funeral ceremonies for the victims of the revolution in March and November 1917 became a blueprint for further developments of early Soviet death culture. These ceremonies incorporated a few earlier influences to engender the subsequent public funeral ritual that would consolidate over the post-revolutionary years. This public funeral ritual culminated in Lenin's funeral on January 27, 1924. While the forms of the ceremony had crystallized by that moment, the content of revolutionary funerals was subtly changing against the volatile political background and the inner developments of revolutionary culture. Below, I demonstrate how the pool of revolutionary heroes narrowed after the Civil War years and how traditional attitudes and presuppositions subtly returned to the revolutionary ceremonials.

Selection and hierarchy

In 1917, the organizers of two major funeral events in the two capitals did not differentiate the buried based on their social background, status, or wealth. This solution differed dramatically from how the funerals were organized before the overturn. In imperial Russia, funerals reproduced the social structure in miniature and depended on the wealth and status of the deceased. Funeral ranks determined the decoration of the procession and the choice of a burial place at a cemetery (the closer to the gate or the church, the more prestigious and expensive the plot was). Contemporaries saw the system as unjust and damaging to human dignity, especially for the poor.²

The funeral for the victims of the February revolution brought about a fundamental change: the lowborn and often anonymous fighters were buried with the highest honors in the state central necropolis, irrespective of their background. The October revolution took one step further and formalized access to funerals for the entire population. On December 7, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars adopted a decree "On cemeteries and funerals" that, among other innovations, introduced equal funerals [*odinakovye pokhorony*] for all and abandoned distinctions based on wealth or ancestry, thus formally eliminating the connection between social status and funeral ceremonies.³

The hierarchy of burial places was theoretically also gone. Cemetery soviets were supposed to control the equal and fair distribution of grave plots among the deceased.⁴ But a new hierarchy was already being installed. From March 1917 onwards, the selected few who gave their lives for the revolutionary cause were honored by state-supported funerals in the new necropolises that

² See Zhivotov, "Six days as a torchbearer" quoted previously in Chapter 2.

³ Decree "On cemeteries and funerals," 7 December 1918. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_414.htm, accessed on May 2, 2023.

⁴ The sprouts of funeral equality did not grow to become anything substantial, and by the end of the 1920s, a class-based hierarchy was back. See Svetlana Malysheva, "Set in stone, set in memory," 189.

quickly acquired their own prestige. What united those who were deemed worthy of the honor was the violent nature of their death and the communal, rather than individual, character of their burial.

The first revolutionary funerals in the Field of Mars, Red Square, and other dedicated necropoles across the country were group funerals of those who had happened to give their lives at the same place and time and for the same cause.⁵ Over the following years, several smaller groups and individuals killed in battles, terrorist attacks, or other armed conflicts were buried in the newly founded revolutionary necropoles. Thus, in January 1918, a terrorist attack in the Dorogomilovsky Soviet in Moscow killed at least three people. In March, three militia members died in a street fire. In September 1919, twelve people died in a terrorist attack against the Moscow Party Committee in Leontievsky side street. Victims of these attacks were buried by the Kremlin wall.⁶ There were also a few individual burials (still in communal graves) of soldiers fallen in battles with the Whites, anarchists, Cossacks, or bandits across the country.

In Petrograd, five Latvian Riflemen killed during the Yaroslavl uprising in the summer of 1918 were buried in the Field of Mars, as well as two victims of political killings: the Bolshevik agitator V. Volodarsky (June 20, 1918) and head of the Petrograd Cheka Moisei Uritsky (August 30, 1918). The same was the fate of the victims of the so-called Kuusinen club incident in August 1920. Further mass burials were held in the Internal section of the Alexander Nevsky monastery: those fallen in the battle of Petrograd in 1919 and the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 were buried there.⁷ Subsequently, this part of the cemetery became known as the Communist Ground [*Kommunisticheskaya ploschadka*].

⁵ To note, the Petrograd ceremony, as, for instance, the funerals in Omsk, were held to honor the 'victims,' not 'heroes,' of the revolution. Contemporaries claimed that the fallen had given their lives "for the right cause," but no particular agency from the side of the victims was expected so that they could receive the honor of state funeral. Numerous dead were being buried together mainly for the reason that they died because of the revolution.

⁶ See details in Abramov, *By the Kremlin wall*, <https://coollib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-stenyi-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁷ Official website of the Alexander Nevsky monastery, <https://lavraspb.ru/ru/history/kompl>, accessed on May 2, 2023.

The range of enemies menacing the Bolsheviks and their supporters was wide. Those could be political enemies, such as anarchists and right SRs performing terrorist attacks; armies of the Whites leading full-scale military action; bandits and highwaymen trying to thrive on the crisis. Those could even be "predator Red Army soldiers," as a curious example from Petrozavodsk illustrates. In the summer of 1919, a "disorderly" Red Army soldier, Andreev, accidentally shot a militia member, Nikolay Fedoseev, who tried to quieten him down. Fedoseev's comrades from the city militia "decided to bury him in the Fraternal grave."⁸

With such a level of danger, violent deaths were many, but it is not entirely clear whether any consistent set of principles guided the decision-making around solemn mass funerals in revolutionary necropolises. Rather, these decisions were made *ad hoc*, and advocating from below played no small role. Comrades of the deceased could influence the decision, as the case from Petrozavodsk above demonstrated. Similar evidence from Moscow shows that city authorities received requests from military regiments and organizations and sometimes fulfilled them. On January 24, 1918, the Mobilization Department of Red Guard Central Staff asked for permission "to bury at the Red Square, in the Fraternal Cemetery, the victims of revolution: three Red Guards killed at southern domestic front."⁹ In March 1918, the Moscow Military Commissariat asked for permission to bury in the Red Square "the Red Army machine gunner comrade Ozolin, killed by counterrevolutionaries in Volokolamsk." The latter letter has a pencil remark on it: "Satisfy."¹⁰

Deaths on various revolutionary fronts were many; requests continued to come in, and the funeral organizers quickly ran into a selection problem. The burial grounds turned out to be insufficient for those who, according to the general perception, earned the right to it with their

⁸ Volokhova, "History of the Communists' fraternal grave," 23.

⁹ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 3. Delo 779. List 20.

¹⁰ TsGAMO Fond 66. Opis' 3. Delo 779. List 26. It is unclear whether this comrade Ozolin was a relative of Yanis Ozolin, the deputy head of Petrograd Cheka, or just his namesake.

blood. Consequently, respective authorities attempted to limit the burials in central necropolises. In Moscow, already by April 1918, the Bureau of Soviets of District Dumas was worried that "further expansion of the cemetery surface constitutes a danger of weakening of grounds [*oslablenie pochvy*] under the Kremlin wall" and wanted to alert all commissariats that "no funerals at the Red Square are admissible without, each, a special permission of the Moscow Soviet of District Dumas."¹¹ Similarly, in Petrozavodsk, where a revolutionary cemetery was inaugurated in June 1919, the Gubernia Military Revolutionary Committee already on July 7 decided that the twenty-one body of fighters killed during the city defense would be the last to be buried in the Fraternal grave: "It should be announced that no one will be buried in this grave from now on and that another Fraternal cemetery should be found for this purpose at the city limit."¹² (But burials continued in the fall).

Another factor further complicated the issue of selection. Along with continuing fighting that took the lives of thousands of anonymous revolutionaries, diseases, and exhaustion started to claim the lives of noncombatants of significant party or public standing. In Moscow, the start of the shift can be dated to March 1919, when Yakov Sverdlov unexpectedly died, supposedly of Spanish flu. In the history of the Red Square necropolis, he was the first to be buried in an individual grave and also the first not to die in battle or of wounds.

At the extraordinary meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Kamenev explained the decision to bury him at the Red Square in the following words:

When we discussed where we should bury this dear body, we came to the idea that he, who did not fall on the battlefield but was *slain by tireless work* (italics mine. – a.p.), had deserved, had earned a place among the graves of comrades who fell with arms in their hands for the ideals of the proletarian revolution. We decided to bury

¹¹ April 19, 1918. TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 3. Delo 779. List 27.

¹² Volokhova, "History of the Communists' fraternal grave," 23.

Ya. M. where the workers and soldiers rest who had won the first Soviet republic from the bourgeois world; there, among the communal graves, at the head of them, we should bury Yakov Mikhailovich.¹³

While Kamenev attempted to equate Sverdlov with other dead workers and soldiers, he was still considered different from them, and it showed in the last rites. Nikita Okunev described Sverdlov's funeral as "extraordinarily exuberant ('tsar-like,' or even grander.)"¹⁴ The ceremony fixed House of Unions as the preferred place for lying-in-state; the presence of Red Army soldiers enhanced associations with battles fought by Sverdlov and his surviving comrades (even though, according to ill-wishers such as Praskovia Mel'gunova-Stepanova, there were not that many people present at the funeral).¹⁵

Over the following years, the number of Red Square funerals decreased, but the ones that took place increasingly favored individual burials of prominent party figures who did not die in combat but of illnesses, accidents, or, rarely, fell victim to political assassinations. In 1920, the People's Commissar for Post and Telegraphs, Vadim Podbel'sky, died from septic fever; the revolutionary and friend of Lenin's Inessa Armand died from cholera; the American Socialist journalist John Reed became a victim of camp fever. Although most of the deceased were still laid in communal graves at the Red Square, the burials were becoming increasingly individual, as was the character of death. The last mass funeral from the period in question dated to July 1921: an experimental high-speed train crashed, killing seven people on board, including the inventor Valerian Abakovsky, the prominent Communist Artyom (a party pseudonym of Fyodor Sergeev),

¹³ Extraordinary meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, 18 March 1919. GARF. Fond 1235. Opis' 21. Delo 11. List 8. The parallel of non-military and military was even more interesting given that later in 1919, Trotsky developed the metaphor, calling for the "militarization of labor" and "treating economic and social tasks as "problems of military combat. ... Every worker was now to become a soldier." (Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 51).

¹⁴ Okunev. Diary. 1919. May 20 (7). <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/17291>, accessed on May 12, 2023.

¹⁵ Mel'gunova-Stepanova also quoted a few unflattering rumors – such as that Sverdlov had died of a common cold "because he fled Orel in just his underwear." She referred to the ritual as "the Jewish one." Praskovia Mel'gunova-Stepanova. Diary. 1919. March 21.

and five Communist delegates from abroad. They were all buried by the Kremlin wall. After that, all funerals there up to the end of the decade were individual.

In Petrograd, the same tendency was observed. The Communist Ground continued to receive bodies of the party members, Chekists, and prominent public figures. In the Field of Mars, there were no burials in 1921, and in 1922, two people joined their fallen comrades in the communal grave. One was young agitator and Proletkul't artist Ivan (Kotya) Mgebrov-Chekan, who was hit by a streetcar, and the other was Dmitry Avrov, a participant in taming the Kronstadt rebellion, who died from brain inflammation.¹⁶ After that, there were no funerals at the Field of Mars during the period in question, and the title of the country's most honorable necropolis decisively passed to the row of graves by the Kremlin wall.

Individual funerals were increasingly a prerogative of prominent party members and international Communists, gradually excluding lower-rank Communists. Unlike soldiers and workers from the Civil War years who sprang from anonymity to immortality through the act of self-sacrifice, these people distinguished themselves through years of political work, decision-making, governance, and ideological resolution, and the high standing within the ranks of various institutions in their lifetime was a recognition of their efforts. Their input was deemed so valuable that after an honorable life, they were also rewarded with honorable funerals. If, in 1922, a Moscow Soviet deputy Efim Afonin (dead from typhus), and the assistant chief of the political direction of *Vsevoluch* Ivan Zhilin (dead from tuberculosis) were buried in the fraternal grave, by 1927, there appeared the graves of such important figures as Mikhail Frunze (dead from surgical

¹⁶ Kotya was a son of Alexander Mgebrov, one of the leading Proletkul't figures. His obituary was published in *Petrogradskaya Pravda* (April 26, 1922), 3. Avrov's biography is quoted from an unverified source, <https://nevnov.ru/605612-kto-pokhoronen-na-marsovom-pole-dmitrii-avrov> accessed on May 15, 2023. The official Soviet sources that covered Avrov's biography, such as the Big Soviet Encyclopedia, passed over the cause of his death.

complications), Feliks Dzerzhinsky (dead from a heart attack), and Leonid Krasin (dead from cardiac paralysis in London). Among them, of course, Lenin's mausoleum occupied a central place from 1924.

Lenin died on January 21, 1924, in the estate of Gorki near Moscow. His funeral, in both matter and manner, became the culmination of the tendencies described above. Unprecedented in scale and emotional impact, it reproduced and solidified the already familiar features of the pompous revolutionary funeral.¹⁷ A Funeral Commission, with Feliks Dzerzhinsky at the head, decided about the date, time, and place of the funeral, defined its visual and audial features, prescribed the order and route of the procession, and controlled media coverage of the event.¹⁸ As Lenin died away from Moscow, every aspect of the ceremony was doubled. In Gorki, a guard of honor of friends and closest colleagues remained beside the body over the night of January 22-23. The body was then taken by train to Moscow, where the first procession accompanied it from the Paveletsky railway station to the House of Unions for the second lying in state. Another guard of honor switched every five to ten minutes to allow as many people as possible to pay their respects to the leader.

Over the week between Lenin's death on January 21 and his funeral on January 27, the country and the capital were mourning. Businesses closed, and funeral banners appeared in the windows. Black and red flags, wreaths, and palm branches decorated the Hall of Columns in the House of Unions, where Lenin's coffin stood, lined with red cloth.¹⁹ For the music, the Funeral

¹⁷ A thorough description of the ceremony and rituals surrounding it is given in: Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). For further details on Lenin's commemorations see for example Vladimir Buldakov, *Utopia, agressia, vlast'. Psikhosotsial'naya dinamika postrevolyutsionnogo vremeni. Rossiya, 1920–1930 gg.* [Utopia, aggression, power. Psychosocial dynamics of post-revolutionary times. Russia, 1920-1930] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2012), 158–170.

¹⁸ RGASPI. Fond 16. Opis' 3. Delo 16 to 39.

¹⁹ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!* 139.

Commission envisaged Chopin's *Funeral March*, *You Have Fallen Victims*, Wagner's funeral march from *Twilight of the Gods*, and the *Internationale* to be played and sung.²⁰

On January 27, a second procession took to Red Square, where Lenin was laid to rest.²¹ Despite the repeated calls from Petrograd workers to bury Lenin in "Red Petrograd," the Funeral Commission did not really consider this option: Moscow was the capital, and the leader was to remain there.²² In Red Square, near the fraternal graves and Sverdlov's grave, a crypt was hastily built that would be constantly reconstructed over the next few years to become the present-day Mausoleum. During the funeral day, endless columns of mourners from the city districts marched through Red Square, lowering their banners when passing the bier. Due to the enormous presence, many had to wait several hours for their turn to enter the square, and bonfires were burning here and there as the temperatures were extremely low.

When the coffin was lowered into the crypt, everything in the country stopped for five minutes. Trains and ships did not run, and everything that could make a loud noise, from train whistles to factory sirens, gave out their sounds. Radio broadcasts transmitted the message informing all citizens that "Ilich is being lowered to his grave."²³ On a more traditional note, a cannon salvo accompanied the internment – in Moscow and other cities, such as Petrograd (newly

²⁰ RGASPI. Fond 16. Opis' 3. Delo 20. List 13; Delo 25. List 2; Delo 26. List 2.

²¹ The order of processions was already fixated. On both January 23 and January 27, "before the coffin, representatives of organization walk[ed] bearing wreaths and banners. Behind them and before the coffin – the orchestra of music; members of Vladimir Ilich Lenin's family follow[ed] the coffin, then the guard of honor, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, Komintern Executive Committee, and persons and organizations enumerated in p. 2, and also delegates of the Congress of Soviets. An honorary military escort from the Moscow garrison close[d] the rear." "Persons and organizations" included the Central Executive Committee, Komsomol representatives, the Executive Committee of Communist International, People's Commissars, the Revolutionary Military Council, Presidium of the All-Union Central Soviet of Trade Unions, Presidium of the Moscow Soviet, and representatives of factories and plants. RGASPI. Fond 16. Opis' 3. Delo 16. Listy 45-46.

²² Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 150.

²³ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 162.

rebaptized Leningrad). These mechanical and military sounds replaced the funeral oration, paying Lenin a special salute.

Lenin, as it was widely known, died of an illness. And yet, official rhetoric had it that he, like other revolutionary heroes before him, was slain – either by enemies of the revolution (Fanny Kaplan's attempt on Lenin's life in 1918 was often invoked as fatal for his worsening condition) or by tireless work for humanity. In the words of Nina Tumarkin, "Lenin and death were described in the press as locked in a heroic struggle ... Lenin had been determined to conquer his illness by the strength of his will, wrote a Petrograd journalist. And he would have attained this goal had he not suffered a fierce attack that carried him to his grave."²⁴

The implied presence of invisible enemies that had caused Lenin's death was an instrument of political mobilization. Quoting various soldiers' and workers' organizations who "sent curses" to those "at whose hand Lenin was killed," Tumarkin concluded that "accusing Lenin's political enemies of bringing about his death was an effective means of asserting political solidarity and control. The people were to be roused into loyalty through rage at the "enemies of the state."²⁵

By then, "dying in battle" was already a self-sufficient, self-maintaining metaphor in the Bolshevik rhetoric about death. Svetlana Malysheva demonstrated how, already in 1919, authors of Soviet necrological texts "thought up and often even constructed the circumstances of the death of 'our dead,' openly making them fit the required 'standard.'"²⁶ Malysheva cited Bukharin, who, commenting on the death of Hungarian revolutionary Tibor Szamuely, implied that his death was not a suicide but a brutal killing by police, that is, the result of a struggle. Similarly, Zinoviev was

²⁴ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 171.

²⁵ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 144.

²⁶ Svetlana Malysheva, " 'Khorpshaya smert' ' v nekrologicheskom diskurse pervykh sovetskikh desyatiletij," [A 'good death' in the necrological discourse of the first decades of the Soviet regime], in: L. Mazur (ed.), *Epokha sotsialisticheskoy rekonstruktsii: idei, mify i programmy sotsial'nykh preobrazovaniy. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* [The era of socialist reconstruction: ideas, myths, and social transformations programs. A collection of academic works] (Ekaterinburg: Izdatel'stvo Ural'skogo universiteta, 2017), 103–10: 105.

certain that Polish-German revolutionary Leo Jogiches (Jan Tyszka) "met his end without blinking an eyebrow" (sic) in a police prison, though there were no details to rely on. "At times, heroic death was almost normalized despite being violent," Malysheva concluded. "It was presented not only as honorable but as quite a natural one."²⁷

Lenin's funeral definitively ended the wartime practice of rewarding anonymous fighters of the revolution with an honorable burial at the country's main necropolis. From that moment on, unknown soldiers would cede their place in the new death hierarchy to prominent party figures who were being honored for their lives full of achievements before the country and the party – a shift suitable for peaceful times.²⁸ And yet, using the metaphorical sense of the concepts of "struggle," "battle," or "fight," the Bolshevik leadership and press cemented their colleagues' right to be buried at a military cemetery while at the same time promoting death in battle as the only possibility that existed for a good Communist.

Variations of the red ceremonial

If causes of death were gradually brought to a common standard, at least in the narrative, the funeral details varied: there were recognizable traits but not a fixated protocol, and many things were decided *ad hoc*. The precise reasons behind these decisions are hard to reconstruct due to several factors. Not all relative documents have been preserved and of those, not all cover the debates and exchange of opinions, tending to represent the Politburo and Funeral Commissions'

²⁷ Malysheva, "A 'good death'," 105.

²⁸ Interestingly, this shift resonated in the practice of awarding the Order of the Red Banner. According to Andrey Savin, in September 1924, recommendations for this award based on military achievements from before 1923 were stopped. See Andrey Savin, "Geroizm kak ideologicheskii kontsept stalinskoy epokhi," [Heroism as an ideological concept of the Stalinist era], *Vestnik Tverskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya Istoriya* 3 no. 55 (2020), 93–108: 100.

meetings in the laconic form of "heard... resolved." And yet, some of the decisions point subtly to the considerations behind them, even if solid supporting data are lacking.

The elements of the ceremony included, but were not limited to, obituaries in central papers, lying in state in the House of Unions in the presence of the guard of honor, a huge funeral procession with red banners, singing, and music, participation of various institutions and collectives, stoppage of street traffic. These features were recognized by those attending as components of the recurring revolutionary ritual. Thus, when Vaclav Vorovsky was assassinated in May 1923 in Lausanne and brought to Moscow for the funeral, Nikita Okunev noted in his diary:

Vorovsky's body was brought to Moscow and buried in Red Square. Workers, Red Army soldiers, and Soviet employees *again* took part in the ceremony of transporting him from the Vindavsky railway station. *Again*, the minatory posters, singing revolutionary songs, hundreds of thousands of people whose presence was deemed "obligatory" by their Communist cells. In short, a holiday *again*. (emphasis mine. – a.p.)²⁹

Some details varied to reflect the personality of the deceased. Thus, when Viktor Nogin died in May 1924, the order of the procession made the Union of Textile Workers especially visible because Nogin had been a textile worker in his youth. Other aspects of the ceremony – obituaries, House of Unions farewells, and a Red Square funeral – were common for the leaders' funerals.³⁰ When Mikhail Frunze died after post-surgical complications in November 1925, his funeral featured the same elements, plus commemorative demonstrations in major cities (including Kharkov, Kiev, Tiflis, and Leningrad), and an artillery salute.³¹ During Felix Dzerzhinsky's funeral

²⁹ Okunev. *Diary*. 1923. June 3. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/17751>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

³⁰ GARF. Fond R-3316. Opis' 18. Delo 514. List 7. To note, the Political Bureau and members of the Party's Central Committee decided on a Red Square burial responding to the doubts of the Funeral Commission. Among those who made this decision were Zinov'ev, Kamenev, Rykov, Stalin, Tomsy, Trotsky, Bukharin, Kalinin, Molotov, Rudzutak, Pyatakov, Manuil'sky, and Sokol'nikov. GARF. Fond R-3316. Opis' 17. Delo 253. List 7. RGASPI. Fond 17. Opis' 3. Delo 439.

³¹ *Izvestia* no. 253 (November 5, 1925), 1; *Pravda* no. 253 (November 5, 1925), 3. See also RGASPI. Fond 17. Opis' 3. Delo 527.

in 1926, "[t]hey whipped in a huge mass of people. Papers wailed. Everything was organized the way it should be: funeral flags, factory sirens, firing shots when the body was being lowered to the grave. The burial was at 7 p.m., and one could not get back home from work as there were patrols everywhere that did not let one pass."³²

Some variations existed for the form of interment. Individual graves were for the most exceptional Bolsheviks: apart from Sverdlov, Frunze and Dzerzhinsky were buried this way (not to mention Lenin, of course).³³ This choice of interment type added to the implied hierarchy of the deceased and the comparative importance of services they had delivered to the party and revolution. With that, communal graves remained the standard, and the bodies of several prominent Bolsheviks were buried in the same graves as their predecessors. This was, for example, the case of Nariman Narimanov, a prominent Azeri Bolshevik and enlightener, who suddenly died in Moscow in 1925, apparently of a cardiac attack. Otherwise, his funeral was luxurious and included, among other things, the lowering of banners, cancellation of all amusement, an official half-day off in all governmental institutions, and an artillery salute in Moscow and key Caucasian cities.³⁴

On several occasions, the remains were placed in the Kremlin wall, not buried in a grave by its side. The practice was inaugurated when Miron Vladimirov, a member of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee who had previously occupied several high posts, died in late March 1925 from a disease in Italy. The same happened to Leonid Krasin, longtime Soviet ambassador abroad, who died in London of cardiac paralysis in 1926, and such international figures of the Communist movement as Arthur MacManus and Charles Emil Ruthenberg (both died in 1927).

³² Sheremeteva. *Diary*. 1926. July 22. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/126753>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

³³ On Dzerzhinsky's funeral, see GARF. Fond R-3316. Opis' 31. Delo 72. Listy 2, 4.

³⁴ GARF. Fond R-3316. Opis' 18. Delo 509. Listy 135, 128, 125, 72–73.

The bodies or the ashes were brought from afar to receive the final honors in Red Square. The proper symbolic significance of the necropolis was coming to the fore. Gradually gaining weight as a memorial to the revolutionary struggle and sacrifices of the people, but also a pillar of the new regime, by the middle of the decade, the Red Square as a burial ground choice was already a signal of the exceptional standing of the deceased, further strengthening the link between an honorable death and the political authorities. Burial of ashes, first organized for those who had died abroad and had been cremated there (Vladimirov and Krasin), along with evident practicality, offered a conceptual middle ground: it allowed for some individuality without claiming too high a status for people who did not deserve it. After the Moscow crematorium was launched in 1927, placing urns with ashes into the Kremlin wall became the dominant type of Red Square burial.

It is hard to say whether the choice of funeral arrangements or type of burial depended on other factors, such as the nationality of the deceased. Many high-profile Bolsheviks were ethnically Jewish, a factor that was not brought up during the decision-making process regarding their Red Square funerals but often mentioned in contemporaries' accounts, often pejoratively (see, for example, quotes from Mel'gunova's diary above). Ethnic Russians, Jews, Polish, or Azeri Bolsheviks seemed to receive the last honors only with regard to their position within the party ranks and the relative significance of their input. Variations that existed – such as the artillery salute in the Caucasus for Narimanov – can rather be seen as a sign of respect towards his lifetime story.

One further detail was heightened attention to the foreign, that is, Western Communists and their last wishes. In a tense international situation where the recognition of the Soviet state was among the government's top priorities, those who committed to strengthening the image of the October revolution could receive high funeral honors in Red Square. This was the case with

John Reed. As for Macmanus and Ruthenberg, their high standing in the respective parties would have been a further argument in favor of satisfying their wish to be buried there. To note, the Soviet state requested, in 1922, for Karl Marx's body to be exhumed and transferred to the Red Square for an honorable burial. In the words of Thomas Laqueur, "The British Home Office refused, claiming that it could not obtain the required permission for an exhumation from Marx's next of kin. This may have been the real reason."³⁵

Red Square was not for everyone, but other elements of the new ritual were widely used at funerals of the Bolshevik *nomenklatura* in the capital and beyond. In 1925, the head of Moscow gubernia militia and member of the Bolshevik party since 1904, Fritz Tsirul' died in a car accident. Judging by the obituary, his merits before the revolution were quite ordinary, except that he was a member of the State Political Directorate. Still, he received a pompous funeral. An elaborate ceremony included the exact numbers of participants from various organizations and the strict order of the procession. The ceremony included laying-in-state in the White Hall of the Moscow Soviet building, a guard of honor, a march across the city center, and a gun salvo.³⁶ Tsirul' was buried at the Novodevich'e cemetery, which counted among the most prestigious in the city.³⁷

Historian Irina Samoylova described a similar case from the Novgorod region, 200 km south of Leningrad. An old Bolshevik and executive secretary of the Borovichi *uezd* party committee, Reingold Putsit, died in January 1925.³⁸ The gubernia party committee bureau was in

³⁵ Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 19.

³⁶ TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 11. Delo 1496. List 1, 2.

³⁷ Yuri Ryabinin. *Istoriya moskovskikh kladbishch. Pod krovom vechnoj tishiny* [The history of Moscow cemeteries. Under the shelter of eternal silence] (Moscow: Ripol-Klassik, 2015), 73–75, 382–385.

³⁸ Irina Samoylova, "Memorial'nyye i traurnye praktiki v propagande i v srede patriynykh rabotnikov (po materialam Novgorodskoy gubernii v pervyye gody NEPa)" [Memorial and mourning practices in propaganda and among party workers, based on the materials of the Novgorod gubernia in the first years of NEP], in T. Shmeleva (ed.), *Novgorodika – 2018. Povsednevnyaya zhizn' novgorodtsev: istoriya i sovremennost': Materialy VI Mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii 26–27 sentyabrya 2018 g.* [Novgorodika 2018. Everyday life of the Novgorod citizens: History and modernity. Materials of the International academic conference, September 26-27, 2018] Vol. 2. (Veliky Novgorod: NovGU im. Yaroslava Mudrogo, 2018), 254–260: 258.

charge of the funeral. They planned the farewell ceremony in Novgorod and the burial in Borovichi (the body was to be taken there by train). Communists and Komsomol members carried banners, and an orchestra played while the procession moved to the station, speeches were said, and an honorary guard of Bolshevik railway workers stood by. The train was decorated with greenery and wreaths, some of which had been ordered in Leningrad. Samoylova concludes that "'red funerals' were rather spread out among the long-time Communists; there is a sense that this is a rather elitist funeral ritual."

A characteristic detail of the grand Communist burials in the early 1920s was that they were overwhelmingly male. Of over 500 people buried in the two main necropoles of the country in 1917-1927 (including, of course, several hundred victims of revolutionary fighting from 1917), only ten were women, and seven of those ten were granted the honor on the same grounds as their male comrades.³⁹ Only three women were buried in the Red Square individually during the decade: Augusta Aasen, Norwegian Comintern delegate, who died in an airplane accident in August 1920; Inessa Armand, old Social Democrat, one of the closest friends of Lenin' and Krupskaya and the first head of Zhenotdel, who died of cholera in September 1920; and Dora Vorovskaya, wife of the Soviet publicist and diplomat Vaclav Vorovsky. She died of a severe nervous shock in November 1923. There is insufficient evidence for bold generalizations, and no universal conclusion can be made based on these few cases. Still, there are subtle indicators allowing us to suggest that individual female burials were driven more by the females' relation to men than by their non-gendered achievements and merits before the party and revolution.

³⁹ Olga Wever and Lyusik Lisinova were killed in the street fighting in November 1917. Mariya Volkova, Irina Ignatova, Anna Khaldina, and Anfisa Nikolaeva were victims of a terrorist attack along with other Party members in September 1919. Liisa Savolainen was one of the Finnish Communists killed in the Kuusinen Club in Petrograd (she was buried in the Field of Mars). See Abramov, *By the Kremlin wall*, <https://coollib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-steniyi-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

The death of Augusta Aasen, the Norwegian delegate to the Second Congress of the Third International, was announced in central papers. The Moscow Soviet was responsible for organizing the funeral, which was quite pompous. Her body was lying in state in the House of Trade Unions, which would later become the traditional place for saying goodbye to prominent revolutionary figures but had only been used for Sverdlov's funeral ceremony by that time. The ceremony included elements to underline Aasen's femininity. Angelica Balabanoff and Kata Dalstroem carried wreaths at the head of the procession, and a special detachment of female workers carried banners. Papers highlighted the fact that Aasen's death orphaned her four children, but when she left for the fatal Congress, "the duty of a revolutionary had prevailed over her feelings as a mother."⁴⁰ *Pravda* noted that she was laid to rest in the ground "watered with the blood of our husbands, sons, and brothers for the great cause of all the exploited," also highlighting the gender difference.⁴¹

About a month later, Inessa Armand died. Suffering from recurring tuberculosis, in the fall of 1920, she traveled to the Caucasus to rest in one of the sanatoriums but contracted cholera and died on September 24. Her body was brought to Moscow by train and received a pompous state funeral on October 12. The ceremony included laying in state in the Small Hall of the House of Trade Unions, wreaths, banners, flowers, an orchestra from the Bolshoi Theatre, a luxurious hearse, and numerous delegations of female workers to accompany her on her last way to the Kremlin wall. Lenin and Krupskaya were also present.

⁴⁰ *Izvestia* no. 173 (August 7, 1920), 1.

⁴¹ "Spi spokojno (u mogily tov. A. Osen) ["Sleep well (by the grave of comrade A. Aasen)"], *Pravda* no. 173 (August 7, 1920), 2.

The nature of Lenin's relations with Armand remains unclear, but Armand certainly belonged to his intimate circle.⁴² This relationship was, arguably, the reason behind the funeral honors she received. Armand had an impressive revolutionary profile. A member of the Socialist-Democratic Worker's Party since 1904, she suffered several exiles and arrests, worked as an international agitator and translator, wrote a lot on the women's question, and led *Zhenotdel*, the women's department of the Bolshevik Party. But there were other women with records no less impressive than Armand's who were not rewarded with burial at the grand revolutionary necropolis, as they were connected with less prominent party figures. One of them was Konkordia Samoilova.

A well-educated daughter of a priest from Irkutsk (east of Russia), Samoilova started participating in the students' movement as early as 1897. Over the following decades, she was arrested multiple times, joined Lenin's paper *Iskra* in 1902 in Paris, worked internationally and in Russia, collaborated in *Pravda*, and stood at the source of the key women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (The Working Woman). After the revolution, she continued issuing *Rabotnitsa* and was also a traveling propagandist. She died in late May 1921 during one of her propaganda trips, having contracted cholera near the southern Russian city of Astrakhan'.

Contrary to what one would expect given Samoilova's impressive revolutionary profile, her body was not brought to Moscow for a Red Square burial. Instead, she was buried in the Astrakhan' Old Cemetery, and due to the fact that "her illness and death followed because of cholera, it was the condition stipulated by local organizations that the funeral be modest and not

⁴² See for instance: Bertram D. Wolfe, "Lenin and Inessa Armand," *Slavic Review* 22, no. 1 (1963), 96–114; Carter Elwood, "Lenin and Armand: New Evidence on an Old Affair," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 43, no. 1 (2001), 49–65; Natalia Pushkareva, "Armand, Inessa – Elizaveta Fiodorovna," in: Francisca de Haan, Krasimira Daskalova, Anna Loutfi, *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 33–36.

crowded."⁴³ A striking difference from Comrade Inessa's funeral, which took place a thousand miles away from the place of her death and assembled the entire capital. Samoilova's red-painted coffin, decorated with a wooden emblem of a sickle and hammer and a red star on the lid, was displayed for the last goodbyes in what was previously a hospital chapel. Her guard of honor featured Red Army soldiers, the executive committee of the salaried workers, and people from the ship she traveled on. The group might have included females, but the report did not specify that.

What it did specify, though, was that "by an odd chance, Samoilova shared the grave with her deceased husband, a revolutionary and fighter for a better future like herself ... Before coming to Astrakhan', she did not know where her husband's grave was."⁴⁴ While it is unclear how the journalist might have known that, the legend took off. The trope of two loving hearts who had shared their lives, their revolutionary work and struggle, and eventually (and miraculously) their grave was systematically exploited in the commemorative literature about Samoilova.⁴⁵ Along with reciting Samoilova's political biography, this literature reproduced the story of love and fate, which only helped to understand why a female revolutionary (whose standing in the party was

⁴³ "Funeral of comrade Samoilova," *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Astrakhan') no. 13 (June 3, 1921), 3. Source: RGASPI. Fond 148. Opis' 1. Delo 5. List 43.

⁴⁴ *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Astrakhan') no. 13 (June 3, 1921), 3. Samoilova's husband, Arkadiy Samoilov, indeed died of typhoid fever in early 1919 in Astrakhan', but it is not clear how the journalist could have known that the grave was Samoilov's two years after his passing. This certainty seemed especially unlikely given that Konkordia's burial place was quickly forgotten: in 1925, it took a special commission of *Zhenotdel* and women workers' representatives to find and verify its exact location. The commission located the grave no. 1041 and opened it. What they found supported the earlier journalist report: there were two coffins one upon other, the upper one matched the description of Samoilova's coffin, and when the lid was taken off, commission members could recognize their deceased comrade in the face. However, they did not investigate the coffin underneath. It is thus impossible to confirm that Arkadiy and Konkordia indeed found their peace in the same grave (RGASPI. Fond 148. Opis' 1. Delo 6. List 1).

⁴⁵ Samoilova's biography was recounted in the 1927 memorial collection *To the Memory of the Fallen Leaders* [Pamiati pogibshikh vozhdey] (Varvara Moyrova, "Konkordia Samoilova", in: *To the Memory of the Fallen Leaders* [Pamiati pogibshikh vozhdey] (Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 1927), 79-82). Her and Armand were the only women among other "fallen leaders." As late as thirty years later, Samoilova reappeared among "glorious female Bolsheviks" in another commemorative volume (N. Putilovskaya, "Konkordia Nikolaevna Samoilova," in: Elena Stasova, Cecilia Bobrovskaya (Zelikson), Anna Itkina (eds.), *Glorious Female Bolsheviks* [Slavnye bol'shevichki] (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1958), 245-258).

immeasurably higher than that of her male partner) was buried in a family grave, not a revolutionary one.

The story of Dora Vorovskaya is the most mysterious one: information about her life and death is extremely scarce. She was born Dora Mamutova in Odessa in a doctor's family. Following the *Pravda* obituary, which mentioned that she had died at the age of forty, her birth year can be established as 1883.⁴⁶ Her interests, occupation, and area of study are hard to reconstruct; family friends recalled that she loved music.⁴⁷ She met Vaclav Vorovsky in Switzerland, and the two seemed to come together around early 1904, after Vorovsky split with his first wife Yulia.⁴⁸

In the following years, Dora had several employments in diplomatic services, the area of her husband's specialization. Diplomacy was not a traditionally female-dominated field like education, childcare, or culture.⁴⁹ What was quite typical, though, was the auxiliary nature of Vorovskaya's roles in diplomatic services: a secretary, a messenger, and alike.⁵⁰ Her other occupations seemed to be typically feminine: hearth and home. In comrades' memoirs, in the Vorovsky family, she was in charge of everyday activities, keeping the budget and caring for the couple's daughter, Nina, who was often sick.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Pravda* no. 271 (November 28, 1923), 2.

⁴⁷ Panteleymon Lepeshinskiy, "A beautiful end of a beautiful life" [Krasivyy final krasivoj zhizni], *Proletarskaya revoliutsiya* no. 3 (15), 1923, I-VIII: V; Nikolay Piyashev, *Vorovsky* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardia, 1959), <https://libking.ru/books/nonf-/nonf-biography/542097-nikolay-piyashev-vorovskiy.html>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, "On the eve of the proletarian struggle (based on personal recollections)" [Na zare proletarskoj bor'by (po lichnym vospominaniyam)] (Moscow : Federatsiya, 1932), 135; Lepeshinskiy, "A beautiful end," II; Piyashev, *Vorovsky*, <https://libking.ru/books/nonf-/nonf-biography/542097-nikolay-piyashev-vorovskiy.html>, consulted on May 21, 2023.

⁴⁹ As Katerina Clark observed, "The characteristic pattern was for the wife of some prominent figure to oversee cultural life for the Party; these included wives of Party leaders, such as N. Krupskaya (Lenin's wife) and O. Kameneva (Kamenev's wife and Trotsky's sister). Zlata Lilina, the wife of Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Petrograd Soviet, also worked in culture, primarily on education." Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, 101.

⁵⁰ Abramov, *By the Kremlin wall*, <https://coollib.com/b/368799-aleksey-sergeevich-abramov-u-kremlevskoy-steniyi-sbornik/read>, accessed on May 13, 2023. In the words of Richard Stites, "The tradition of women as secondary figures in the revolutionary movement was stronger than the impulse to introduce complete equality of the sexes." Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press, 1977), 326.

⁵¹ Bonch-Bruevich, *At the glorious watch*, 44–45.

After Vorovsky was assassinated in Lausanne in May 1923, Dora suffered a nervous breakdown so severe that the Party Central Committee thought it best to send her to a sanatorium in Germany.⁵² The treatment did not help, and she died of the consequences of her shock on November 26 or 27, 1923, several days after the Swiss court absolved her husband's assassins.⁵³

What happened next is not entirely clear. Who was responsible for burying a lonely foreigner, and what decision did this person make? One option would be the sanatorium cemetery – "a small and cozy one, right across the sanatorium's windows, where they used to bury deceased patients on Sundays and holidays," in the words of Maxim Gorky, who was treated in the same sanatorium several years prior.⁵⁴ Another possibility was cremation. One of the nearest cities, Zurich, has had a crematorium functioning since 1889, and there were dozens of them across Germany and Switzerland.⁵⁵ This hypothesis seems more plausible, as it was an urn with her ashes that was transferred to Soviet Russia in August 1924 for the Red Square reburial. However, no exact details are available on who was behind the decision and its execution. Vorovskaya was reburied quietly, with no press coverage, marches, or speeches. The urn was placed in her husband's grave – not accidentally, as was probably the case with Samoilova, but quite purposefully. The reason for her internment in the country's main necropolis was her marriage.

As shown above, already by the middle of the decade, the period of experimenting was over, and the forms of the Bolshevik funeral ritual crystallized, with minor variations that allowed the organizers to account for the individual traits of the deceased. State funerals shifted away from

⁵² Annetta Gattiker, *L'affaire Conradi* (Berne : Lang - Francfort/M. : Lang, 1975), 55.

⁵³ *Pravda* no. 271 (November 29, 1923), 2; *Izvestia* no. 273 (November 29, 1923), 1.

⁵⁴ Klaus Hockenjos, "Maxim Gorki im Schwarzwald," *Schau-ins-Land: Jahresheft des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins*, 132 Jahrbuch (Freiburg 2013), 107–123: 114. <http://dl.ub.uni-freiburg.de/diglit/schauinsland2013/0003>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁵⁵ In September 1925, *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* enumerated over fifteen crematoriums in Germany and sixteen in Switzerland. In March 1926, according to the same edition, there were sixty-nine and seventeen respectively. See: "Burying in the ground or cremation?," *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 18 (September 20, 1925), 30–32; Guido Bartel, "To the 50th anniversary of cremation," *Kommunal'noe Khoziaistvo* no. 6 (March 20, 1926), 16.

honoring those who participated in revolutionary battles to those who had their part in forging the revolution and ruling the revolutionary country. While the rhetoric of struggle, fighting, and triumphing over the enemies remained very much in place, the honorary dead were increasingly prominent party or public figures, associated with the revolution through their affiliation with the Bolsheviks.

All men must serve: the moral dimension of Bolshevik death

Elements of the Bolshevik funerals varied, as did the circumstances of deaths. But the stories told about death and dying in official publications ever since 1917 were smooth and cohesive. Instead of dwelling upon the vicissitudes of individual lives and deaths, they offered an increasingly normalizing discourse of what constituted the virtues and merits of the Soviet citizens.

One widespread genre of death-related publications was obituaries and necrologies. According to Jeffrey Brooks, who studied the issues of *Pravda* throughout the 1920s, obituaries appeared most regularly of all "representations of lives" (45 percent of the total); other types of representation were biographies submitted for contests, 29%, descriptions of exemplary individuals, 17%, and articles about people celebrating anniversaries of some sort, 5.5%.⁵⁶ While the deceased commemorated on the pages of *Pravda* were of different social situations, they shared one thing: according to Brooks, "the central idea of almost all the lives presented was that of service; that is, the individuals' contribution to something larger than themselves."⁵⁷ Galina Orlova also highlighted self-denial [*samootdacha*] among the qualities most cherished by authors of the

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Brooks, "Revolutionary lives: Public identities in *Pravda* during the 1920s," in: Stephen White (ed.) *New directions in the Soviet history*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27–41: 29, 30.

⁵⁷ Brooks, "Revolutionary lives," 31.

1920s revolutionary necrologies.⁵⁸ The dead who demonstrated complete self-denial and gave "all of their lives" most resembled the ideal "new men."

The "larger-than-oneself" cause could vary. It could be the factory collective or a professional institution, the local party cell, the Party as a whole, the revolution, the future of socialism, or simply "struggle." The political element was most visible, though, and it also provided gridlines to structure an individual life in retrospect. According to Orlova, "the underground, prison, the Civil war," February and October remained, until the mid-1930s, key elements around which a political necrology would be centered.⁵⁹

Since the cause was larger than any "self" of individual fighters, the death of one did not mean the end of the cause. Rather, it was a trigger for mobilization: for the common cause to continue, the surviving comrades had to close their ranks, intensify their work, and/or avenge the fallen. Mobilization, intensified work, revenge, and educating the youth were ways through which the cause would live on.

Other commemorative publications, such as editions marking death anniversaries, also combined political underpinnings and calls for mobilization. Thus, in 1925, a brochure was published to commemorate six years since the "incident in Leontievsky side street" – a terrorist attack against the Moscow Party Committee in September 1919.⁶⁰ The entire first segment of this brochure was dedicated to the details of the home and international politics in the era, explaining to the reader why the attack had happened and who was behind it. The second section covered

⁵⁸ Galina Orlova, "Biografiya (pri)smerti: zametki o sovetskom politicheskom nekrologe" [(Near)death biography: Notes on Soviet political obituarues], *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 2 (64) (2009), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2009/2/biografiya-pri-smerti-zametki-o-sovetskom-politicheskom-nekrologe.html>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁵⁹ Orlova, "(Near)death biography," <https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2009/2/biografiya-pri-smerti-zametki-o-sovetskom-politicheskom-nekrologe.html>, last accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁶⁰ N. Milyutina (ed.), *25-e sentyabrya 1919 goda. Pamyati pogibshikh pri vzryve v Leontievskom pereulke* [September 25, 1919. To the memory of the fallen during the explosion in Leontievsky lane] (Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 1925).

details of the funeral, highlighting, among other things, the battle cries like "Assassination of proletarian leaders will not stop the working class's revolutionary struggle. You are murdered – you are alive" and "Your martyr-like death is a call for an onslaught on counterrevolution."⁶¹ The brochure also cited funeral orations in which the Soviet leaders praised the "enviable fate" of those who had fulfilled their duty and insisted that no sacrifice would hold the proletariat's impulse in the struggle for socialism.⁶²

The loss of a comrade was, first and foremost, a loss for the cause, and sentiments expressed in necrological publications reflected it. Thus, in the 1927 anniversary album *Pamyati pogibshikh vozhdey* [To the memory of the fallen leaders], many biographical sketches contained references to the possibilities lost with the death of this or that figure. People's Commissar Leonid Krasin "left us way before the moment when he would have depleted the richest gifts of his nature"; one of the oldest RKP(b) members, the first People's Commissar of Commerce and Industry, and the head of Textile syndicate Victor Nogin "died unexpectedly for the party and the working class, at the zenith of his powers when his best plans have just started coming to life"; Alexander Myasnikov, deputy head of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic Sovnarkom and Marxist theoretician, "has taken with him to the grave forces not yet depleted and organizational and theoretical capabilities that had only started to develop"; diplomat Petr Voykov "would have achieved a lot in improving and strengthening our relations with Poland, had not a ridiculous death cut off the activities of this extraordinarily talented, educated, and bright man."⁶³

Biographies of the deceased and memoirs about them were authored by their comrades-in-arms. Personal acquaintances, intimate friends, or birth family members rarely, if ever, appeared

⁶¹ Milyutina, *September 25, 1919*, 84.

⁶² Milyutina, *September 25, 1919*, 86.

⁶³ Feliks Kon (ed.), *Pamyati pogibshikh vozhdej. Al'bom vospominanij* [To the memory of the fallen leaders. Memorial album] (Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 1927), 25, 35, 61, 88.

in revolutionary obituaries in any capacity. They hardly wrote anything about their dead for the public and were almost never mentioned in necrologies. Brooks observed that "in thousands of pages of Soviet newspapers from the 1920s, one is hard pressed to find a single picture of a family or even a child with one of its parents. ... A brief comment on home or family was found in only 7 percent of the 495 cases (of biographical sketches – a.p.), and in these it was almost exclusively negative."⁶⁴ Similarly, the closing biographical section of *September 25, 1919*, and the twenty-three essays in *To the memory of the fallen leaders* were written by this principle. Rare exceptions, such as Nadezhda Krupskaya's short post-mortem biography of Inessa Armand, a long-time family friend, still fit the scheme: the dead were described from a political, not personal perspective.

The "old Bolsheviks," who began their political activities in the early 1900s, often had no family outside their comrades. Living as revolutionaries meant constant surveillance and the threat of prison or exile, making it difficult to maintain relationships beyond their close circle. However, they formed strong bonds based on shared hardships and political ideals, creating a quasi-family. When a revolutionary died, this symbolic family replaced their blood relatives in burial and commemoration.

This substitution paralleled a wider trend of disregarding the individual when describing life during historical eras such as the revolution. While individual testimonies were a common instrument of fixating and preserving the history of a particular party cell, factory, or club, the narrators were supposed to have focused on events, not on their experiences.⁶⁵ Methodological recommendations on how to write memoirs published in *Proletarskaya revolutsiya*, the Istpart magazine, in 1925 highlighted the importance of historical facts as opposed to the role of

⁶⁴ Brooks, "Revolutionary lives," 34.

⁶⁵ Alissa Klots, Maria Romashova, " 'Tak vy zhivaya istoriya?': sovetskiy chelovek na fone tikhoy arkhivnoy revolyutsii pozdnego sotsializma' ['Are You Living History?' The Soviet Person and the Quiet Archival Revolution of Late Socialism], *Antropologicheskij forum* no. 50 (2021), 169–199: 173.

personality in them. Memoirs in which the authors talked too much about themselves were condemned as they "mostly do not reflect reality but serve to put the 'central' person in a favorable light."⁶⁶

Individual feelings – grief, pain, sadness – as a reaction to death were also unwelcome. After a brief period of doubt in 1917, reservedness in the face of the inevitable and the tragic increasingly became a marker of the dedicated Communist. In March and even in November 1917, crying for the victims of revolution was an acceptable way to honor them, and the press named sadness and pain among the feelings shared by the crowds at the funerals of revolutionary heroes. *Izvestia of the Moscow Soviet* wrote in November 1917:

Sad is the sound of cornet-a-pistons that starts the Marseillaise. The triumphant hymn does not suit the situation ... The air is filled with the pain of the things lived through and dreams of the future. The harmony of crying and hope suits the mood of those present and the entire sense of the events. A man standing next to me is crying. Tears come up my throat... Sounds of the funeral march, the *Internationale*, and musical orchestras seemed to swish the air with sighs and wailings and made an indelible impression.⁶⁷

By the first October anniversary, stoicism and happiness pushed out the sadness in the official rhetoric. Lenin, in his speech at the opening of the memorial plaque at the Kremlin wall, proclaimed that "[t]he great happiness of victory befell the comrades fallen in October last year. The greatest honor of which the revolutionary leaders of humanity had dreamt happened to be theirs. This honor was that over the bodies of comrades who had fallen valorously in battle,

⁶⁶ Oksana Klymenko, "Constructing Memoirs of the October Revolution in the 1920s," in: Agnieszka Mrozik, Stanislav Holubec (eds.), *Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism* (Routledge, 2018), 260–274: 266. Klymenko notes, however, that in actual memoirs, these recommendations were only partially followed.

⁶⁷ "Pokhorony geroev revolyutsii" [Funerals of the heroes of the revolution], *Izvestia Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*. no. 203 (210). 1917. November 12 (25).

thousands and millions of new fighters went on." In conclusion, Lenin called for commemorating them not by weeping but by "making an oath, before their memorial, to follow in their steps."⁶⁸

When Lenin died, his Communist comrades wept for him as if against their will. Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич recalled the moments after he had received the terrible news: "Vladimir Il'ich passed away... As if something had hit me on the head, swirled and moaned in my heart. My throat squeezed as with ticks. Something is coming up. 'What is that? Tears?' – a thought flashed in my mind. 'Communists do not cry!' – my heart responded."⁶⁹ Grigory Zinoviev, reconstructing the arrival to Gorki the next day, described Lenin's face: "It appears that the Old Man is not content: why do we look at him so long, why does a tear come to the eye. Bolsheviks crying! Who has ever heard of such a thing"⁷⁰

Whereas the Bolsheviks did not cry because they were Bolsheviks, the non-Bolsheviks did not have a suitable forum to do so. They could mourn their dead in private, and indeed, intimate journals provide plenty of examples. Teacher Elizaveta Kladischeva lost her beloved brother in January 1918. She only noted it in her diary in April because "[I] could not write and have been suffering all this time so much that I had never suffered before."⁷¹ In August, she came back to the topic to write down that "over six months [she] could not get over this grief, Kostya's death," and only time and awful scenes of other's grief could finally help to dissolve her pain in the suffering

⁶⁸ Vladimir Lenin, "Rech' pri otkrytii memorial'noj doski bortsam oktyabr'skoj revoliutsii 7 noyabrya 1918 g." [Speech at the opening of the memorial plaque for the fighters of the October revolution, November 7, 1918], in: Lenin, *Complete Works. Vol. 37* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1963), 171.

⁶⁹ Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, *Smert' i pokhorony Vladimira Il'icha: po lichnym vospominaniyam* [Death and funeral of Vladimir Il'ich: based on personal recollections] (Moscow, 1925), 4. <http://elibrary.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/23182-bonch-bruevich-v-d-smert-i-pokhorony-vladimira-ilicha-po-lichnym-vospominaniyam-m-1925-biblioteka-dokumentov-zapisok-i-vospominaniy-kn-6>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁷⁰ Grigory Zinoviev, *Shest' dney: al'bom o smerti V. I. Lenina* [Six days: Album about the death of V. I. Lenin] (Leningrad, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925), 8. <http://elibrary.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/54113-zinoviev-g-e-shest-dney-albom-o-smerti-v-i-lenina-l-m-1925>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁷¹ Elizaveta Kladischeva. *Diary*. 1918. April 3. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/386397>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

known to all.⁷² Gymnasium student Lyubov' Martynova lost her mother to the Spanish flu in November 1918. For her, "it was the thing I feared most in my life, and it happened, it happened during this terribly hard time when one needs a loved one nearby. And I have lost mine forever, and now I am completely lonely."⁷³

Sheila Fitzpatrick demonstrated that throughout the 1920s-1930s, shades of grief, sadness, and other varieties of melancholy were often to be found in Soviet ego documents; they could even be made public "as long as the person telling the story did not blame the regime for what had happened to them."⁷⁴ Sadness and anxiety could take a very specific form of alienation; how deeply it concerned people can be inferred from the diary of Stepan Podlubny, who suffered from his ambiguous social status throughout the 1930s.⁷⁵ However widespread these feelings were in the private realm, none of them would befit a good Communist. In the words of Catherine Merridale, "private pain went underground," and this concerned both ordinary victims of hunger or illnesses and those who were destroyed by the regime.⁷⁶

As for the good Communist, the emotional reaction to loss would be self-imposed restraint, overcoming the natural intention to grieve and redirecting one's forces to the continuation of work and struggle instead. Over the following decades, this restrictive approach was strengthened from multiple sides. Stakhanovite and Pioneer movements called for continuous contributions to the community, be it labor, (self-)education and "self-improvement," or supporting weaker social groups. State repressions made it even more unlikely for the victims' families to voice their grief

⁷² Kladischeva. *Diary*. 1918. August 25. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/386398>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁷³ Lyubov' Martynova. *Diary*. 1918. December 17/30. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/244318>, accessed on May 17, 2023.

⁷⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Happiness and Toska: An Essay in the History of Emotions in Pre-War Soviet Russia," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 3 (2004), 357–71: 370.

⁷⁵ Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 44, no. 3 (1996), 344–73.

⁷⁶ Catherine Merridale, "The collective mind: Trauma and shell-shock in twentieth-century Russia," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 no. 1 (2000), 39–55: 46.

and openly mourn the *non-grata* dead. The Second World War, with its enormous death toll that affected virtually every family in the country, has overshadowed the origins of the story of revolutionary heroism and self-sacrifice from the 1920s while enforcing its key message. A universal story of a wartime feat would bring together a useful life, a heroic death, and serving a great cause.⁷⁷

"The life-preserving force of the collective"⁷⁸

Reservedness, stoicism, and self-denial in the face of death, be it one's own or that of a comrade, had long been among the revolutionaries' top values. The old Bolshevik A. Skobennikov remembered his letter exchange with Mikhail Frunze in Vladimir prison several years before 1917: "I received a short note from Frunze... he was for the second time sentenced to death. He was ready to die for the revolutionary cause and, at the same time, wrote frankly that ... somewhere deep in his soul, he hoped to live. ... In response, I only wrote that if he was to face death, then, knowing him, I was certain that he would face it with the dignity of a revolutionary."⁷⁹

However, readiness to die with dignity did not imply that one should bring one's end closer: the death of a Communist inevitably took away forces needed for the revolution. The extreme circumstances of the German war, revolution, Civil War, armed political conflicts, and everyday hardships of the first post-revolutionary years hardly provided reasons to reading into the early Soviet culture a "tanatologism" that "showed through" its various aspects.⁸⁰ And when these

⁷⁷ In 1949, a young working mother in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* "conceptualized *schast'e* as a process of continually striving and struggling to prove "useful" to the motherland". Anna Toropova, "An Inexpiable Debt: Stalinist Cinema, Biopolitics, and the Discourse of Happiness," *Russian Review* 74, no. 4 (2015): 665–83: 665.

⁷⁸ Expression of the Moscow psychiatrist Leonid Prozorov, quoted in Kenneth M. Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective. Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism, 1921-1929*, (Cornell University Press, 2010), 49.

⁷⁹ A. Skobennikov, *Vo Vladimirovskoj katorzhnoj tyur'me. 1907-1911 g.g.* [In Vladimir convict prison] (Vladimir, 1926), 18.

⁸⁰ Malysheva, "Red Tanathos," 25.

conditions withered away, the death of a comrade was increasingly seen by other party members as not just a sad and untimely accident. In some cases, it became problematic to the degree of immorality.

In 1921, the introduction of the New Economic Policy led, among the Bolsheviks, "to suicides and resignations among its most disenchanted members, fostering from that time forward a strong link between suicide and "desertion" in Bolshevik discourse."⁸¹ By 1925, the extent of the problem became so troubling that it was discussed in detailed reports in the higher echelons of power. One such report stated that of 616 people who had died during the first quarter of 1925, 81 were lost to suicide.⁸² After a series of investigations, it turned out that harsh living conditions, unsurmountable workload, fear of punishment for crimes of professional misconduct, and disappointment in the current life were the most frequent causes of suicides among the Communists. With that, as Valeria Tyazhelnikova observed, "According to a wide range of documents on the Communist, workers, military, and students' everyday life in the 1920s, suicide was not perceived as an extraordinary phenomenon... It appears that cases of suicide are somewhat ordinary, they are not exceptional cases, and the thought about them is constantly hanging in the air."⁸³

The question was indeed widely discussed, according, for example, to the diary of Iosif Litvinov, a student at the Institute of Red Professors and staff member at the Sverdlov Communist University. Between January and March 1922, he mentioned suicide at least five times; two of

⁸¹ Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 44.

⁸² Valeria Tyazhel'nikova, "Samoubijstva kommunistov v 1920-e gody" [Communist suicides in the 1920s], *Otechestvennaya istoriya* 6 (1998), 158–170: 162. <https://российская-история.рф/archive/1998-6>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

⁸³ Tyazhel'nikova, "Communist suicides," 168.

these notes were detailed descriptions of the suicides of people he personally knew.⁸⁴ On January 15, he made a general observation: "Recently, it [suicide – a.p.] has been the most popular topic among Communists. They shoot and poison themselves at every turn, and people talk about it at every turn. And the unflinching Rozit has correctly observed that they shoot themselves not for social reasons but on personal grounds: because of their material and family situation."⁸⁵

This assessment was repeated several years later at higher party levels. In October 1924, Emelyan Yaroslavsky discussed party ethics at the Second Plenum of the Central Control Commission. He argued that since 1921, when the NEP was introduced, the number of suicides within the party has decreased. Yaroslavsky went on to generalize that "only tired and weakened people kill themselves" and that "we cannot, not to the smallest degree, justify comrades' suicides," which, for him, were "wrong steps harmful for the Communist cause."⁸⁶ Old Bolshevik Aron Sol'ts agreed with him: "There is a certain number of suicides now... This is natural and understandable: we are living through times when the nerves of so many people have been tested and tried so that they do not anymore have the powers to do what the party requires of them." For Sol'ts, suicide showed that a person did not only have a certain "rotteness" [*chervotochina*] in them but also that they were "poor party members."⁸⁷

In December 1925, Yaroslavsky picked up the topic again at the XXII Leningrad *gubernia* Party Conference to condemn the self-destroyers of the NEP era as "weak-nerved, weak-willed people who have lost faith in power and force of the party, in the future of the working class and

⁸⁴ Mikhail Mel'nichenko, "Samoubijstva sovetskogo vremeni po materialam elektronnoho korpusa lichnykh dnevnikov 'Prozhito' " [Soviet suicides, based on materials from Prozhito, the electronic corpus of personal diaries], *Arkheologia russkoj smerti* 2 (2016), 51–81: 54–60.

⁸⁵ Mel'nichenko, "Soviet suicides," 54.

⁸⁶ A. Gusejnov, M. Iskrov, R. Petropavlovsky (eds.) *Partijnaya etika. Dokumenty i materialy diskussii 20-kh godov* [Party ethics. Documents and materials of the discussion of the 1920s] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1989), 194, 195, 196.

⁸⁷ *Party ethics*, 280.

revolution." More recently, according to him, people "shoot themselves either being drunk, or because they have committed a crime, or for romantic reasons" – in short, nothing connected to the loss of faith in the party or revolution.⁸⁸ Another year later, Yaroslavsky decisively condemned suicides among workers as a "manifestation of weakness, lack of will to fight, slackness [*rasslablennost*]." ⁸⁹

Nevertheless, it was not just a matter of "slackness." For many, especially old revolutionaries, personal and political considerations merged, bringing their suicides closer to a political statement. The suicide of Adolf Ioffe, Trotsky's comrade-in-arms and long-time friend, can be considered from this perspective. Suffering from multiple health conditions, Ioffe was being gradually pushed out of responsible positions and posts and deprived of medical support. Trotsky's expulsion from the party finally brought him down, and he shot himself on November 17, 1927.

Ioffe's suicide note addressed to Trotsky opened with a reference to the Lafargues, who committed a double suicide when they could no longer serve the cause. Ioffe explained his decision by similar considerations and expressed the hope that his death would be more useful to the revolution than his life in its present condition.⁹⁰ The intended publication of the note should have stopped the Russian revolution approaching its Termidor (sic! – a.p.).

Ioffe's suicide gave rise to a heated debate. Oppositionists saw him as an irreconcilable fighter who served the revolution even in death, while party figures, represented by Yaroslavsky, attributed Ioffe's decision to his weakness and decadence (*upadochnichestvo*).⁹¹ According to him,

⁸⁸ *Party ethics*, 246.

⁸⁹ Emelyan Yaroslavsky, "Moral' i byt proletariata v perekhodnyj period. Doklad, pročitannyj v Politekhničeskome muzeje 14 aprelya 1926 g.," [Morals and everyday life during the transitory period. A lecture given in the Polytechnic Museum on April 14, 1926], in: *Party ethics*, 343.

⁹⁰ The text of Ioffe's last note see in the memoirs of his daughter: Nadezhda Ioffe, *Vremya nazad: Moya zhizn', moya sud'ba, moya epokha* [Back in time: My life, my fate, my epoch] (Moscow: TOO Biologičeskie nauki, 1992), 62–73. <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=page&num=7705>, accessed on May 22, 2023.

⁹¹ Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 93–94.

the revolution did not need saving: the party was as strong as ever and was leading it the right way. As he had observed as early as 1924, those who could not realize that were, politically, no better than dead, so they could also be gone physically.⁹²

Pinnow wittily observed that the Bolsheviks came close to blurring the lines between the notions of "murder" and "suicide":

Where the individual is conceived as an autonomous being, murder can be thought to reflect the love of the self, while suicide suggests a desire to destroy it. By contrast, the Bolsheviks' understanding of the individual as a social being made suicide appear the result of an excessive love and concern for oneself that conflicted with the interests of the larger collective.⁹³

However, the substitution that led the Bolsheviks to welcome the self-destruction of "lost" party members did not prevent them from destroying their open opponents, as will be shown below.

Suicides outside the party ranks did not receive as much attention from the party theoreticians. In personal accounts from the revolutionary and post-revolutionary years, suicides appear regularly but without many ethical comments. In 1917-1919, many suicides, especially among the military, were related to political considerations intertwined with the idea of incompatibility of the current situation with officers' honor. Thus, diarists noted the suicides of General Krymov in September 1917 after conversing with Kerensky, or General Skalon in late November during the peace talks in Brest-Litovsk.⁹⁴

⁹² Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 97. On the impossibility of living outside of the party, see for example Nanci Adler, "Enduring Repression: Narratives of Loyalty to the Party Before, During and After the Gulag," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 2 (March 2010), 211–234: 220.

⁹³ Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 97.

⁹⁴ These two stories are quoted in the diaries of Zinaida Gippius, Rashel' Khin-Gol'dovskaya, Alexey Oreshnikov, Nikita Okunev, writer Vladimir Korolenko, general Alexey Budberg, and general Nikolay Zarin, among others.

Everyday hardships were commonly given as reasons to take one's own life. Thus, in January 1917, Rashel' Khin-Gol'dovskaya quoted a story of a wife of "some merchant in Odessa who shot herself and left a note: Waiting in lines every day for several hours has completely poisoned my existence...."⁹⁵ Litvinov, in February 1922, argued that the wife of a mechanic whom he knew attempted suicide because "apparently, she was just sick and tired of this life – dirty, grey, boring, in the Communist barrack...."⁹⁶ The same winter, Nikita Okunev's wife shot herself – "the most horrible thing in [his] life that was incomparable to any other shock [he] lived through over these seven and a half wretched years":

This damned war and all that followed mangled kingdoms, cities, houses, apartments – and finished off not just our happiness but also our relative welfare. By the end, all that remained was nerves torn, forces exhausted, disappointment and fear in front of the misfortunes to come ... My poor noble friend lost her forces! Her health fractured once and for all over these preoccupations in the kitchen, washing, cleaning, firewood splitting, furnace stockings, carrying bags, and other "trade" nuisances... And then a bullet in her temple shot by her own heroic (sic! – a.p.) hand.⁹⁷

There were reasons to believe that life in the early 1920s was harder for Communists than non-party members. Tyazhel'nikova observed that the salaries of these categories of the population were equal, but Communists performed an overwhelming amount of social work on top of their professional duties, and their physical and mental exhaustion could have pushed them over the edge more frequently.⁹⁸ However, most statisticians and medical professionals "argued that the revolution had had a salutary effect by reducing the number of people who were taking their own lives."⁹⁹ Specialists hoped that among the general public as well as Communists, the number of

⁹⁵ Khin-Gol'dovskaya, *Diary*. January 1917, in: Surzhikova (ed.), *1917 Russia in ego-documents. Diaries*, 244.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Mel'nichenko, "Soviet suicides," 56.

⁹⁷ Okunev. *Diary*. 1922. December 31/January 13, <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/17707>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

⁹⁸ Tyazhel'nikova, "Communist suicides," 168.

⁹⁹ Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 47.

suicides would continue to decrease because, as nowhere in the world, in the Soviet state, conditions existed to help people overcome self-destructive intentions. There was a great common cause, the building of socialism, that was expected to encourage individuals to come together and overcome their egoistic interests for the sake of the collective.¹⁰⁰

In death, as in life, the dichotomy of individual and collective was politically colored, and, especially after such figures as Yaroslavsky voiced their position, the correct choice was predestined. According to Natalia Lebina, by the 1930s, the window of possibilities in even discussing suicide narrowed down: "The Soviet system preferred to approach suicides only from the political perspective," and "the simplest considerations in this area became impossible against the background of the forming monopoly of the Bolshevik ideological system."¹⁰¹ Perhaps thinking about self-destruction was not impossible, but the consideration should have been resolved the right way. A good Communist was a person of strong will, s/he should have overcome individual pain to contribute to the achieving of the common goal. But if one's willpower was not strong enough to endure the hardships of post-revolutionary life and socialist construction, s/he had to improve oneself or perish.

The heterogeneous range of early Soviet "fallen heroes" was substantially narrowed over the decade, and narratives about it channeled into a more consistent and normalized story. Changing circumstances, generational changes, and a few pivotal events, such as Lenin's funeral, all contributed to this. A number of elements continued to vary, emphasizing the personality of the deceased (thus, women were buried by women, textile workers by textile workers, and so on) - but by the end of the decade, the pool of heroes diminished to focus on the Party figures. The

¹⁰⁰ Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective*, 52.

¹⁰¹ Natalia Lebina, "Tenevye storony zhizni sovetskogo goroda 20-30kh godov," [Dark sides of life in a Soviet city, 1920s-1930s], *Voprosy istorii* 2 (1994), 30-42: 36, 37.

importance of life for the common cause predominated over the importance of death, for the common cause or otherwise, and thus, heroic fighters of the Civil War years gave way to the thinkers and leaders whose long years of service were more significant for the revolution than the instance of their death. With that, the general opinion of the Party was that any life dedicated to the right cause is more worthy than death, especially a self-inflicted one. Life could be hard, but a Communist should be harder, ready to continue the struggle even at the cost of suppressing pain or negative emotions such as grief and sadness. These emotions, ineradicable privately, were not welcomed publicly. What remained was an idealized narrative of a dedicated life and heroic death; other options were being suppressed. The following section illustrates this thesis from another angle.

Funerals for the enemies

The Russian revolution was merciless to its enemies. Starting from February 1917, they lost their lives in street fights, terrorist attacks, army operations, and political killings. Despite the number of deaths, their visibility markedly changed over the first revolutionary decade. As the Bolsheviks gained political weight and stability, the window of opportunity for their adversaries to have their dead openly honored and commemorated narrowed down along with the changes of what "revolution" and "revolutionary" meant. Over the summer of 1917, public funerals could come close to anti-Bolshevik manifestations while maintaining revolutionary rhetoric. After October, it was no longer possible. Families and friends took care of the bodies of the more fortunate, ensuring a decent funeral. Those who did not have friends and families could, at best, hope to be buried by indifferent municipalities or, at worst, be taken over by political opponents who would abuse or neglect their bodies for political purposes or with no purpose at all. Some of

the practices that were tested in the circumstances of the Civil War continued in peaceful times to influence the formation of political solutions that became typical for the Soviet regime.

1917: contested "revolutionariness"

Even though the 1917 February revolution in Petrograd was often labeled "bloodless" in contemporaries' accounts, there were wounded and dead on both sides.¹⁰² The Funeral Commission responsible for the grand ceremony in March made considerable efforts to separate revolutionaries from policemen, army officers, and other "allies of tsarism." The goal was that only the right people were honored with a state funeral. During the preparation time, papers wrote that in city morgues and mortuaries, "true freedom fighters [were] being thoroughly separated from the supporters of the old regime."¹⁰³ But identification was complicated, as discussed above, and for those on the tsarist side of the struggle, particularly so. In a revolutionary city, not many were willing to admit adherence of their fallen relatives and friends to the old regime. The city authorities did not specifically care about burying tsarist officials separately, and it was impossible to establish political allegiances of all the dead. Given that many coffins in the Field of Mars ceremony were anonymous and that some of the families claimed the bodies of their dead and buried them in the cemeteries of their choice, it is quite probable that some of those who were buried with red banners to the sounds of the *Marseillaise* were loyal to the tsar.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See for example the diary of the artist Aleksandr Benois. *Diary*. 1917. March 20. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/123897>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

¹⁰³ *Birzhevye Vedomosti* no. 16150 (March 23, 1917), 3.

¹⁰⁴ On March 7, *Birzhevye Vedomosti* mentioned that "many bodies have been buried at Smolenskoe, Okhtinskoe, and other cemeteries." Quoted in Orlov, *Bereavement and festival*, 13. *Utro Rossii* wrote that certain soldier Panyakov who fell in Petrograd on February 28 and was buried on March 19 in his native Nizhny Novgorod (*Utro Rossii*. no. 77 (March 22, 1917), 5). As *Russkie Vedomosti* reported, "Many remain unidentified, and the inscription on those coffins reads: "Unknown, killed on February 27" (*Russkie Vedomosti* no. 67 (March 24, 1917), 4). This fact circulated as a rumor as well, for example, Georgy Knyazev noted in his diary that "we still do not know whom we bury" (*Diary*. 1917. March 23. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/343547>, accessed on May 21, 2023).

On other occasions, "allies of tsarism" received decent public funerals despite their loyalties. In late March 1917, there was a funeral of low-rank policemen killed in the revolution, an event that made an impression even on the supporters of the revolution. Artist Alexander Benois described the shift in public mood in his diary: "Not long ago, all four of our kitchen ladies were burning with rage against the police, and today they weep over the fallen policemen. Everyone was touched by the moving funerals of these 'reverse victims of the revolution.'" ¹⁰⁵ It is unclear who the organizers were and how crowded the event was, but it attracted some public from outside the immediate circle of friends, families, and colleagues and signaled, albeit modestly, that alternative funerals were possible.

Over the year, the non-Bolshevik camp had a few opportunities to organize public funerals bordering with or turning into political manifestations. One such occasion followed the "July Days" when a militarized conflict between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks in central Petrograd left about forty dead and several hundred wounded on both sides. The funeral of seven Cossacks, organized by the Provisional Government, became a veritable anti-Bolshevik manifestation for those who "were loyal to the Revolution and imbued with its spirit." ¹⁰⁶

Despite the repeated references to the revolutionary character of the ceremony made by the organizers, Richard Stites was correct when he noted that "The symbols and speeches at the graveside were entirely in keeping with the day's 'spirit of traditional Orthodox patriotic Russia.'" ¹⁰⁷ The archbishop of Petrograd, the exarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the members of the Holy Synod performed the funeral service in St. Isaac's Cathedral. ¹⁰⁸ The choice

¹⁰⁵ Aleksandr Benois. *Diary*. 1917. March 20. <https://corpus.prozhitto.org/note/123897>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Quote from the Petrograd mayor cited by Mayer, *The Furies*, 457.

¹⁰⁷ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: Norton, 1976), 40.

of the place and participants was as pompous and respectful as it was demonstrative. As discussed above, the March ceremony was organized without the official presence of the clergy; the ceremony in July sought to highlight the difference.

Members of the cabinet, representatives of the local soviet, *zemstvo*, city government, merchants, and estates, as well as leading diplomats, were among the participants. Upon exiting the church, they joined Alexander Kerensky in swearing "before the bodies of the fallen" to "work to save the state and freedom."¹⁰⁹ In the procession, military troops were more noticeable than workers, even though city factories and plants were asked to send their representatives.¹¹⁰ There were wreaths and crosses instead of red banners, and the coffins that had been taken out of the church on the shoulders of cabinet ministers continued their journey to the Alexander Nevsky monastery on horse-drawn carriages to the sounds of tolling church bells and singing of the hymn *How Glorious is our God in Zion*, traditionally performed at military funerals.¹¹¹ The ceremony was "magnificent and moving," according to Vladimir Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, an anti-Bolshevik and, later, a member of the Volunteer Army.¹¹² It was also markedly old-fashioned, an attempt of the Provisionary Government to insist on their understanding of "revolutionary": politically distanced from tsarism but symbolically close to the traditions of orthodox Russia.

By October, such amalgamation was no longer possible. Funerals of those who fought against the Bolsheviks could not be labeled "revolutionary" anymore, and neither the organizers of such ceremonies nor the participants and relatives of the dead wished it. This change can be illustrated by drawing on the example of the funeral ceremony of November 13, 1917, in Moscow.

¹⁰⁹ Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 41.

¹¹⁰ Mayer, *The Furies*, 457; Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 42.

¹¹¹ Mayer, *The Furies*, 459; Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 42.

¹¹² Vladimir Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, *Diary*. 1917. July 7. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/316641>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

After the fighting left several hundred dead, a student committee cared for the bodies of the fallen (except for those who were "claimed by their relatives and close ones and buried earlier"), and student organizations funded a funeral ceremony for the fallen students of military schools and higher education institutions who fought against the Bolsheviks.¹¹³

The ceremony had a pronouncedly traditional character. The organizers and participants alike highlighted its difference from the "Bolshevik" funeral that took place in Red Square only three days before. Bodies lay in simple pinewood coffins, with fir branches as the only decoration. The attendees dressed in traditional black carried the coffins on their shoulders or funeral carts ("and often the horses did not even have black or white horsecloth"), and "there were no posters, no flags, no wreaths," as the Socialist press caustically informed.¹¹⁴ According to *Russkie Vedomosti*, "little was known in larger Moscow about the details of the funeral, the time, the route," and "no one cared to cancel the streetcar traffic for the funeral."¹¹⁵

Still, the ceremony assembled several dozens of thousands of people, and the clergymen of the highest ranks performed the funeral service in the Greater Church of the Ascension. More priests joined with litanies while the procession moved towards the Bratskoe cemetery founded a few years before for the soldiers fallen in the German war – another highlight of the traditional and patriotic lineage of the military students killed by Bolsheviks.¹¹⁶ The church bells rang, and quires sang *Holy God, May Them Repose with All the Good Souls and Eternal Memory*. An orchestra played Chopin's funeral march and *How Glorious is Our Lord in Zion*. There were also speeches in the church and at the cemetery. Archbishops, professors, and officers had the floor to say a few words in honor of the fallen.

¹¹³ *Utro Rossii*, no. 261 (November 14, 1917), 3.

¹¹⁴ *Delo Naroda*, no. 209 (November 14, 1917), 4.

¹¹⁵ *Russkie Vedomosti*, no. 249 (November 14, 1917), 4.

¹¹⁶ *Utro Rossii*, no. 261 (November 14, 1917), 3.

Those who participated in the ceremony of November 13 understood that it was a counter-manifestation to the "red funerals." Praskovia Mel'gunova, the wife of anti-Bolshevik historian and activist Sergei Mel'gunov, put down in her diary that the "popular crowds" "compared the funerals of Red Guards at the Kremlin wall, without clergy, to this funeral, accompanied by all church rituals and in the presence of priesthood, and all comparisons were against the former: "A dog's death for a dog," they said about "those," buried "like dogs" under the fence."¹¹⁷ Yuri Gauthier juxtaposed the crowds of "exclusively cultured, or, more correctly, civilized" people that were present at the Bratskoe cemetery and the "mobs" and "barbarians" on the other side of the political barricade.¹¹⁸

This transformation that took less than a year to happen showed how the meaning of the concept of "revolutionary" was already shifting towards the "Bolshevik." The worsening economic, political, and social situation that followed the March exaltation and enthusiasm were among the factors that influenced this shift; the others were disillusionment in the Provisionary Government and its actions and tiredness of the revolution. By October, not many people were still willing to embrace the idea of revolution and fill it with positive connotations and associations, whereas the Bolsheviks were more than ready to do so. Already here, one can observe the roots of the reasons why, over the following decades, the Bolsheviks managed to appropriate revolutionary rhetoric and symbolism and retrospectively narrow all things "revolutionary" to "Bolshevik."

The other side of this process was taking measures against those who did not fit the new understanding of the revolutionary. After October, the new government used different methods

¹¹⁷ Praskovia Melgunova-Stepanova, *Diary*. 1917. November 14. <http://corpus.prozhito.org/person/518>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Yuri Gauthier, *Diary*. 1917. November 13. <https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/37961>, accessed on May 30, 2023.

against their enemies, experimenting with legal and paralegal formats. Below, I show how these various options intertwined and what they eventually led to.

Tribunals and trials

One solution for dealing with enemies of the revolution was proposed almost immediately after the October overturn: fighting against counterrevolution made its way into the novel legal system. The Decree on Court No. 1, published on November 22 (December 5), 1917, abolished all preexisting courts and introduced two new formats: local courts to solve minor civil and criminal cases, and revolutionary tribunals "to struggle against the counterrevolutionary forces," pillaging, and sabotage.¹¹⁹ On December 7 (20), the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, or Cheka, was created to fight against counterrevolution and sabotage.

The functioning of these organs quickly proved problematic, and not only due to the lack of well-trained personnel and clear legal guidance.¹²⁰ It was not evident what kinds of cases fell under the responsibility of which institution and what verdicts were appropriate for what kind of crime. Until the adoption of the new criminal code in 1922, revolutionary and military revolutionary tribunals were guided by the vaguely understood "revolutionary consciousness." The flexibility of the "revolutionary consciousness" can be inferred from the account of historian Dmitry Pavlov. He quoted a 1920 amnesty report from Moscow, with an overwhelming variety, not to say randomness, of crimes investigated by revolutionary tribunals and punishments they proposed. According to the head of the Moscow amnesty commission, revolutionary tribunals had

¹¹⁹ "Dekret o sude," *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti. T. I* [Decrees of the Soviet government. Vol. 1] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957), 124–126. http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/o_sudel.htm, accessed on December 16, 2022.

¹²⁰ Rendle, "Revolutionary tribunals and the origins of terror," 705; Paul Du Quenoy, "Perfecting the show trial: The case of Baron von Ungern-Sternberg," *Revolutionary Russia* 19, no. 1 (2006), 79–93: 83.

accused people of such things as "chattiness," "critique of the Soviet power," "being suspicious," "participating in the Union of the Russian People in 1905," or "previous service," and chose various prison sentences: three, six, twelve months, a year, three, five, ten years, "until the accused comes of age," "until the end of the Polish war," "until the end of the Civil war," "until peace with Estonia is concluded," or "until the Soviet power is strong enough."¹²¹

Surprisingly for the Bolsheviks, revolutionary consciousness was sometimes more tolerant towards the accused than expected, and, therefore, the use of tribunals was not as straightforward as they might have planned. A telling example of such miscalculation was the very first public trial organized by the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal on December 10, 1917. The accused was Countess Sofia Panina, a wealthy aristocrat, known philanthropist, and top-level member of the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadet), charged with appropriating funds allocated for education. But even though the verdict was accusatory, the case was hardly a Bolshevik triumph. Panina was obliged to return the money, which was quickly collected by her supporters, and her actual punishment was limited to "public censure."¹²²

On other occasions, falling back upon revolutionary tribunals was supposed to manifest the ultimate revolutionary justice that does not distinguish between "us" and "them" in its pursuit of truth. However, the results were also dubious. Members of the Kadet party, Andrey Shingarev and Fedor Kokoshkin, were arrested by the Bolsheviks. After falling ill in the Peter and Paul Fortress, they were transferred to Mariinsky Hospital, where a group of Baltic sailors brutally murdered them on the night of January 7, 1918.¹²³ The commandant of the hospital who had allowed the

¹²¹ Dmitry Pavlov, "Tribunal'nyj etap sovetskoj sudebnoj sistemy, 1917-1922 gg." [Tribunal stage of the Soviet legal system, 1917-1922], *Voprosy istorii* no. 6 (2007), 3–16: 10. Source: TsGAMO. Fond 66. Opis' 1. Delo 483. List 299.

¹²² Adele Lindenmeyr, "The First Soviet Political Trial: Countess Sofia Panina before the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal," *Russian Review* 60, no. 4 (2001), 505–25.

¹²³ William G. Rosenberg, "Russian Liberals and the Bolshevik Coup," *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 40 no. 3 (1968), 328–347: 340.

murder to happen was brought to trial and convicted. Still, as Orlando Figes pointed out, "none of the murderers was ever caught, and the Bolshevik leaders, who at first condemned the murders, later sought to justify them as an act of political terror."¹²⁴

The flexibility and unpredictability of the tribunals was one problem; another was the lenience of the sentences they delivered. Formally, the tribunals were among the few institutions that had the right to decide about capital punishment since June 1918, a moment that marked the reintroduction of the death penalty into Soviet legal practice.¹²⁵ But there was no direct correlation between the proceedings of revolutionary tribunals and the execution of death sentences. On the one hand, even when capital punishment was not formally part of the legislative system, it never fully went away: extraordinary institutions such as Cheka delivered their summary justice, and pronouncements and executions of death sentences continued, abuse of power sometimes leading

¹²⁴ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 536.

¹²⁵ See for example Denis Shkarevskiy, "Voennye tribunaly v 1920-e gg.: rol' i znachenie," [Military tribunals in the 1920s: their role and significance] *Vestnik VGU* no. 3 (2019), 93–103: 99. The death penalty was formally abolished and reintroduced several times over the first five post-revolutionary years. The Provisional Government abolished capital punishment on March 12, 1917, and reintroduced it on the fronts for grave offences among the military on July 12, 1917 (*Sbornik ukazov i postanovlenij Vremennogo pravitel'stva. Vypusk 1* [Collection of decrees and resolutions of the Provisional Government. Issue 1] (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaya tipografia, 1917), 37; Ilya Rat'kovskiy, "Vosstanovlenie v Rossii smertnoj kazni na fronte letom 1917 g." [Restoring capital punishment in Russia on the fronts of war in the summer of 1917], *Novejshaya istoriya Rossii* no. 1 (2015), 48–58: 52). On October 28, 1917, the death penalty was abolished again to be gradually reintroduced over the course of 1918 (Dekret II Vserossiyskogo Sjezda Sovetov Rabochikh, Soldatskikh i Krest'yanskikh Deputatov. Ob otmene smertnoj kazni [Decree of the II All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies. On the abolition of the death penalty], *Code of regulations* (M., 1942), 6). The Decree "Socialist Homeland in Danger!" from February 21, 1918, called for shooting on the spot of "enemy's agents, speculators, burglars [*gromily*], hooligans, counterrevolutionary agitators, and German spies" (*Decrees of the Soviet government* (1957), 490–491). The Decree issued by the Commissariat of Justice on June 16, 1918 allowed revolutionary tribunals to carry out any sentence, death penalty included, for counterrevolutionary activity (Postanovlenie Narodnogo komissariata yustitsii ot 16 iyunya 1918 g. "Ob otmene vsekh donyne izdannyykh tsirkulyarov o Revolyutsionnykh Tribunalakh," [Decree of the People's Commissariat of Justice of June 16, 1918 "On the abolition of all hitherto issued circulars on the Revolutionary Tribunals"] *Izvestia VTsIK* (1918) no. 122). On January 17, 1920, the death penalty was abolished again (Postanovleniye VTSIK, SNK RSFSR ot 17 yanvarya 1920 g. "Ob otmene primeneniya vysshey mery nakazania (rasstrely)" [About abolishing the highest measure of punishment (shooting)], *Sobranie uzakonenij RSFSR*, no. 4–5, art. 22). Capital punishment was introduced in the 1922 criminal code, albeit formally as an exceptional and temporary measure (*Sobranie uzakonenij RSFSR* [RSFSR Code of regulations], no. 15 (1922), St. 153).

to court cases.¹²⁶ On the other hand, tribunals that had a legal right to deliver death sentences did not resort to this option too often. By the count of Paul de Quenoy, "Of nearly 4,500 defendants prosecuted in them in 1918, two-thirds were acquitted or fined, while only 14 received death sentences."¹²⁷ A few examples below illustrate the irregularity of the links between legal procedures (trials and tribunals) and death warrants.

The first victim of the reintroduced capital punishment in June 1918 was Captain Alexey Shchastny. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed for conspiring against Soviet power. What was remarkable about this trial was that Leon Trotsky personally initiated the process. The evidential base against Schastny was weak, but he was shot anyway, according to some accounts, in Trotsky's presence.¹²⁸ Even though some formalities were observed, the case can hardly be seen as a course of law.

Almost at the same time, a lengthy discussion about the possible fate of Nicholas Romanov and his family was coming to a culmination. Lenin, apparently, was in favor of the death penalty for Nicholas ever since April 1917: he drafted a resolution, passed by the party's central committee, declaring that "William II [was] as much of a crowned bandit deserving of the death penalty as Nicholas II." By February 1918, the Sovnarkom, with Lenin at its head, decided "to collect evidence on the case of Nicholas Romanov" to organize a trial. Still, neither the date nor the place

¹²⁶ Ilya Rat'kovskiy pointed to the Muraviev and Dybenko cases in early 1918: Ilya Rat'kovskiy, *Krasnyj terror i deyatel'nost' VCHK v 1918 godu* [The Red Terror and VChK activities in 1918] (Saint-Petersburg University Press, 2006), 43.

¹²⁷ Du Quenoy, "Perfecting the show trial," 83. Rendle agreed, arguing that "The final issue was the sentences; they were increasingly seen as too lenient" (Rendle, "Revolutionary tribunals and the origins of terror," 708).

¹²⁸ Pavlov, "Tribunal stage of the Soviet legal system," 13; Rat'kovsky, *The Red Terror and VChK*, 93; Kirill Nazarenko, "Kapitanskaya tochka. Za chto bol'sheviki rasstrelyali komanduyuschego Baltijskim flotom kapitana I ranga Alekseya Schastnogo" ["The end of a captain. Why did the Bolsheviks shoot the Baltic fleet commander, 1st rank Captain Alexey Schastny"], *Rodina* no. 9 (2020), <https://rg.ru/2020/09/09/za-chto-bolsheviki-rasstrelyali-komanduiushchego-baltijskim-flotom-kapitana-i-ranga-alekseia-shchastnogo.html>, accessed on December 16, 2022.

of that trial was defined.¹²⁹ In May 1918, at the Party Plenum, "comrade Sverdlov informed that the question of Nicholas's further fate was up at the Central Executive Committee Presidium and among the Ural comrades and the SRs. It should be decided what is to be done with Nich[olas]. It is decided not to do anything so far...."¹³⁰

By the summer, the date and place of the trial were undecided, but Lenin seemed to still support the idea. "An all-Russian trial precisely! – Lenin asserted to Sverdlov – with publications in papers. We should count the human and material damage the autocrat [*samoderzhets*] has done to the country over the years of his reign... He should be made responsible before the face of the whole people!"¹³¹ Trotsky, in his memoirs, claimed that he had been in favor of "an open trial that would reveal a picture of the entire reign ... The trial ought to be broadcast to the whole country by radio. Reports on the trial ought to be read aloud and commented on daily in every rural district."¹³² Notably, the result of the investigation, according to historian Wendy Slater, would have been "a *public execution following a public trial* (emphasis mine – a. p.) which had found him [Nicholas] guilty of the crimes he had committed as the personification of autocratic

¹²⁹ GARF. Fond R-130. Opis' 2. Delo 1. List 135, <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/29/>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹³⁰ RGASPI. Fond 17. Opis' 2. Delo 1. List 15, 16. <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/r22/>, accessed on May 13, 2023. The Ural comrades appeared in the discussion because by the time, the former tsar with his family was in exile in Ekaterinburg, under the responsibility of the local Bolshevik party branch. Sverdlov ordered the former tsar's transportation from Tobol'sk to Ekaterinburg, explicitly prohibiting any further movements, in April 1918 (GARF. Fond 601. Opis' 2. Delo 33. List 1, <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/32/>, accessed on May 13, 2023).

¹³¹ According to the memoirs of Mikhail Medvedev (Kudrin), member of the firing squad. Quoted from: Vladimir Khrustalev, Mark D. Steinberg (eds.), *Arkhiv novejshej istorii Rossii. Seriya "Publikatsii". Vol. III. Skorbnij put' Romanovykh (1917–1918 gg.) Gibel' tsarskoj semji: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [Russia's contemporary history archive. Publications. Vol. 3. Sorrowful path of the Romanovs (1917–1918). Fall of the royal family: Collection of documents and materials] (Moscow: Rosslen, 2001), 253. Source: RGASPI. Fond 588. Opis' 3. Delo 12. List 43—58, <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/31711-iz-vospominaniya-uchastnikov-rasstrela-tsarskoj-semi-m-a-medvedeva-kudrina-dekabr-1963-g>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹³² Mark D. Steinberg, Vladimir Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs* (Yale University Press, 1995), 288. It is to note that Trotsky was not among those who made the decision: Sverdlov and Lenin are most often quoted as relevant responsible figures in party leadership.

monarchy. This was how the French and the English Revolutions had dealt with their *ancien régimes*."¹³³

Eventually, a trial never happened: pressured by the military circumstances, the members of the Urals Regional Soviet made a unilateral decision to execute the former tsar.¹³⁴ According to the most universally accepted version of the events, the Romanovs were awakened in the middle of the night of July 16 to 17, 1918.¹³⁵ They were brought to the basement of the Ipatiev house, with little to no explanation provided, where Yakov Yurovsky, a regional Cheka member and the commandant of the house, pronounced the sentence. He did it so hastily that Nicholas could not

¹³³ Wendy Slater, *The many deaths of Tsar Nicholas II. Relics, remains and the Romanovs* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 153.

¹³⁴ Helen Rappaport, *The last days of the Romanovs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 131–132. Historians differ radically in their analysis of the event. Rappaport believes a "double game" was on between Moscow and Urals. While the official position for the international audiences was that the tsar was being transferred to the capital for trial, active involvement of the local party cell left the door open for any "excesses" and "incidents" along the way. Should anything unpredicted happen, it could easily be blamed on "Ekaterinburgers" and "would leave the central government in the clear." (Rappaport, *The last days of the Romanovs*, 138). Mark Steinberg and Vladimir Khrustalev, in their turn, admit "the plausibility of the long-standing argument that the Ural Bolsheviks themselves decided to murder the tsar and his family and servants or, at least, that they overstepped Moscow's more limited authorization" (Steinberg, Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs*, 283). They also point to the indecisiveness of both the center and the locals until the mid-July: "it is not clear that anyone in authority decided exactly what to do with them until very shortly before the execution." (Steinberg, Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs*, 287). Dominic Lieven holds the opposite opinion: "Although the Soviet regime right down to its last days claimed that the Romanovs' murder was purely the responsibility of the Ural Bolsheviks, recent evidence coming out of Russia shows conclusively that this was not the case, and that the command came from Lenin personally and from the top party leadership." (D.C.B. Lieven, *Nicholas II: twilight of the Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 242). This position is partially supported by the recollections of Trotsky, who, writing in exile in 1935, brought up a conversation with Sverdlov. Allegedly, Sverdlov asserted that "we decided it here. Ilich thought that we could not leave them a living banner, especially in the present difficult circumstances" (Quoted from Steinberg, Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs*, 292–293). But, as mentioned above, Trotsky's memoirs on the matter should be taken with a grain of salt. Ekaterinburgers tried to obtain Moscow's sanction till the very last moment, but their wire to Sverdlov and Lenin from July 16, 1918, remained unanswered (GARF. Fond R-130. Opis' 2. Delo 653. List 12. <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/143/>, accessed on May 13, 2023).

¹³⁵ The reconstruction of events is not too reliable, due to the non-matching memoirs of the participants and utterly equivocated organization and coverage of the execution. Historian Alexander Lymaryov, head of the South Urals State Historical Museum academic work, pointed to the discrepancies in the memoirs: Alexander Lymaryov, "Ubijstvo tsarskoj semji v ijule 1918 goda. Svidetel'stva palachej" [Murder of the royal family in July 1918: Testimonies of executioners], http://chelmuseum.ru/specialists/scientific_publications/488/, accessed on May 13, 2023. Ivan Plotnikov devoted a special study to the national composition of the firing squad: "O komande ubijts tsarskoj semji i ee natsional'nom sostave," [On the assassination party of the royal family and its national composition], *Ural* no. 9 (2003), 229–237, <https://magazines.gorky.media/ural/2003/9/o-komande-ubijcz-czarskoj-semi-i-ee-naczionalnom-sostave.html>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

hear it well, reacting with the most untheatrical "What?" or "Eh?" Such was the end of a debate about the royal trial.

When the trials did happen, they increasingly tended to be more manipulated and predictable while remaining public. A telling example was the trial of Baron Roman Ungern von Sternberg. During the Civil War, this odious anti-Bolshevik warlord was active in the Eastern parts of the former Romanov empire. The Reds captured him in August 1921; soon after, Lenin insisted on "a public court hearing" before the execution (Lenin's prescription specified that justice was done "with maximal speed").¹³⁶ As Ungern was not particularly loved or supported by the local population because of the atrocities he and his men had committed in the region, the trial's outcome was predictable enough to organize it safely. According to Willard Sunderland's analysis, "Since Ungern was going to be shot anyway, the point of the trial was to set up the execution in the right way—that is, to put it in the necessary ideological context while at the same time keeping people interested since the event was also a spectacle. ... Ungern stood for a way of life that was antidemocratic, reactionary, corrupt, exploitative, deceitful, delusional, murderous, and disloyal. The Soviet order, naturally, was the opposite."¹³⁷

Ungern's trial ended in the death penalty: he was shot, which was meant to be a quick and efficient way of execution.¹³⁸ But not all trials had such a fortunate setup for the Bolsheviks, and the sentences could turn out to be not just lenient but also unpredictable. Early revolutionary tribunals were open to the public, and when they did not go to plan, it undermined the prestige of the new government. Furthermore, if the verdict was not solid enough, the didacticism of the trial was lost. The Bolsheviks approached their legal system along the lines of retaliation and restoring

¹³⁶ Pavlov, "Tribunal stage of the Soviet legal system," 13.

¹³⁷ Willard Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak: A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 2014), 215, 217.

¹³⁸ Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak*, 214.

justice due to the working class.¹³⁹ Spectators and audiences had to rest assured that the representatives and supporters of the old regime got what they deserved in terms of settling historical scores. If this did not happen, public trials did not reach their goal. Several scholars agreed that Lenin, the Sovnarkom, and other Bolshevik leaders demonstrated a growing reliance on different methods of revolutionary justice, moving away from revolutionary tribunals towards terror and extrajudicial solutions.¹⁴⁰

Death sentences did not necessarily need to be an outcome of a judicial procedure, but the publicity of executions was often used to teach the spectators a lesson and deliver a threatening message. The decree "Socialist Homeland in Danger!" sparked a series of shootings nationwide.¹⁴¹ In the summer of 1918, there were three attempts on top Bolshevik figures. On June 20, 1918, V. Volodarsky, chief of the Press Division of the Executive Committee of the Union of Northern Communes, was assassinated. On August 30, 1918, in Petrograd, Leonid Kannegiser killed the head of Petrograd Cheka Moisei Uritsky, and in Moscow, Fanny Kaplan shot Lenin; he was heavily wounded but survived. On September 5, the official Decree on the Red Terror prescribed "mass shooting" to be "inflicted without hesitation" upon the enemies of the revolution. The same day, in the north of Moscow, the Cheka publicly shot about eighty ex-tsarist officials and priests.¹⁴² In the following months, other "bourgeois hostages" were executed across the towns and cities of European Russia.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ As per Bolshevik legal theory, law was "the system or order of social relations corresponding to the interests of the ruling class and protected by the organized force of that class." Quoted by Rendle, "Revolutionary tribunals and the origins of terror," 697.

¹⁴⁰ Du Quenoy, "Perfecting the show trial," 83; Rendle, "Revolutionary tribunals and the origins of terror," 712.

¹⁴¹ Rat'kovskiy, *The Red Terror and VChK*, 54–59.

¹⁴² See for instance the brief message in *Izvestia* that "Petrograd Extraordinary Commission has shot over 500 people from among hostages." *Izvestia* no. 189 (September 3, 1918), 4. Sergei Mel'gunov, quoting "an eyewitness of the events," estimates the number of executed as 1300 (Mel'gunov, *The Red Terror*, 21).

¹⁴³ Mel'gunov, *The Red Terror*, 24.

Karl Radek, in his *Izvestia* piece "The Red Terror," pointed to the effect these executions could have:

Five bourgeois hostages shot based on a public verdict issued by a plenary meeting of the local Council of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies, shot in the presence of thousands of workers who approved this act, is a more impressive act of mass terror than the shooting of five hundred people by a decision of the Emergency Commission without the participation of the working-class masses.¹⁴⁴

The ensuing violence of the Civil War was also instrumental in eliminating political enemies, targeting not just individuals but large and loosely defined groups of people: wealthier peasants, the clergy, party insiders accused of being part of conspiracies, enemy armies of all colors. Eric C. Landis, who studied the Antonov rebellion in the Tambov region in 1920-1921, pointed out that "within certain circles, there appeared to be an easy acceptance of the utility of demonstrative violence against villagers that bordered on enthusiasm."¹⁴⁵ Over just two months in the summer of 1921, a minimum of 1500 people, mostly villagers, were publicly executed by the Soviet representatives – a figure that Landis found too low.¹⁴⁶ According to Alexander Teplyakov, in some places where fighting continued, the execution maintained their public character until as late as 1924: Basmachi [a Soviet pejorative umbrella term to describe resistance anti-Bolshevik fighters of various nationalities, who were active in Central Asia] in the Bukhara republic were shot in broad daylight to frighten their supporters.¹⁴⁷

Intimidation of the enemy using dead bodies seemed characteristic, especially during the Civil War years. Thus, when the White general Lavr Kornilov was killed by a random artillery shell in April 1918, his supporters from the Volunteer army secretly buried his body in a small

¹⁴⁴ Karl Radek, "Krasnyj terror" [The Red Terror], *Izvestia* no. 192 (September 6, 1918), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 236.

¹⁴⁶ Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 351.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander G. Teplyakov, *Protsedura: ispolnenie smertnykh prigovorov v 1920-1930-kh godakh* [The Procedure: Execution of death sentences in 1920s-1930s] (Moscow: Vozvraschenie, 2007), 7.

colony about 40 km away from the city of Ekaterinodar to hide the tomb from the adversary party. The precautions did not help. The Bolshevik forces arrived the next day, rifled the fresh grave, and rightly supposed that the body dressed in the general's uniform was Kornilov's. They then took it to the city center and abused it for several hours before "burning it on a rubbish dump."¹⁴⁸ As Catherine Merridale observed, "It was during the Civil War that the secret police began their practice of 'dumping' piles of corpses at the entrances to urban cemeteries," as "the purpose of the terror was, after all, partly educational."¹⁴⁹

And yet, public intimidation was not the only instrument in the Bolshevik arsenal. Another tendency, arguably even more intimidating in the long run, was to execute death sentences away from the public eye and eliminate any physical reminders of what happened to the body. In the following section, I bring in several examples to illustrate this tendency.

"The remains are to be destroyed without a trace"

Public trials became a recognizable trait of Soviet political life, from the early experiment in the 1920s to the big show trials in the late 1930s until the final decades of the regime. But when it came to eliminating political enemies, publicity was increasingly absent. Punishment of individuals who were unwanted or dangerous for the Bolshevik regime tended to be non-public, if not secret, ever since the death penalty became a tool in the arsenal of political solutions. Once the trial, if there was a trial, was over, the convicted disappeared from the public eye. On many

¹⁴⁸ Mayer, *The Furies*, 262. Description quoted from: Yu. Fel'shtinsky, G. Chernyavsky, *Krasnyj terror v gody grazhdanskoj vojny. Po materialam Osoboj sledstvennoj komissii po rassledovaniyu zlodeyanij bol'shevikov* [Red Terror in the Civil War years. Based on the materials of the Special Investigation Commission for the investigation of Bolsheviks' misdeeds] (Moscow: Terra – Knizhny Klub, 2004), <http://lib.ru/HISTORY/FELSHTINSKY/krasnyjterror1.txt>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Merridale, "Revolution among the dead," 181.

occasions, no convincing evidence remained to testify how, where, and by whom the execution was carried out and what happened to the body.

As mentioned, the first official victim of capital punishment in June 1918 was Captain Alexey Shchastny, who was accused with the participation of Trotsky, found guilty and sentenced to death. But despite his special status, there is no reliable evidence about his execution and the further fate of his remains. Alexander Rabinowitch, who studied the Shchastny file in the Archive of the Russian Federal Security Service for St. Petersburg and the St. Petersburg region, pointed to the unreliability of the source on which all subsequent accounts of captain's death were based: "The origin of this description, which is quite detailed, appears to be a questionable third-hand account written by a former naval officer, A. Lukin, for the Paris émigré newspaper, *Posledniia Novosti*."¹⁵⁰

According to this unreliable description, "For security reasons, Shchastny was shot before dawn in the closed courtyard of the Alexandrovskii Military Academy... His body was stuffed in a sack and hidden on the Academy grounds – in a pit dug beneath the parquet floor of an office on the first level."¹⁵¹ It is not clear what exactly these security reasons were. Furthermore, in Soviet historiography, the case was either ignored entirely or dismissed briefly as counterrevolutionary. Contemporary Russian historians quote the myth or abstain from any hypotheses about the shooting and the burial.¹⁵²

The story of the Romanov family execution strikes as equally lacking official descriptions. Everything about this event makes an impression of situational, hasty, and non-thought-through,

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Rabinowitch, "The Shchastny File: Trotsky and the Case of the Hero of the Baltic Fleet," *The Russian Review* 58, no. 4 (1999): 615–34: 632.

¹⁵¹ Rabinowitch, "The Shchastny file," 632.

¹⁵² Pavlov believed that he was executed "right in the inner yard of the revolutionary tribunal premises on Znamenska street" (Pavlov, "Tribunal stage of the Soviet legal system," 13); Kirill Nazarenko observed that "there [wa]s no reliable information on how the shooting went and where Shchastny's body is buried." (Nazarenko, "The end of a captain," *ibid.*).

even though the execution took over a year to be decided and carried out. It is hard to trace how the decision was made and who was ultimately responsible. Still, a few traits allow us to situate the story of the Romanovs' execution within the range of other secret executions of the party's enemies in 1918 and beyond.

As mentioned above, the pronouncement of the verdict to the Romanovs family was hasty, and so was the execution. Without repeating the accusation or decision, the firing squad started shooting but did not manage to kill all the victims at once and had to use bayonets. As Lisa Kirschenbaum showed, despite the Bolshevik press efforts to present shooting as "swift, non-nonsense justice," a manifestation of "revolutionary discipline," memoirs of the participants do not support the image of organization and preparedness.¹⁵³

The burial was equally unprepared. Immediately after the execution, a truck took the victims' bodies to an abandoned mine near the city, where they were buried in an unmarked grave. According to their memoirs, the executors did not discuss the possibility of pilgrimage to the royal graves nor virtually any reason for their actions other than the order they had received to proceed so that "no one would never find their body."¹⁵⁴ After the hastily improvised grave proved too shallow and the local population showed signs of suspicion of the strange activity in the woods, the executors resorted to the use of acid and burned the remains to get rid of any trace of the Romanovs.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Lisa Kirschenbaum, "Scripting the Revolution: Regicide in Russia," *Left History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry and Debate* 7, no. 2 (2000), 29–51: 42–43. Memoirs of Yakov Yurovsky recorded by M. Pokrovsky. RGASPI. Fond 588. Opis' 3c. Delo 9. List 7–12, <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/r10/>, accessed on May 13, 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Memoirs of P. Ermakov, <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/n06/>, accessed on May 1, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ Among the prospects of what to do next, there were plans to burn the bodies, disfigure them with acid, or ride them over with a truck. Eventually, it appears, these ideas were somehow combined (See Vladimir Soloviev, "Sravnitel'nyj analiz dokumentov sledstviya 1918–1924 gg. s dannymi sovetskikh istochnikov i materialami sledstviya 1991–1997 gg." [A comparative analysis of documents of the investigation, 1918–1924, the Soviet sources, and materials of the investigation, 1991–1997], <http://www.romanovy.narod.ru/sravn.htm>, accessed on May 1, 2023). Nikolay Sokolov, who investigated the case in 1918–1924, found out that sulfuric acid and gasoline were delivered to the mine

Despite the hectic process and information leaks, the Romanovs' bodies remained undiscovered for many decades.¹⁵⁶ Partly, it was due to the politics of the Soviet leaders who withheld and falsified information about the execution. The official narrative was laconic and only mentioned that the ex-tsar was put to death. His family was said to have been evacuated to a "safe place." This disinformation first appeared in the telegram from the Presidium of the Ekaterinburg Soviet to Lenin and Sverdlov on July 17, 1918 (a ciphered telegram from the same date pointed to the actual state of affairs) and was systematically reprinted in the national press.¹⁵⁷ It was not before 1921 that the real fate of the tsar's family was made public.¹⁵⁸ But the event coverage remained very brief. The story dropped out of the public eye already in the 1920s and was officially passed with silence for most of the century, and the executioners' memories were classified.¹⁵⁹ The atmosphere of secrecy engendered numerous conspiracy theories, impostors, and mysteries that were not decisively solved before the 2010s.¹⁶⁰

The Romanovs had a special status as royalty. But from the perspective of secret execution, they shared their fate with other enemies of the Bolshevik regime. Like many before and after them, the Romanovs were destroyed with zero publicity in the middle of the night, almost

and used to disfigure faces and burn the belongings of the dead (Nikolay Sokolov, *Ubijstvo tsarskoj semji* [Murder of the royal family] (Berlin: Slowo, 1925), 204–205).

¹⁵⁶ Yurovsky's memoirs attested to the chaotic character of the process: the shooting was random, the truck for transporting the bodies arrived too late, the burial detachment did not know where the chosen place was, there appeared to be no shovels ready, the truck got stuck in the mud, the mine was too shallow, burning of bodies took too much time, *et cetera*. Memoirs of Yakov Yurovsky recorded by M. Pokrovsky. RGASPI. Fond 588. Opis' 3c. Delo 9. List 7-12. Available online at: <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/r10/>, accessed on May 1, 2023.

¹⁵⁷ GARF. Fond 601. Opis' 2. Delo 27. List 8-9, <https://statearchive.ru/assets/images/docs/145/>, accessed on May 1, 2023.

¹⁵⁸ Pavel Bykov, "Poslednie dni poslednego tsarya," [The last days of the last tsar] in: N. Nikolaev (ed.) *Rabochaya revolyutsia na Urale: Epizody i fakty* [Workers' revolution in the Urals: Episodes and facts] (Ekaterinburg, 1921), 3–26.

¹⁵⁹ Slater, *The many deaths of Tsar Nicholas II*, 155.

¹⁶⁰ Bodies were first recovered in the late 1970s by the geologist and amateur historian Alexander Avdonin and a team of supporters. In the 1990s, a governmental commission run an official investigation, studying the burial site, the remains, and the earlier materials. In 2007, two bodies that had been buried separately were finally found, and a genetic study confirmed their affiliation with the Romanovs. See Michael Coble, "The identification of the Romanovs: Can we (finally) put the controversies to rest?" *Investigative genetics* 2 no. 20 (2011).

unknownst to themselves, and their burial was carried out in the most unsentimental fashion, without any ritual. The Romanovs fell victim to their royal status, but the fate of those who actively fought against the Bolsheviks was often similar.

Even in the days leading up to the official start of the Red Terror, contrary to what one might have expected, the punishment of those who committed the attacks against top Bolshevik figures was not public, and it is even hard to reconstruct what happened or who was behind making and executing the decision. Worker Nikita Sergeev, suspected of shooting Volodarsky, managed to escape and evade responsibility; his participation was never solidly proven or even proclaimed. Leonid Kannegiser, Uritsky's murderer, was caught red-handed and confessed. After lengthy interrogations, he was found guilty and shot in late September or early October 1918. Who made this decision or executed the verdict and what happened to his body is unknown.¹⁶¹ The arrest of Fanni Kaplan, who allegedly shot Lenin, was hardly supported by solid evidence.¹⁶² Kaplan was interrogated by the Cheka, confessed, and was shot on September 3, 1918.¹⁶³

There is some evidence regarding Kaplan's execution, but the sources are unreliable and heavily edited. One source is the account of the Kremlin commandant Pavel Mal'kov, who claimed to have pulled the trigger. According to the first version of his memoir published in 1959, behind the decision to shoot Kaplan was Sverdlov, cited as saying: "We are not going to bury Kaplan. The

¹⁶¹ Despite the enormous volume of evidence collected in relation with the case, academic writing about it is virtually nonexistent. Writer Vitaly Shentalinskiy worked with the materials on Kannegiser's case; he claimed that among the papers he consulted, there was neither a verdict nor an act of shooting. By his estimation, Kannegiser was shot between September 18 and October 1, 1918. It is still not clear by whose order the verdict was executed, and by whom. See Vitaly Shentalinskiy, "Poet-terrorist" [The Terrorist Poet], *Zvezda* no. 3 (2007), <https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2007/3/poet-terrorist.html>, accessed on May 1, 2023.

¹⁶² Semion Lyandres, "The 1918 Attempt on the Life of Lenin: A New Look at the Evidence," *Slavic Review* 48 no. 3 (Autumn, 1989), 432–448; 438–439; see also <https://www.prilib.ru/item/963103>, accessed on May 1, 2023. Eyewitness accounts pointing to her participation were controversial and inconsistent, and despite her eventual confession, historians doubt that she was the culprit. The story was so dubious that four years later, in 1922, the Bolsheviks brought it up again during the show trial of the Right SRs. Lyandres, "The 1918 Attempt on the Life of Lenin," 432; Boris Orlov, "Tak kto zhe strelyal v Lenina?" [So who shot Lenin after all?] *Istochnik* no. 2 (1993), 63–74; 73; Dmitry Volkogonov, *Lenin: A new biography* (Simon and Schuster, 2008), 242–244.

¹⁶³ The *Izvestia* issue from September 4, 1918, mention her execution on the previous day on page 5.

remains are to be destroyed without a trace."¹⁶⁴ In the later editions of Mal'kov's memoir, the story was different: not Sverdlov but Varlaam Avanesov, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee member, commanded him to execute Kaplan, and there was no mention of the destruction of the body.¹⁶⁵ What happened to Kaplan's body remains unclear to this day. According to a persistent legend reproduced in academic and popular literature, the corpse was poured over with gasoline and burnt in an iron barrel somewhere at the territory of the Moscow Kremlin.¹⁶⁶

It is equally hard to reconstruct the story of the execution and burial of Admiral Alexander Kolchak, who was among the few White military leaders captured by the Reds. He was held prisoner in Irkutsk and interrogated for over two weeks, from January 21 to February 6, 1920. According to the interrogation protocols published a few years later by a Soviet publishing house, the investigation did not reach any conclusive point by the night (sic!) of February 6-7, when, in view of the growing military threat from the White forces, Kolchak was executed.¹⁶⁷

Again, there is no consensus as to who decided it. Some memoirists and historians believed that the order was given by the initiative of the Irkutsk military revolutionary committee, while

¹⁶⁴ Pavel Mal'kov, *Zapiski komendanta moskovskogo Kremlya* [Notes of the Moscow Kremlin commandant] (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1959), 130.

¹⁶⁵ Pavel Mal'kov, *Zapiski komendanta Kremlya* [Notes of the Kremlin commandant] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987), http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/malkov_pd/07.html, accessed on May 1, 2023. Boris Orlov believed that the elimination of this detail from the later version of Mal'kov's account pointed to its credibility (Boris Orlov, "So who shot Lenin after all?," 73).

¹⁶⁶ At the apparent origin of this story, one finds the writer Yury Davydov who mentioned it in the preface to Boris Savinkov's novel *To, chego ne bylo* [That what was not there]. The introduction was first published as an article in *Ogonyok* in 1989; in 1990, the book publication followed (Yury Davydov, "Boris Savinkov, on zhe V. Ropshin, i drugie" [Boris Savinkov, a.k.a. V. Ropshin, and others], *Ogonyok* no. 30 (1989), 25–28; 27; V. Ropshin (Boris Savinkov), *To, chego ne bylo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990). Online at: http://az.lib.ru/s/sawinkow_b_w/text_0090.shtml, accessed on May 21, 2023). In the book version of his preface, Davydov hypothesized about the authorship of the idea of burning Kaplan's body. According to him, Mal'kov suggested it. A former sailor, he "should have remembered how, in March 1917, people had cremated Kronstadt officers alive in ship burners." As "the Jew Sverdlov did not want to befoul our earth with the burial of the Jew Kaplan," there was nothing left to do (Davydov, Preface to *That what was not there*, http://az.lib.ru/s/sawinkow_b_w/text_0090.shtml, accessed on May 21, 2023). The story of burning was then reproduced in other writings, such as Alexander Teplyakov's *Protsedura* [The Procedure], where it was quoted without any reservations or references (Teplyakov, *The Procedure*, 5).

¹⁶⁷ Konstantin Popov (ed.), *Dopros Kolchaka* [Interrogation of Kolchak] (Leningrad: GIZ, 1925).

others pointed to a directive of the head of the Siberian *revkom* Smirnov. Both versions were shattered when additional evidence came out of the so-called "Trotsky's Papers": a note by Lenin implied that the decision might have been his.¹⁶⁸ The story outline thus reminds us of the Romanovs' shooting, only that, unlike the royal family, Kolchak suspected what was in store for him a few hours before the execution.¹⁶⁹ Most reconstructions of the admiral's final hours are based on eyewitnesses' accounts, often contradictory and sometimes anonymous.¹⁷⁰ The shooting took place in the early hours of the morning; its exact location is not known, but according to a popular version, it happened on the ice of the Ushakovka River, confluent with the Angara.¹⁷¹ Kolchak's body was lost, probably drowned.

Even the final days of baron Ungern, whose trial was better documented and publicized, are enigmatic. Sunderland hypothesized that "Ungern was probably shot by just one man, perhaps Evreinov, standing right behind him," but it is not clear to what extent the execution itself was public and how efficient this solution was.¹⁷² As for the lesser-known enemies of the revolutions and/or the Bolsheviks, their traces go cold even earlier.

As not much legislation existed before 1922, the work of institutions delivering and executing death penalties was irregular and hard to track or control. The widespread neglect of documentation and keeping the proceedings made it harder to reconstruct what was decided and

¹⁶⁸ Vladimir I. Shishkin, "Rasstrel admirala Kolchaka" [Shooting of Admiral Kolchak], *Gumanitarnye nauki v Sibiri. Seriya Otechestvennaya istoriya* no. 2 (1998), 76–84.

¹⁶⁹ Bernard Pares, "Dopros Kolchaka by K. A. Popov," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 8 no. 22 (June 1929), 225–230: 226.

¹⁷⁰ See for instance the "Eyewitness Narrative of the Crisis in Which Kolchak Fell and Bolshevism Triumphed—Documented Story of His Execution," *Current History* 13 no. 1 Part 1 (October 1920), 162–169, which is simply signed "A former member of Kolchak's staff."

¹⁷¹ Sergei Drovkov, "Aleksandr Vasil'yevich Kolchak," *Voprosy istorii* no. 1 (1991), 50–67; G. Ioffe, "Verkhovnyj pravitel' Rossii: dokumenty dela Kolchaka" [Supreme Leader of Russia: Materials of Kolchak's case], *Novyj Zhurnal* no. 235 (2004), <https://magazines.gorky.media/nj/2004/235/verhovnyj-pravitel-rossii-dokumenty-dela-kolchaka.html>, accessed on May 21, 2023.

¹⁷² Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak*, 277, 214.

why.¹⁷³ Although many decisions were ad hoc and dictated by the moment, they aligned well with the principles of revolutionary justice proclaimed by the leadership and the press: simplicity, swiftness, effectiveness, and pragmatism. Accelerated investigations based on insufficient proof or even summary executions without trial were widespread, especially in the Civil War years. During this period, shooting crystallized as the most common method of execution. Despite the multiple other ways available, firearms were handy, practical, and accessible while also being markedly different from the ordinary weapons of peasant or townsfolk violence.

The executions themselves often happened at night and in distant places so that the local population did not learn about them and possibly never find any trace.¹⁷⁴ The absence of funeral rites and burials "on the spot" complemented the picture. Rivers were often used to dispose of bodies, especially when digging graves in distant woods required too much time and work.

After the end of the Civil War, the principle of secrecy expanded to encompass not only singular figures from the enemy camp but an ever-growing number of Soviet citizens suspected of counterrevolutionary activity. In 1922, a circular issued by the Supreme Tribunal of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee officialized the secrecy of executions. In the translation of Nikita Petrov, the circular read: "The body of those shot shall not be released to anybody, shall be buried without any formalities and funerary procedures, in all the clothes in which he/she had been shot, at the place of execution or in any other deserted place and in such a way that there would be no trace of a grave, or else this person shall be sent to a morgue."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Sergei Mel'gunov observed that local Cheka branches "destroyed their precarious paperwork at hasty evacuations or when there was a risk of a revolt (like in Tambov during the Antonov attack)." Mel'gunov, *The Red Terror*, 15. Denis Shkarevskiy agreed that in the Civil war years, tribunals were negligent in the procedures, often did not keep accurate records of processes and verdicts, and tended to execute their sentences hastily: Shkarevskiy, "Military tribunals in the 1920s," 95.

¹⁷⁴ See Yuri Dmitriev's case from 2016-2021 (ongoing). Teplyakov, *The Procedure*, 39–41.

¹⁷⁵ Nikita Petrov, "Group Picture of Soviet Assassins: The Trajectory of Stalinist Executioners from the Revolution to the Great Terror," *Connexe* no. 5 (2019), 155–178: 158.

Petrov observed that from the early 1920s, "information about the shooting was not disclosed even to the family of the executed person if a decision about the execution was taken out of court." According to Alexander Teplyakov, the records of trials and verdicts never left the Cheka system. Relatives of the deceased never received any files from the case (in extreme cases, they were deprived of all information regarding their family members), and neither did Soviet institutions such as civil status registration bureaus.¹⁷⁶ This way, those who acted against the Bolsheviks and were unfortunate enough to get arrested and executed vanished as if they never existed.

Conclusion

Early Soviet practices connected with the political use of death developed in two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, there was death "in the world," visible and even specially highlighted (or rather, it was a postmortem, public funerals, and commemoration). Initially, this was the prerogative of those who had died for the revolution with weapons in their hands or from weapons in the hands of the enemy, no matter whether anarchists with a bomb, a hooligan with a pistol, or the White Guards on the fronts of the Civil War. The selected few revolutionary heroes could count on public recognition of their achievements in the form of a state funeral. But over just a few years, this principle shifted. Instead of honoring heroism and self-sacrificial bravery, the new pantheon started to increasingly include those affiliated with the Bolshevik party, irrespective of the nature of their death.

By all appearances, decisions regarding the specificities of each "red funeral" were situational and unscripted even when it concerned Red Square funerals. Once the revolutionary

¹⁷⁶ Teplyakov, *The Procedure*, 7–8.

rituals cascaded down to the provinces, where no Kremlin funeral committee could make a joint decision about the process, variations were plenty, showing the interplay of social, financial, and cultural influences. With that, variations aimed at emphasizing the individuality of the deceased found themselves within a recognizable canon. Not least in this recognition was the place of burial, which went from being a reward granted for merit to an end in itself. While the ritual was revolutionary, the analysis of female burials hints at the limits of this revolutionary nature, giving an example of how implicit patriarchal attitudes were still in place.

Along with the deaths and funerals of heroes and leaders, another line of Soviet death developed and solidified, namely the elimination and destruction of enemies. A number of actions against enemies of the revolution were public, especially during the Civil War: executions and violation of dead bodies and graves were a tool to intimidate the enemy, and this on both sides of the front (the Bolsheviks did not differ much from the Whites or the Greens). Also, the Civil War taught them to appreciate practicality, haste, and neglect of procedures that were commonsensical at that moment, dictated by time pressure and warlike circumstances no less than by the usual crowd violence practices, not necessarily imbued with revolutionary symbolism. They were then reconceptualized as revolutionary, no-nonsense ways to treat enemies, and the Cheka incorporated some of those aspects into their practices.

At the same time, in those same years, another practice of reprisals against enemies was taking shape, namely, secret extermination - so secret that no evidence was left at all, not even for Bolsheviks' internal use. This was exactly what was done to major figures from the enemy camp, like the royal family or Fanny Kaplan. Their execution and their dead bodies were not used for intimidation; they simply disappeared, and no one ever saw them again.

Significant absences were particularly handy. The absence of funeral rites, graves, or, in extreme cases, even the bodies of enemies was synonymous with their elimination from history as if they never existed. These absences had political significance, especially against the pompous state funerals systematically organized by the Bolsheviks for those fallen in the name of the revolution. Executions of enemies and instances of secretly disposing of their bodies have received various speculative explanations, from the supposed "fear" the Bolsheviks felt at the prospect of their almost illegal acts being exposed to the public to the wartime situation that did not favor adherence to legal procedures, and the principal incompatibility of "revolutionary conscience" with old regime justice. These explanations do not consider the other side of the early Soviet death, which was the glorification of Soviet heroes. Destroying the bodies of enemies in secrecy helped create and maintain a consistent public narrative where there was only a place for those whom the Soviet authorities approved and respected.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Russian revolution of 1917 and the French revolution of 1789 was special already since February 1917. Russians and foreigners, representatives of all political currents, compared the two events, drew analogies, took guesses on who is the next "Russian Marat" from the political figures of the day, and tried to predict the course of Russian political events based on French history. This approach persisted in Soviet Russia throughout the century: even in 1989, the year of its bicentennial, the French Revolution retained political significance, if not in Soviet life, then at least in the official Soviet historiography. Although this significance declined after the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars of 1917 still casually cite examples from French history when talking about Soviet history.

How valid are such parallels, and to what areas of historiography - and history itself - do they apply? Over the last 50-70 years, the fields of political and social history have been studied in detail; this research attempts to analyze the field of culture from a comparative point of view. In some areas, there seems to be a reason for comparison: both revolutions were bloody, took place against a background of internal and external wars, produced a huge number of victims, and – a specific feature – directed their anger not only at the representatives of the *ancien régimes*, but also at fellows revolutionaries (some scholars found this 'purificatory violence' to be the hallmark of revolutions of a particular type, of which the French and the Russian ones are the brightest examples). Excess deaths were a consequence of revolutions that could not be overlooked.

Both revolutions sought to restructure the very foundations of life and to readdress existential questions, and as part of this process, revolutionary governments experimented with practices surrounding death. It is also not to forget that the later revolutionaries were quite

knowledgeable in the history of the former. Do these factors suggest that the Soviets learned from the French? Can we speak of "cultural borrowings," and to what extent did similar situations lead to comparable results?

As the analysis of publications by various authors of 1917-1927 on the Soviet territory shows, the French cultural experience for the Soviet leadership and functionaries served rather as a marker of their shared cultural context than as a guide to action. Mentions of the French experience were many; in the writings of the Bolshevik leaders, frequent were references to French revolutionary violence. The reasons for these frequent references could be noticeable similarities between the types of violence in the two cases as well as the fact that for the Bolshevik leadership, the experience of the Civil War was personally significant (for many of them, it was the first lived experience of full-scale violence). However, similar situations did not mean copying: thus, the lethal aggression against the opposition leaders came later in the Russian revolution than in the French, and the importance of war for the Soviet case was arguably higher than for the French.

In the sphere of culture, music and festivals was the most relevant legacy of the French revolution for the Bolshevik leadership; rare references to antireligious writings of *les philosophes*, while also found in the Bolsheviks' writings, were not among the key tools in the struggle against Orthodoxy in Russia. Politically, the consensus was that the October revolution "surpassed the French." In general, it can be concluded that for the Soviet decision-makers, the history of the French revolution provided a repertoire of references rather than a consistent model to reproduce.

This assessment is confirmed by the analysis of the actions of revolutionary governments in the area of death and funerals. Their strategies were partly similar: it was necessary to glorify heroes (and in such a way that these events had a recognizable revolutionary character), to deal with the pragmatics of burying "ordinary people," and to get rid of enemies. Along with the

comparable secularization drive and the urge for equality, some of the situations that governments in France and Russia faced were also similar.

Administratively, France and Russia faced comparable problems in registering and counting their citizens who belonged to many religious denominations during the old regimes, and respective revolutionary governments made decisive steps towards secularizing such registries. Due to this measure, the administration of death became (or started to become) more equal and standardized.

Attempts to standardize and equalize the material side of funerals were harder to implement. In both countries during the old regime, funeral supplies and accessories reflected social status, and the hierarchical nature of funerals was a feature that both revolutionary governments wanted to leave in the past. But even though they suggested making funerals more modest and equal for all, families of the deceased, who remained key actors in the process, were often unwilling to renounce customary hierarchies. In the Soviet context, egalitarian efforts faced additional complications. The state was willing to step in and become a provider and organizer, substituting for the church and the families. However, the overall economic scarcity and extreme conditions were major impediments in this way, especially during the Civil War. The introduction of full equality proved impossible also because, along with the destruction of the old hierarchy, the revolutionary governments suggested a new one.

During the late *ancien régime* in France, the royal government was already searching for improvements in cemetery management in order to address public hygiene concerns caused by the growing urban population and the consequent lack of burial space. The revolutionary governments pursued similar goals, attempting, at the same time, to enhance accessibility to public cemeteries for representatives of different religious denominations. Simultaneously, philosophical and artistic

projects sought to reimagine cemeteries as serene places for meditation and contemplation. Both these endeavors proved challenging, and their realization stretched beyond the revolutionary decade.

In Russia, secularization and urbanization trends, along with population growth, similarly triggered a lack of burial space, often leading to similar solutions. Urban monastery cemeteries were being closed, and some projects considered repurposing cemetery lands and tombs (suggested options included promenades, sports activities, or using tombstones for construction purposes). New cemeteries were established on the outskirts of towns to accommodate the increasing numbers of the dead. Hygienic concerns played a massive role in these projects; however, the most technologically advanced solution proposed in this respect – cremation – did not gain widespread acceptance due to its radical nature and cultural reservations.

Nonetheless, these decisions were made independently. From the early Soviet sources and discussions I analyzed, it was clear that one could not speak of "learning from the predecessors" in the pragmatic aspects of death-related practices. Soviet legislators and innovators did not look back at any historical precedent to solve practical problems they faced. Talking about the French model specifically, it can be noted that knowledge of the French revolution that the Soviet legislators and innovators had hardly covered the nuances of delivering new metrics templates from Paris to the provinces, the lack of funds for cemetery transfer or other aspects that could have been useful for solving the pragmatic issues at hand. For the Bolsheviks, ideological underpinnings of actions taken in the death-related sphere played a less significant role than urgent practical considerations and common sense.

Less commonsensical and more ideologically loaded were rituals, symbols, and aesthetics that marked funerals in the two revolutionary contexts as events of the new political order and

made participants and audiences see, hear, and feel the profound transformation that the revolutions brought. Eliminating the old religious symbols and practices and introducing revolutionary ones were two pillars of this process. In France, it took the revolutionaries some time to acknowledge their dead, and the gap between the old and the new grew gradually. The decreasing role of the church shifted accents from the holy mass to the grand procession in the French revolutionary funerals. However, performing the holy mass and saying prayers for the rest of the souls of the revolutionary dead remained an element in the rituals during the decade in question. The choice of the cortège's route, participants' list, and symbolic accessories were linked to the person of the deceased and their contribution to the revolutionary cause and/or to the nation. On rare occasions, contrary to tradition, the dead bodies of revolutionary martyrs were exposed during the ceremony to inspire the desire for vengeance among those present – a temporary solution that did not become the norm but marked a tense episode of *la patrie en danger*.

The Pantheon was built in Paris to honor the exceptional great men who had distinguished themselves before the nation, an ultimate manifestation of glory and acknowledgment. It soon turned out, however, that selecting those worthy of this honor was a challenging task linked to the current political situation. Intense controversies, endless debates, and eventual depantheonizations undermined the eternal claim that the constructors of the Pantheon had made.

In Russia, a tradition of political funeral marches-turned-manifestations has existed since the 1870s; it strengthened after the first Russian revolution of 1905. Its most recognizable features – singing revolutionary songs and playing orchestra music instead of tolling church bells and saying prayers, and the abundant use of red color – combined expressive powers and political message. In 1917, this tradition became a national one. The absence of priesthood became the most visible marker of novelty. One further trait was a special selection of burial grounds: the

revolutionary dead were not necessarily buried in cemeteries but in city centers or places charged with political significance. Somewhat controversially, many "victims and heroes" were buried in communal graves. This solution was circumstantial – soldiers of the revolution died together and were buried together – and bore an influence of wartime norms; from the traditional point of view, collective burials were an anomaly that could only be tolerated in exceptional situations. Individual graves came to be used again once the situation allowed.

Comparatively speaking, there were more differences than similarities in French and early Soviet death-related revolutionary symbolism. Albeit grand funeral ceremonies, with their symbolic and spatial variety, were one of the brightest features of the two revolutionary decades, there was not much stylistic continuity between them. For the Soviet context, the underground tradition going back to the 1870s in Russia was more important than the French revolutionary funeral aesthetics inspired by antiquity.

In both contexts, public thinkers addressed the problem of concordance between the traditional rituals and the new world the country entered with the revolution, and argued in favor of new, more rational practices that would reflect the new life. Despite heated debates and sometimes intense propaganda aimed at introducing "new rituals for all," even the reproduction of the brightest features of grand funerals during the funerals of "ordinary people" was met with resistance and controversy.

In the Soviet case, the demonstrative break with the priesthood was radical enough and visible enough to become, in the eyes of the population, a marker of "revolutionary," "red," "Communist," or "Bolshevik" funerals, as proven by the examples from letters, diaries, and propaganda press. These terms were used interchangeably in the sources I consulted, manifesting

the beginning of the blending between "revolutionary" and "Bolshevik" that intensified in the 1930s.

Beyond the revolutionary decade, the "revolutionary" elements of death-related practices mixed with the traditional ones rather than overshadowing or eliminating them. What survived of these innovations beyond the immediate post-revolutionary period was not necessarily related to the revolution but rather to the nation and/or the state. The grand funeral events characteristic of the French revolutionary decade had run their course with the revolution, but the Panthéon remained a factor in France's social, political, and cultural life. The Red Square necropolis in Moscow was used until the mid-1980s, accommodating not the heroic fighters but Party leaders and politicians (General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko was the last to be buried there in 1985).

The subtle changes already in the first post-revolutionary decade made the blending of "revolutionary" and "state" possible. In the Soviet context, over ten post-revolutionary years, the affiliation of the illustrious dead with the nation, state, or the ruling party prevailed over revolutionary overtones. Anonymous soldiers of the revolution were buried in communal graves in revolutionary necropoles from roughly 1917-1921; during the following five to seven years, well-known party leaders were being increasingly honored by individual burials in those necropoles, and the chances of unknown fighters to get such posthumous honors drastically declined. Burials and reburials of foreign Communists in the Soviet necropoles secured Soviet Russia's international status as the final destination of all Communists everywhere.

While readiness to die for the common cause remained a virtue, according to the public debates, it should not have been confused with the willingness to die. I analyzed the controversies surrounding suicide to show how, despite the alarming numbers of self-killings in the mid-1920s, especially among "comrades," the party leadership preferred to interpret suicide as a marker of

weak will and lack of revolutionary devotion. Those who could not pull themselves together and overcome the hardships of life did not deserve to be cared for.

Over the ten years after the October revolution, funerals and burials changed for the non-supporters of the Bolshevik regime. If, during the summer of 1917, the notion of "fallen for the revolution" could still be contested, as demonstrated by the example of the Cossack funerals in July 1917, after October, negotiations around this term were no longer possible. The notion of "revolutionary consciousness" that should have guided the decisions of the newly created revolutionary tribunals also proved problematic. It quickly turned out that there was no common understanding of what "revolutionary consciousness" was, and the sentences delivered based on said consciousness were less radical and more unpredictable than the Bolshevik leadership had expected. Trials against the enemies of the regime started becoming increasingly staged, while the executions of the regime's enemies started becoming increasingly secret. The practice of secret executions spread over the broader numbers of "enemies" during the following decade.

Retrospectively, revolutions often seem like watersheds that irreparably divide the past and the present. But how radical the death-related practices really were in the two contexts? The revolutionary change can be deemed definitive and successful for the administration of death and cemetery management: the revolutionary governments in France and Russia brought latent tendencies and dormant problems to the open and suggested bold initiatives to bring death-related practices to a new level of progress. With that, some innovations implemented after the revolutions had been suggested and designed under the old regimes; it was not the ideas but their realization that was new. Furthermore, funeral provisions or distributing responsibilities during the funeral organization continued the pre-revolutionary practices rather than breaking with them. And the technical inventions radical enough to become virtual symbols of revolutionary innovations – the

guillotine in France, the crematorium in Soviet Russia – were controversial, causing disgust and aversion rather than inspiring awe in the face of progress.

While solutions that were initially "revolutionary" were increasingly associated with the state, its international interests, and the official party course, some traditional assumptions and presuppositions related to funerals and burials were never challenged. Thus, the new hierarchy of Bolshevik dead substituted the old one, but the fact that some dead deserved better than others was never questioned. There are reasons to believe that decisions about funerals of the female "glorious revolutionaries" were motivated by their interpersonal relations with males – quite a traditional, if not traditionalist, approach. Secret executions of the regime's enemies, absence of burials and/or neglect of their bodies were also in line with the traditional idea of the fundamental importance of a proper funeral, the absence of which signaled total defeat. Revolutionary – meaning unheard of before – was only the scale on which these actions began to take place.

The contributions of this study, as its goals, are twofold. Methodologically, I have performed a multi-level comparison between two contexts that have long been considered comparable, especially in sociopolitical aspects. My comparison, however, lay in the spheres that have not been studied comparatively before: the sphere of everyday culture and death-related practices. After outlining the perceptions of later revolutionaries vis-à-vis earlier revolutionaries, I showed the limits of these perceptions, the common features in the two contexts brought to life by similar tendencies, and the cultural differences at the points of intersection.

The comparison of the two revolutionary contexts also made it possible to show that the story of "continuous revolutionary legacy" was a myth: buzzwords whose content changed according to the political needs of the moment. One further comparative observation that can be made is that if the French revolution was not a model to imitate, neither were the Russian

revolution and its heroes, at least not for long. As the Bolshevik state solidified, anonymous freedom fighters and party leaders whose names were hard to recall virtually stopped being used to mobilize their fellow citizens for further struggle or to motivate them to imitate their heroic example. Unlike the dashing Civil War fighters, such as Vasily Chapaev, the heroes of the revolution quickly became a thing of the past when the revolution was over, melting into the background of annual marches and state holiday parades. Their funerals became political manifestations, paving the way for many other similar state events to come. Deindividualized stories of their deaths praised not their personal traits but a relentless devotion to the cause that was common to them all. For a young man or woman looking for inspiration, there was not much to find.

The empty wrapper of myths allowed them to be filled with new content as needed. The most powerful infusion was, of course, the Second World War (known in the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia as the Great Patriotic War). It added more tragic figures to the list of heroes and to the narrative of "necropedagogy" (to borrow the expression of Maria Tumarkin) that had started to form in the 1920s. The narrative proved persistent: even by the end of the Soviet century, new generations continued to refer to the examples of heroic self-sacrifice as significant for their personality. Some would refer to the young WWII heroes as their role models, as did Maria Tumarkin, who, as a child in the 1970s and early 1980s, was deeply impressed by the story of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. She "compulsively reimagined and restaged in [her] mind" Zoya's last moments and tried her destiny on: "Kosmodemyanskaya served as a trigger for a seemingly inescapable question, "What would I do in her place?"¹ Others, as Catherine Merridale, would interview war veterans in the 1990s to hear from "men and women, officers or not" stories about

¹ Maria Tumarkin, "Productive death: The necropedagogy of a young Soviet hero," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (2011), 885–900: 885, 887.

the Soviet people's extraordinary toughness. "Soviet citizens assumed themselves to be above the weaknesses and neuroses of the Western allies."² And some, as Svetlana Adonyeva (born 1963), would, as a kid, tremble in awe visiting war monuments because of the feeling that "every Soviet person in their ultimate realization is a hero. He is immortal, and even his enemies attest to that. I am a Soviet person; ergo, I belong to this community of heroes...."³

And here enters the third key theme of the study, the theme of death and its politicization. Revolution does not necessarily have to deal with the reorganization of death and funerals, although excess deaths result from the revolution and concerns everyone. The fact that both revolutions dealt with these issues in one way or another emphasizes their ambitions to remake human existence on new grounds. In the words of Thomas Laqueur, "The dead make civilization on a grand and an intimate scale, everywhere and always: their historical, philosophical, and anthropological weight is enormous and almost without limit and compare. As such, death and the dead may not have a history in the usual sense but only more and more iterations, endless and infinitely varied, that we shape into an engagement with the past and the present."⁴

In both cases, the success of this enterprise – the remaking of all life on new grounds – was at least incomplete. In the Soviet case, it was often substitution, wishful thinking, and/or sweeping inconvenient facts under the rug instead. Nevertheless, I hope I have been able to point to discrepancies between facts and narratives and between narratives produced by different narrators with different purposes and agendas. The mutual influence of various actors is also something that a micro-historical study of past revolutions brings to the fore. As a close look reveals, facts themselves form at the intersection of different wills and actions, and even in times of strong

² Merridale, "The collective mind," 47.

³ Svetlana Adonyeva, *Kategorija nenastoyashego vremeni. Antropologicheskie ocherki* [Category of the non-present time. Essays in anthropology] (Saint-Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 2001), 138–139.

⁴ Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 11–12.

governments and severe measures, there are wormholes, ways around the corner, subtle resistance strategies, and slip-ups in which life goes its ways.

Appendix 1.

"В стариковской паутине". *Безбожник у станка* №2 (1926), с. 11.

Из красной армии домой я приехал безбожником и стал устраивать семейную жизнь по-новому. ... Но вот у нас родился еще ребенок. Жена говорит, что надо крестить, а я – против этого, стал жену убеждать, что мы и так все сделаем: зарегистрируем в ЗАГС'е и дело с концом.

Но жену отговаривает ее старуха-мать.

– Ты, – говорит, – дочка, своего большевика-то не слушай, а крести, как и все люди-то делают. А то, что он у нас будет некрещеный. Шариком что ль его назовешь?

Но жену все-таки удалось убедить и мы крестить не стали, а зарегистрировали в ЗАГС'Е и назвали Кларой.

Ребенок у нас прожил недолго — помер. Тут-то уж борьба гораздо труднее, чем не крестить. Все старухи шепчут моей жене:

– Смотри, не подумай хоронить, как большевики хоронят, со знаменами, тогда ребенок-то в гробу перевернется вниз лицом и будет приходить по ночам домой. Не придавшись земле никак нельзя.

Жена совсем растерялась, наслушавшись бабушек. Долго мне пришлось жену убеждать и в конце-концов удалось убедить и схоронили ребенка без попа. Вырыли могилу, покрыли гроб красным миткалем и понесли вдвоем с женой хоронить...

(много времени спустя зашел разговор)

Жена засмеялась.

– А ты думаешь, что мы так и не крестили и не хоронили с попом? Нет, мы, как только ты уехал, ее окрестили и назвали Клавдией.

– Меня, – говорит, – старухи со свету сжили. Крести да крести. Как это ангельская душка некрещена будет. А поп сговорился с нами, говорит, что мы это все обделаем так, что никто не узнает. Так и обделали. Пришел поп на дом и окрестил в ведре, в холодной воде. А также мы и похоронили ее с попом. Ночью в 12 часов поп ходил с моей матерью на кладбище и предавал земле. ...

Г. Козлов. Владимирская губ.

"In the old folks' net." *Atheist at the Workbench* no. 2 (1926), 11.

I returned from the red army as an atheist and started organizing my family life in a new way ... And then we had another baby. My wife says we should baptize her, and I was against it. So I started to persuade her that we could do without it: we would register her at ZAGS, and that'd be the end of it.

But her old mother tried to talk my wife out of it, saying:

– You, daughter, don't you listen to your Bolshevik. Baptize the child as all people do. How will she not be christened? Will you also name her after a dog?

But I still persuaded my wife, and we did not baptize her but registered her at ZAGS and named her Klara.

The child did not live long and died. The struggle here was much more intense than with baptism. All the old women whispered to my wife:

– Careful, don't you dare bury her as Bolsheviks bury, with banners: then the child will turn her face down in the coffin and will haunt your home at night. It's not right without the ceremony.

Having listened to the old nannies, my wife was perplexed. Persuading her took a long time, and in the end, I managed to prevail on her, and we buried the child without a priest. The grave dug, the coffin covered with a red cloth, my wife and I buried it, just the two of us...

(Long after, the story came up in the conversation.)

My wife laughed.

– You still think that we did not baptize her and did not bury her with a priest? As soon as you were gone, we baptized her and named her Klavdia.

– The old women drove me to my grave, – my wife said. – They insisted that I should baptize her. How can an angelic soul live without being baptized? And the priest conspired with us; he said that we would do everything so that no one would know. So, we did. The priest came to our home and baptized her in a bucket, in cold water. And we buried her with the priest the same way. At midnight, the priest went to the cemetery with my mother and performed the ritual...

G. Kozlov, Vladimir *gubernia*.

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