

# The Role of Pan-Slavism in Modernising the Russian Empire: The Slavic Benevolent Committee and the Development of an Alternative Philosophy of History

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## Abstract

This article seeks to show how in an attempt to resolve the exclusion of the Russian Empire from the Western philosophy of history, a group of Russian Pan-Slavist intellectuals associated with the Slavic Benevolent Committee developed an alternative Slavic philosophy of history. According to this philosophy, the Russian Empire was not simply included into history but was identified as the harbinger of its completion, thereby reconceptualising it as a developed nation. In order to reconstruct the Slavic philosophy of history, I focus on the intellectual activity of the Slavic Benevolent Committee, 1858-1878, with an in-depth analysis of two publications: *Cyrillo-Methodian Almanac* (1865) and the first volume of the *History of the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee* (1871). Finally, I look at the ways in which the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition 1867 was designed to reflect the Slavic philosophy of history.

## Keywords

Pan-Slavism, Russian Empire, Philosophy of History, Slavic Benevolent Committee, Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition 1867, Hegel

In 1835, a piece of St Cyril's hand, at the time held in Paris, was to be transported to the Moravian metropolitanate, the site where hundreds of years ago, St Methodius blessed a church. Mikhail Pogodin, a professor of history at the Moscow Imperial University, happened to be in Prague at the same time. He eagerly asked his Czech and Slovak colleagues, luminaries of West Slavic Pan-Slavism, Václav Hanka, Pavel Šafárik, and Ján Kollár, to give him a small piece of the relic. His wish was granted. And in 1855, a piece of St Cyril's hand made its way to Moscow Imperial University, a gift from Pogodin to celebrate its hundred-year anniversary.<sup>1</sup>

At least that is how the encounter is recounted by Ivan Aksakov in a letter documenting the commemoration celebrations at Moscow University in 1862, marking a millennium of Slavonic literacy introduced by St Cyril and Methodius. This story would be nothing more than an anecdote with a doubtful provenance had it not implied the passing of the not-so-metaphorical torch from the West Slav Pan-Slavists to the Russian Pan-Slavists, portending the future reunion of the Slavic peoples under the auspices of the Russian Empire. In the same letter Aksakov states, 'This celebration serves as a pledge for the future spiritual reunion of all Slavs, a link tying together all of the scattered brothers.'<sup>2</sup> Both events documented in Aksakov's letter, Pogodin bringing a piece of St Cyril's hand to Russia and the commemoration of a millennium of Slavonic literacy, are less representative of religious zeal as of a metaphysical conviction in the rise of a Pan-Slavic civilization. A conviction which was cultivated by the professorial and student circles at the Moscow University and actively propagated in the public sphere.

The need for a broader Pan-Slavic civilization and Russia's re-location within it was an intellectual response to European historical developments which identified Russia as a civilizational outlier. The Old Regime of Europe, reconstructed in Vienna in 1815 and embodied by Russia within its official ideology of 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality', progressively eroded over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> First, it was challenged by

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Aksakov, '11 Maya v Moskve (1862)', in *Kirillo-Mefodievskiy Sbornik*, ed. Mikhail Pogodin (Moskva: Sinodalnaya Tipografia, 1865), pp. 534-542 (p. 537).

<[https://archive.org/details/libgen\\_00299068/page/n3/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/libgen_00299068/page/n3/mode/2up)> [Accessed 7 January 2022]

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 534.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Malia, *Russia under the Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 139.

the 1830 July Revolution in France and the attempted 1830 Polish Revolt. This left Austria, Prussia, and Russia as the only autocratic monarchies on the continent, increasingly surrounded by liberal forces. In 1848, the Springtime of the Peoples challenged the now Central-Eastern European status quo. Even though the Tsarist forces quelled the Hungarian Revolution in 1849, they could not stop the quiet Austrian adoption of a constitution in 1848 and the introduction of a constitution by Frederick William of Prussia in 1850. Russia found itself isolated: the last autocratic monarchy with a system of serfdom left in Europe; the only power still embodying the Old Regime.

Many Russian intellectuals had anticipated Russia's isolation at least twenty years prior to the debacle of the 1850s.<sup>4</sup> For them, however, the isolation in question was inherently historio-metaphysical and prompted questions about Russia's relation to Europe and World History more widely. Walicki comprehensively outlines how the adoption of idealistic metaphysics in the Russian intellectual milieu in the 1820s, via Schellingianism by way of Moscow Imperial University, were instrumental in shaping Russia's historical exceptionalism, which would 'breathe new life into all that was best in European civilization'.<sup>5</sup> This exceptionalism was based on the idea that Russia had preserved the instinctive powers lost by the inhabitants of Western Europe under the influence of rationalism. However, by the 1840s it was becoming increasingly obvious that Russia's exceptionalism still had no effect on Europe, now bogged down in scepticism and unbelief. For Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), one of the original adepts of idealistic metaphysics, Hegel simultaneously represented the apotheosis and bankruptcy of Western enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Whereas, for the new generation of Moscow University alumni, Hegelianism was a breath of fresh air and a hope for rehabilitating Russian exceptionalism.

The most renowned minds of the nineteenth century – Vissarion Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin, Alexander Herzen, Konstantin Aksakov – all traced their intellectual roots back to Moscow

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<sup>4</sup> Edward J. Brown, 'The Circle of Stankevich', *The American Slavic and Eastern European Review*, 16 (1957), pp. 349-368 (p. 352).

<sup>5</sup> Andzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought, From Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ivan Kireevsky, 'O kharaktere prosveshchiesnia Evropy I ego otnoshenie k prosveshcheniu Rosii', 1852. <[http://www.odinblago.ru/kireevski\\_t1/4](http://www.odinblago.ru/kireevski_t1/4)> [Accessed 27 November 2023]

University and the Hegelianism cultivated at the Circle of Stankevich.<sup>7</sup> However, seminal historical works tend to consider Hegel's impact on Russian thought only insofar as it explains the development of Russian materialism or socialism. For instance, Martin Malia stresses in *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (1961) how Hegelianism in Russia, similar to Hegelianism in Germany, led to the rise of social radical movements targeting the ills of these respective societies.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Isaiah Berlin's essay 'The Remarkable Decade' holds that Hegelianism inspired Russian intellectuals active between 1838 to 1848 to adopt the dialectics of the progressive evolution of the spirit and realisation of freedom and adapt it to Russian autocratic realities; with a particular fascination with Alexander Herzen's revolutionary programme.<sup>9</sup> Both authors dismiss any school of thought outside of this intellectual trajectory as outdated, romantic, and unserious – epitomised by the Slavophile camp.

Andzej Walicki is one of the first historians to consider Hegel's influence on the overlooked Slavophiles. For instance, in *The Slavophile Controversy*, Walicki labels Konstantin Aksakov, Aleksei Khomiakov, and Ivan Kireevsky as 'Orthodox-Christian Hegelians', and discusses the ways in which they attempted to reconcile Slavophile ideas with Hegelian philosophy and produce a Russian philosophy of history.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Walicki judges the Slavophiles' attempt at Hegelianism as failed. He concludes that it was their inability to reconcile the notion that philosophy is the ultimate revelation of the Absolute with their belief that Orthodoxy achieved the same goal that led to Slavophilism's disintegration.<sup>11</sup> Ana Slijak, however, reconsiders this judgement and convincingly shows that the Slavophiles did not pursue Hegelianism, frequently dismissing it. Nevertheless, they could not avoid Hegel's philosophy of history. Slavophiles adopted it in their own thought by inverting its assumptions and conclusions to

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<sup>7</sup> Edward J. Brown, 'The Circle of Stankevich', p. 349.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 229.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'A Remarkable Decade' in *Russian Thinkers*, ed. by Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin Books, 2008), pp.130-240 (p.165).

<sup>10</sup> Andzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 300.

<sup>11</sup> Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 109.

align with Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> This impasse between the Slavophiles and Russian Left Hegelians dominated the intellectual thought of the 1840s and early 1850s, with no certainty of it ever progressing onwards.

For many historians, Russia's defeat in the Crimean War in 1855 and the death of Nicholas I was the turning point that transformed Russian thought into radical action. According to Walicki, mere contemplation of Russian reality was no longer sufficient to facilitate its transformation; evoking Karl Marx's famous dictum 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.'<sup>13</sup> In the 1860s, elements of Herzen's socialist thought were adopted by populists, some of whom were also nihilists, determined to force Russia into the future. While Slavophilism is considered defunct due to its inherent retrospection, the most provocative remnants of this thought matured into militaristic Pan-Slavism (but otherwise had a limited systemic influence on the further development of Russian thought).<sup>14</sup> Such an unsympathetic treatment of Slavophilism as backward, outdated, and useless is a direct borrowing of Russian Left Hegelians' critique of Slavophilism. Following the same assumptions, Hans Rogger also suggests that Slavophilism developed into Pan-Slavist militarism. However, in contrast to Walicki, he confirms Slavophilism's systemic influence on Russian thought, especially as a stage in the development of Russian Rightism.<sup>15</sup> Thus, there remained no use for the metaphysics of the early nineteenth century. According to traditional historiography, the two options left for Russian scholars were grounded on firm materialism, either as conservative militarism or revolutionary radicalism.

However, Aksakov's letter from 1862 suggests that neither idealism nor Hegelianism were fully exhausted in Russian thought. The year 1855 — the year Pogodin donated St Cyril's relic to Moscow University as a gesture of Slavic unity — was also the year of Russia's defeat in the Crimean War and the death of Nicholas I. The timing implied an almost divine intervention in

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<sup>12</sup> Ana Slijak, 'Between East and West: Hegel and the Origins of the Russian Dilemma', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), 335-358 (p. 350).

<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 171-173 (p.173).

<sup>14</sup> Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 291.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Rogger, 'Russia', in *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, ed. by Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 443-500.

Russia's historical development. Russia's isolation as a pariah, following the 1856 Treaty of Paris and the Ottoman Empire gaining territories populated by Slavs and Orthodox Christians, provided enough encouragement for the generations that flirted with Hegel and the rationalisation of history to interpret these events and Russia's role in them through an alternative philosophy of history. The pursuit of such a philosophy of history was embodied by the work of Russian Pan-Slavists in the 1860s. Thus, while the Pan-Slavism of the 1860s produced enough material to be considered a school of thought in its own right, it has yet to be explored as such. The extent of Hegel's influence on Pan-Slavism is also yet to be established.

Russian Pan-Slavism, frequently dismissed in historiography as a marginal and irredentist movement, in fact dominated the pages of journals, university lectures, and as this paper will show, exhibition halls.<sup>16</sup> And where it did not find support in numbers, it would find support among the brightest minds of the period. For almost all adherents of Russian Pan-Slavism, it was considered a means to resolve a problem of civilizational scale. A problem which at its crux was a problem of modernity, based on the teleological assumption that developed states had to be historic nation states. The states that would not comfortably fit into the narrative produced by this assumption, most famously Russia, were conceptualised as backward: a state cannot be developed because it is not a historic nation state.

The standard of development that arose in the nineteenth century continues to haunt the most recent historiography of the same period. Geoffrey Hosking produced a variation of the argument above, stating that the backwardness of the Russian Empire was symptomatic of Russian empire-building obstructing Russian nation-building.<sup>17</sup> Numerous historians of Russia, to avoid this teleology and backwardness, had attempted to reconcile the Russian Empire with Russian nation-building, hence proving that national consciousness does not always lead to nation-states.<sup>18</sup> However, these historians tend to look specifically at Russian nationalism as

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<sup>16</sup> For the dominant interpretation of Russian Pan-Slavism, see: Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (New York: Vintage Books), 1960; Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism 1856-1870*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> See: Olga Maiorova, *In the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010); Velko Vujačić, *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia:*

the means of this reconciliation, overlooking the influence of Pan-Slavism, and dismissing it as confusing and an incoherent philosophical system, or reducing it to a variation of Russian nationalism. This article seeks to expand this scholarship further by looking at Russian Pan-Slavism in its own right, as a pan-national movement, not just a variation of Russian nationalism.

In this article, I do not counter that Russia was not conceptualised as a developed state, especially during the nineteenth century. I do, however, argue that what obstructed Russia from ‘developing’ was its conceptual exclusion from history in the Western intellectual imagination, based on Hegel’s philosophy of history. In other words, while the Russian state was not developed, its lack of development was relative, rather than essential, and determined by a Western philosophy of history. I do purport that the adherents of Pan-Slavism — not as an ideology, but as a transnational, religious, intellectual movement — were able to reimagine Russia as developed by producing two innovations: an alternative philosophy of history and the concept of a Slavic nation as the vector of this history.

The subject of this article will be the intellectual activity of the Slavic Benevolent Committee and its members from 1858 to 1878, including: the publications issued by the Committee, the works of their members and events co-organised by the members of the Committee, notably the Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867. The structure of this article will be the following. In the first section, I outline how Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* produced a national hierarchy, excluding the Russian Empire from history. In the second section, I will show how the proponents of Pan-Slavism attempt to resolve this problem by producing an alternative philosophy of history in favour of a Slavic world, in turn, conceptually modernising Russia as ‘developed’. In the third and final section, I demonstrate how the Pan-Slav innovations were popularised during the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition 1867.

## Section I: The exclusion of the Russian Empire from History

### Hegel’s Philosophy of History and the Model of National Hierarchy

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*Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Alexei Miller, ‘The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation’, in *Nationalizing Empires*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

Hegel's philosophy of history is constructed on three bases. First, that the absolute end-goal of World History is the full consciousness of the World Spirit, also expounded as the realisation of freedom.<sup>19</sup> Second, World History is the gradual, linear, progressive process of revealing the consciousness of the World Spirit that eventually leads to the end-goal absolute freedom. This development occurs due to dialectics of progression. This can be understood as a progression from the most simplistic to the most developed state of consciousness, measured by the extent to which it conforms with the World Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Third, there are stages in World History, and each stage represents a particular configuration of self-consciousness in the form of a world-historical realm.<sup>21</sup> Hegel identified each stage with specific nations. In *Philosophy of Right* he identifies four main 'world-historical realms': Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic.<sup>22</sup> It is these nations that are predominant in World History at that stage, developing their own faculties and simultaneously developing the self-consciousness of the World Spirit. It remains unclear whether other nations, those excluded from the periodisation, must pursue this linear progression by imitation, by developing their own faculties, or are excluded from World History altogether.

According to Frederick Beiser, this goal — the development of the full consciousness of the World Spirit — is not purely formal and abstract; each culture achieves it in its own unique way. Beiser goes on to elaborate how while Hegel's philosophy of history operates on two levels, horizontal and vertical. The horizontal level allows for the nation to adapt to its economic, geographic, and climactic conditions, then each nation will have unique values, in turn promoting the consciousness of the World Spirit. Simultaneously, the vertical level consists in World History and the contribution each nation made towards the realization of its end.<sup>23</sup> This implies different nations promoting different ways of progressing towards the self-consciousness of the World Spirit.

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<sup>19</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'The State as the Realization of Spirit', in *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. by Leo Rauch (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 40-57 (p. 56).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, 'Appendix: from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*', in *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, pp. 99-106 (p. 103).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-105.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, 'Hegel and Historicism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 270-301 (pp. 279-280).



Beiser's assumption that nations were allowed to develop their own ways into history may apply to the nations that are considered 'epoch-making in history': Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic. However, for the nations not listed in this periodisation this interpretation is not fully convincing. It seems inconclusive whether Hegel believed that any other nations were able to reach the end-goal of World History by their own means at all. This is further substantiated by Hegel's statement that the 'epoch-making' nation in history has an 'absolute right as the vehicle of the World Spirit [...] Against it, the spirits of other nations have no rights — and they, along with those whose epoch has passed, do not count at that time in World History.'<sup>24</sup>

History, then, culminates in Europe, in the spirit of the Germanic realm. Hegel writes in the *Philosophy of History*, 'World History goes from East to West: as Asia is the beginning of history, so Europe is simply its end.'<sup>25</sup> Hence, any nation that either already passed into history or who was never crowned as an 'epoch-making' one is insignificant to history, potentially even excluded from it. And since World History culminates in Europe, any nation that remains outside of this World History, remains outside of Europe. With regards to the 'nation' that concerns us, that is, Russia, Karl Löwith writes 'His [Hegel's] world was still the Christian Occident, old Europe. America and Russia...were only on the periphery of his interest'.<sup>26</sup>As a result, those nations left in the periphery of Hegel's interest could easily be interpreted as either representing nations that already passed into history or were simply beyond history, essentialist and static, reduced to an object of comparison to highlight the World Spirit culminating in Europe. Regardless of the imagined fate of these nations, this constructed a national hierarchy, of nations more developed and more revealing of the World Spirit, and those that were backward or completely outside of history.

While not directly damning to the Russian Empire, Hegel's philosophy of history produced a model of national hierarchy that identified certain nations as vehicles for progress towards an end-goal, hence as more valuable, while others as either insignificant or completely ahistorical. This established a standard of development. Development then can be measured by the nation's proximity to a historical purpose. The process of development, then, is a nation

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<sup>24</sup> Hegel, 'Appendix: from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*', in *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, 'The Division of History', in *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, pp. 92-99 (p. 92).

<sup>26</sup> Karl Löwith, 'Hegel', in *Meaning in History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 52-60 (p. 58).

justifying that it exists as a vehicle for progress towards a historical end-goal. In this sense, if a country is nonhistorical it cannot ever become developed because its nation will never progress close enough to the historical purpose.

It is the diffusion of this conceptual model and the popularisation of history as a progression towards a purpose facilitated by nations that possessed both the key to the exclusion of the Russian Empire and Slavs from history and the key to its inclusion back within history.

## The Russian Intellectuals' Awareness of the Exclusion from History

Russian intellectuals were aware of the Russian Empire's seemingly alienated position within history. Pyotr Chaadaev lamented in his *Philosophical Letters* 'We [Russia] exist as if beyond the limits of time and as if we were never touched by the universal education of humanity.'<sup>27</sup> Chaadaev wrote his letters in between 1826 and 1831 in French, years before Hegel's *Philosophy of History* was published. In the letters Chaadaev explained how Russia lagged behind Western civilization and did not contribute anything to the world's progress.<sup>28</sup> These letters were written after Chaadaev's three-year journey across Europe and meetings with Friedrich Schelling and Félicité de la Mennais, which heightened his sense of Russia's alienation from Western civilization.<sup>29</sup> This only serves to emphasise the standards of development, world progress, and World History that existed in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, informing Hegel's thought, and how the Russian Empire did not comfortably fit into that.

While for Chaadaev this existence of Russia beyond time was a tragedy, for Russian Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists later in the nineteenth century the Western *perception* of Russia not having a history was an absurdity. On the 11 May 1863, Pogodin made a speech in the Society of Lovers of Russian Literacy where he sardonically declared: 'with Belinsky's heavy hand, finding many followers and even admirers who declare in all ears that Russians have no history, no ancestors,

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism 1856-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Filosofskiyi Encyklopedicheskiy Slovar*, ed. by L.F. Ilyichev, P.N. Fedoseev, S.M. Kovalev, V. G. Panov, Moskva: Sovetskaya Encyclopedia, 1983, p. 767, <<https://www.runivers.ru/upload/iblock/1b4/filosofsky%20slovar.pdf>> [Accessed 6 January 2022].

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

no language [...] everything is borrowed, foreign, stolen. Finally, there exist certain *esprits forts*, who proved to learned Europe, that we too do not exist: *Niema Rusi!* [There is no Russia!].'<sup>30</sup>

The admirers and followers identified by Pogodin were not the Western followers of Hegel or Young Hegelians but the Westernisers, of which Chaadaev was the first and Vissarion Belinsky was the most famous. One of the main ideas of Westernisers was the assumption that Russia can only progress if it pursues the Western model of historical development. Nevertheless, Pogodin's *cri de coeur* reflected the frustrations that Western Europe presented for the Russian culture, one where you would always need to prove the Russian nation's historical existence and value. But the logic of this dictum, that Russians did not have a history and that all culture in Russia was stolen from the West, was used in Engels' analysis of the Austrian Slavs during the revolutions of 1848: 'We concluded yesterday with the proof that the Austrian Slavs have never had a history of their own, that from the historical, literary, political, commercial, and industrial points of view they are dependent on the Germans and Magyars, that they are already partly Germanised, Magyarised, and Italianised.'<sup>31</sup> It also motioned to the assumption, partially reflected in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, that progress in history, and hence culture, could only be guaranteed by the 'epoch-making' nations; in this case, like the Germans or Magyars. The Slavs could only appropriate the 'epoch-making' culture and have their own erased.

This perceived lack of history and a failure to progress vis-à-vis Europe is what united Russia with the Slavs in Europe. This was a significant factor in the development of Russian Pan-Slavism because it directed the focus on proving that Slavic peoples had a history, and that it motioned them towards the world-historical end-goal.

## Section II: A Slavic Philosophy of History

### Slavophilism and an Attempt at a Russian Philosophy of History

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<sup>30</sup> 'Riech proiznoshonaya v zasedanii moskovskogo obshchestva lyubitelei rossiyskoi slovestnosti predsedatelem M. P. Pogodinym 11 maya 1863 goda, v pyamyat' o Kirille I Mefodii' in *Sbornik*, pp. 81-145 (p. 143).

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Democratic Pan-Slavism', *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, No. 223, 1849, p. 362, in *Marxists Internet Archive Library*

<<https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1849/02/15.htm>> [Accessed 07 January 2022].

Before we venture to discuss the Slavic philosophy of history developed by Russian Pan-Slavists in the 1860s, it is necessary to first acknowledge that its assumptions, structure, and to some extent conclusions were inspired by a Russian philosophy of history as attempted by Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856) and Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-1860) in the 1840s. As mentioned above, Kireevsky and Khomiakov were known to their contemporaries as the Slavophiles. They were of a generation that preceded the Russian Hegelians of Stankevich's Circle and were mostly influenced by Schelling. Nevertheless, they were also familiar with Hegel.

Kireevsky agreed with Hegel's notion that Western European history was the history of progress of reason and increasing individual freedom.<sup>32</sup> He also believed Hegel to be right to identify that only a philosopher looking from a vantage point of history would be able to consciously reflect on it.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Kireevsky also developed a critique of Hegel's philosophy of history originating from his devout belief in Orthodox Christianity. Kireevsky disagreed that Hegel was the ultimate philosopher in question as he was not positioned at the vantage point of history. 'The European logical *razum* (Reason) having reached its highest point of development, also realized its own limitation [...] Europe had expressed itself completely. In the nineteenth century, one could say, it completed the cycle of its development which it began in the ninth.'<sup>34</sup> The intellectual exhaustion of Western thought was only another stage of development of history, which would now be spearheaded by Russian thought. Thus, Russian intellectuals were at the avant-garde of interpreting God's divine plan in history because of their uncorrupted Orthodox faith, still grounded in the original teachings of the Church Fathers.<sup>35</sup>

For that reason, both Kireevsky and Khomiakov did not see Western rationalism to be liberating at all. For them, it represented a fragmented one-sidedness that originated from the works of Greek and Roman pagan philosophers.<sup>36</sup> Kireevsky specifically held that following the

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<sup>32</sup> Kireevsky, 'O kharaktere prosveshchenia Evropy'.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Aleksey Khomiakov, 'Po Povodu Statii I.V. Kireevskogo', in *Zapiski o Vsemirnoi Istorii: Chast' Pervaya, Tom V* (Moskva: Tipografia Tovarisha I.N. Kushnereva, 1906), p. 257.

<<https://new.runivers.ru/bookreader/book18635/#page/2/mode/1up>> [Accessed 23 November 2023].

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

Schism in 1054 from the Universal Church, the Catholic Church and Latin Christendom were unable to fully shake off their Roman heritage, eventually leading to the reduction of faith to an exercise in logic and syllogisms.<sup>37</sup> It was this that prevented them from attaining the true end-goal of history — unity of being. However, Kireevsky offered a solution suggesting that the attainment of unity in Russian Orthodox Faith ‘in its wholeness, promised to grant the highest meaning and the latest stage of development’ to European *prosveshchenie* (thought).<sup>38</sup> Thus, Kireevsky reversed Hegel, by changing the end-goal of history from individual liberty to unity of being, while keeping the structure of his philosophy of history.<sup>39</sup>

In line with Kireevsky’s findings about Russia, Khomiakov sought to uncover a more comprehensive and holistic philosophy of history than that which only introspectively focused on Russian thought: ‘In history we search of the beginning of the human race, in the hope to find a clear word about its original brotherhood and a common origin.’<sup>40</sup> He began ‘Notes on World History’ or *Semiramida* (*Semiramis*) in 1838. The chronology of the work covers ancient and early medieval history, the rest being left incomplete, and a broad geography of peoples: Ostrogoths, Abbasids, Scandinavians, Bolgars, and others.<sup>41</sup>

What is of particular interest to us is how Khomiakov develops the history of the Slavs. The purpose of this exercise was to disprove German scholars’ conclusion that Slavs did not have a history and hence were not a historic nation.<sup>42</sup> Khomiakov builds his argument around the assumption that literacy is the basis of history and those enlightened peoples ‘who do not know literacy, fell into oblivion along with the savages’.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the fifth volume of the

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<sup>37</sup>Slijak, ‘Between East and West’, p. 357.

<sup>38</sup>Kireevsky, ‘O kharaktere Prosveshchenia Evropy’.

<sup>39</sup>Slijak, ‘Between East and West’, p. 353.

<sup>40</sup>Aleksey Khomiakov, *Zapiski o Vsemirnoi Istorii: Chast’ Tretia, Tom VII* (Moskva: Tipografia Tovarisha I.N. Kushnereva, 1906), p. 30. <<https://new.runivers.ru/bookreader/book18637/#page/4/mode/1up>> [Accessed 24 November 2023].

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Khomiakov, *Zapiski o Vsemirnoi Istorii: Chast’ Pervaya, Tom V* (Moskva: Tipografia Tovarisha I.N. Kushnereva, 1906), p. 56. <<https://new.runivers.ru/bookreader/book18635/#page/2/mode/1up>> [Accessed 23 November 2023].

<sup>43</sup>Khomiakov, *Zapiski o Vsemirnoi Istorii: Chast’ Pervaya*, p. 25.

work, Khomiakov takes for granted the existence of a common Slavic language and literacy and compares it against German and Sanskrit. This combined with the creed of the Byzantine Greeks of ‘unity of the Eastern spirit’ preserved in its supposed Russian heirs awkwardly and incompletely justified Russia’s leading role in human civilization.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, both Kireevsky and Khomiakov held that Russia would be the true harbinger of history — thanks to its preservation of the original tenets of the true Faith — Orthodox Christianity — not the Germanic World contra Hegel. Kireevsky was the first to invert Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* to prove that Western rationalism bankrupted itself and would lead the way for Russian thought to lead the world to its end-goal of unity of being. While Khomiakov, writing his own World History, produced a prototype defence for the implied unity of Slavs based on shared linguistic ancestry and the civilizational value in the Orthodox faith inherited by Russia. These innovations would later be adopted by the Russian Pan-Slavists in the 1860s.

Ivan Aksakov, future adherent of Pan-Slavism and co-founder of the Slavic Benevolent Society, was exposed to the thoughts of Khomiakov and Kireevsky directly. His interaction with Slavophilism was an integral part of his biography. This culminated in 1858 when he became the co-editor of *Russkaya Beseda*, a Slavophile periodical primarily concerned with the future of the Slavic peoples. The main contributors to the journal were the proponents of Slavophilism in the 1840s, who also happened to be his close relatives: his brother Konstantin Aksakov and his father Sergei Aksakov. After the death of Sergei Aksakov in 1859 and Konstantin Aksakov and Khomiakov in 1860, the operations of *Russkaya Beseda* ceased. Consequently, Ivan Aksakov would introduce the Slavophile innovations in the field of Russian philosophy of history into Pan-Slavism to develop a philosophy of history centred on the Slavic nation.

## The Slavic Benevolent Committee and the Invention of the Slavic Nation

Pan-Slavism was a heterogenous transnational movement that spanned from approximately the 1830s up until the early twentieth century across the Russian, Hapsburg, and Ottoman empires. Due to this heterogeneity and broad span of time and space, I choose to focus on the Moscow Committee of the Slavic Benevolent Society from 1858 to 1878, which grew out of a circle of Pan-Slavist professors and academics associated with the Moscow Imperial University.

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<sup>44</sup> Slijak, p. 357.

Many of them specialised in history, ethnography, archaeology, and linguistics of Slavic nations, giving them first-hand experience and interest and in the interpretation and construction of a Slavic philosophy of history.

The Slavic Benevolent Society was founded in 1858 with the specific goal of ‘providing assistance to Southern Slavs’.<sup>45</sup> Aleksei Bakhmetev, an honourable member of Moscow Imperial University and a trustee of the Moscow educational district, became its chairman. In the Society’s *Ustav* (Statute) the assistance to be provided was mainly limited to the educational sphere: to provide opportunities for students from Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and others to come to Russia for higher education; assist students from Ottoman-controlled lands of Slavic *plemena* (tribes) with financial grants to study in seminaries and universities; and support Bulgarian and other Orthodox schools in cities and villages in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>46</sup>

In 1861, following Bakhmetev’s death and the election of Mikhail Pogodin as the provisional chairman, the work of the Slavic Benevolent Committee gained civilizational importance. In a letter to all editors of Moscow’s periodicals, the purpose of the Committee’s activity was made clear:

The Slavic Benevolent Committee, established in Moscow with the Highest permission, identified as its main goal the following: to promote the spread of enlightenment among our brothers, of our shared tribe and partially shared confession, oppressed by the rough Turkish yoke and, what is unfortunate, the more sinister Austrian rule[...]The establishment of schools, the awakening of the innate spirit, and consequently of the national self-consciousness – this is the only path towards protecting of the Slavic nationality for its *future World-Historical activity* [my italics].<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Zapiska ob obshchestve dlya vspomoshchestvovaniya yuzhnym slavyanam i proekt ustava ego’ in *Iz Istorii Slavyanskogo Plagotvoritel'nogo Komiteta v Moskve, I. Pervoe Pyatiletie (1858-1862)* (hereafter, *Iz Istorii*), ed. by Nil Popov, (Moskva: Universitetskaya Tipografia, Katkov I Ko., 1871), pp. 65-73 (p. 65), <<https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01003869925>> [Accessed 07 January 2022].

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Deistviya Komiteta po smerti pervago predstedatelya A.N. Bakhmetova’ in *Iz Istorii*, pp. 74-8 (pp. 77-8).

In 1858, at its foundation, the Society's goal was educational assistance to Southern Slavs living in Ottoman-controlled lands. Whereas in 1861, the activity of the Committee was conceptualised around preparing Slavs for their future role in World History. The jurisdiction of the Committee's activity was, at least conceptually, extended to all Slavs. Furthermore, the leading thesis in the updated purpose of the Slavic Benevolent Committee was conviction in the existence of a Slavic nationality, and hence, a nation.

The basis for both the existence of the Slavic nation was premised on the common spiritual origin of the Slavs, grounded in St Cyril and Methodius' introduction of Slavonic literacy. This link was made particularly prominent during the commemoration of the millennium of Slavonic literacy on 11 May 1862. It occurred in the church of Moscow University and was itself the result of the Benevolent Slavic Committee members' intercession to organise such an event, replete with a liturgy and a prayer service in honour of the saints.<sup>48</sup> According to Maiorova, identifying St Cyril and Methodius' introduction of Slavonic literacy as the historical point of departure presupposed the existence of a common Slavic history, untethered by the limits of one particular state, and shared by all Slavic peoples living inside and outside the Empire.<sup>49</sup>

While the Pan-Slavists had identified the Slavic nation as a real feature of World History, they had yet to resolve two issues. Firstly, the issue of identifying an end-goal of that World History and the Slavic nation's relation to it. And secondly, the issue of reconciling the Slavic nation with the Russian Empire, and by extension, identifying its role in the Slavic philosophy of history. Below, I discuss how publications by Pan-Slavist members of the Slavic Benevolent Committee constructed a Slavic philosophy of history, resolving the two issues identified above. And while it was not a particularly elaborate or developed system, its simplicity made it easily reproducible, and hence fervently adopted among the adherents of the Russian Pan-Slavist movement in their own works.

## Writing the Russian Empire into History

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<sup>48</sup> Ivan Aksakov, '11 Maya v Moskve (1862)', in *Sbornik*, pp. 534-539 (p. 534).

<sup>49</sup> Olga Maiorova, 'Slavyanskyi S'ezd 1867 Goda: Metaforika Torzhestva' (hereafter, Maiorova, 'Slavyanskyi S'ezd 1867 Goda'), *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 51, (2001), 5, <<https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2001/5/slavyanskij-sezd-1867-goda-metaforika-torzhestva.html>> [Accessed 27 July 2023]



Instead of attempting to analyse and synthesise the historical works and publications of all of the various members of the Slavic Benevolent Committee, I will focus on two particular documents: the *Cyrillo-Methodian Almanac* (1865) and the first volume of the *History of the Moscow Slavic Benevolent Committee* (1871). This approach is more advantageous than the one used by Kohn and Petrovich, based on the assumption of Pan-Slavism as an internally consistent ideology that progressed directly from Slavophilism.<sup>50</sup> Instead this approach will allow to appreciate a miscellany of works and sources, written at different times, published together in two volumes. The fact that the two volumes consist of multiple pieces of writing by different authors suggests that they were selected and curated with the purpose of producing a somewhat consistent narrative.

The *Almanac* was published and edited by Mikhail Pogodin in memory of the millennium of Slavonic literacy in Russia in 1865. Pogodin at the time was the chairman of the Slavic Benevolent Committee and was to become one of Russia's most famous historians after Nikolai Karamzin. The other document was published by Nil Popov in 1871 to highlight the accomplishments of the Committee from 1858 until 1867, the year when the Committee organised the Pan-Slav Congress in Moscow. Popov was the secretary of the Committee and a historian of the West Slavs; he eventually became the head of the History and Philology faculty at Moscow Imperial University in 1873.

Slavic history is not presented by the authors of the *Almanac* and *History* as a comprehensive chronological narrative, as expected of national histories of the period. This is partly due to the nature of the documents; they are collections of miscellaneous works, from hagiographies to private letters, rather than one volume of narrated history. Nevertheless, the end-goal of history can be teased out from Pogodin's 'Circular Epistle to the Slavs' as the union of the Slavic nation, also called the Slavic world, and the accomplishment of the Orthodox Christian spiritual salvation. He exclaims to the Slavic peoples to know 'themselves as one united, related family, a united nation!'.<sup>51</sup> Pogodin also suggests that the role in helping the Slavic nations unite is up to Russia as its 'natural historical ally, protector, and patron'.<sup>52</sup> This 'Epistle' presents a

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<sup>50</sup> See: Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and ideology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism 1856-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

<sup>51</sup> Mikhail Pogodin, 'Okruzhnoe Poslanie Slavyanam (25 May 1862)', in *Sbornik*, pp. 523-550 (p. 549).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547.

convincing example of the conscious effort by members of the Committee to construct a Slavic philosophy of history: it is addressed to the Slavs with the intention of this being congruent enough with the other works to be selected in the Almanac.

The Slavic philosophy of history does not have a clear periodisation based on different stages of history represented by specific nations, akin to Hegel's periodisation of history. Nor does the Slavic philosophy of history purport that the Slavic nation develops from other cultures, like the Germanic realm rises out of the Greek and Roman realms. Nevertheless, it does present a type of periodisation. Russian Pan-Slavists identified the introduction of Slavonic literacy by St Cyril and St Methodius as the beginning of history because this mission awakened the various Slavic peoples to the word of God — 'our Holy enlighteners, without themselves knowing it, decided the question of our true faith, of our future.'<sup>53</sup> From that moment the Slavic peoples had shared origins of language and religion; however, due to historical processes and circumstances they became separated and divided, some even by intra-fraternal conflicts.<sup>54</sup>

This separation and conflict are partially identified with the divisive role of European nations who oppress the Slavs and so prevent the union of Slavic peoples. One of the pieces that reflects this most clearly is a letter written by a Bulgarian serving in the Caucasus to the Committee. It expressed the crux of the separation of the Slavic peoples and was expertly included in the *History* by Popov specifically to underline this point.

The most commonly cited example concerns the religious struggle for the minds of Slav inhabitants of the Ottoman-controlled lands. The author of the 'Appeal' considered Turkey to be controlled by the 'paramount European States'.<sup>55</sup> The main goal of the 'agents of the West' was 'to break into pieces Orthodoxy in Turkey in order to weaken the territory to sow religious enmity among the Slavs: to undermine their trust in Russia and politically neutralise its influence over Christians in European Turkey'.<sup>56</sup> The author stresses how various confessions: Catholicism, Lutheranism, Protestantism, and Islam are forced onto Slavs. While this particular example is about the Ottoman Empire, it reveals a pattern that the oppression of Slavs is

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<sup>53</sup> Aleksander Gorskyi, 'Slovo na den' pamyati Sv. Kirilla i Mefodia, 11 Maya 1863', in *Sbornik*, ed. by Mikhail Pogodin (Moscow, 1865), pp. 441-9 (p. 445).

<sup>54</sup> Pogodin, 'Okruzhnoe Poslanie Slavyanam', in *Sbornik*, pp. 547-48.

<sup>55</sup> 'Vozzvanie odnogo iz chlenov Komiteta k Kavkaztsam', in *Iz Istorii*, pp.84-92 (p. 85).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

extended to other parts of Europe. ‘Considering all of the hostile actions against the mass of Slavdom in Turkey, Austria, Germany it is clear, that everyone is against us, almost all of Europe’s whole policy is directed against the Slavs.’<sup>57</sup>

It is this consistent use of first-person plural by the members of the Committee in other documents in the *History* which produced an ambiguous sense of unity between Russians and the rest of Slavdom, but also between the Russian Empire and Slavdom. The threat to one, presupposes the threat to the other. The belief that all of European policy is directed against all the Slavs, and hence against Russia, places the two in the same oppressed position. The only way to overcome this oppression is the reunion of the Slavic peoples. In the Slavic philosophy of history this is identified as the end-goal of history.

The end of history will be dominated by the spiritual union of the Slavic peoples under the auspices of the Russian Empire. According to the Slavic philosophy of history, as evident in Pogodin’s ‘Epistle’, the only entity that could be the harbinger of the end of history is the Russian Empire. It is presented as the utmost Orthodox entity, unsullied by foreign influence and the true inheritor of St Cyril and St Methodius’ creed. This idea would become a guide for future works stressing the Russian Empire’s primacy in World History. Ivan Aksakov, the secretary of the Committee, writing Fyodor Tyutchev’s biography stated, ‘They acknowledge Russia’s historical and spiritual calling, as the representative of the Orthodox East and the Slav tribe and portend her a great World future.’<sup>58</sup> Aksakov also elaborates on Tyutchev’s more sinister remark about how Austrian Slavs must become Russians, if they want to remain Slavs. Aksakov argues that non-Orthodox Slavs can only latch onto Russia’s destiny by converting to Orthodoxy, since the future belongs to Russia after all and not any other entity.<sup>59</sup> Hence, further emphasising the end-goal of history as the ‘spiritual’, in this case, Orthodox, union of Slavs. It is the role of the Russian Empire as the facilitator to finally reunite the ‘scattered brothers’, attain the end-goal of history, and become the most developed nation.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>58</sup> Ivan Aksakov, *Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev (Biograficheskyi ocherk)* (Moskva: Tipografia V. Gotie, 1874), pp.76-77 <<https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01003603653>> [Accessed 24 July 2023].

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 264-5.

### Section III: Reconciliation of the Slavic nation within the Russian Empire in the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition 1867

Once the Pan-Slavists conceptualised the Slavic nation and the Slavic world within a philosophy of history alternative to Hegel, Russia would finally be included within history and be located at its apotheosis, near its end-goal and hence become the most developed nation. This conceptualisation was further popularised through the Committee's members participating in other scientific associations and societies. This allowed for the conception of Slav primacy in history and the concept of the nation to be reconciled with the Russian Empire with scientific credibility. The most significant unofficial collaboration between the Slavic Benevolent Committee was with the Moscow Society of Lovers of National History to organise the Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867.<sup>60</sup> According to Marina Mogilner, the Society of Lovers of Natural History was founded in 1863 to support an emerging discipline of evolutionist epistemology. Inspired by Darwin, it represented a new model of scholarship encompassing ethnography and physical anthropology and intended to study humans and their cultures.<sup>61</sup> The Exhibition was to be the first physical expression of the combination of this new scientific scholarship with the Slavic philosophy of history.

Originally, the exhibition was meant to be a purely scientific venture, organised by Anatolii Bogdanov, a young Russian zoologist and one of the founders of the Society of Lovers of Natural History. Nathaniel Knight suggests that Bogdanov first conceived the exhibition in 1859 while on a visit to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, becoming the resting place of the first International Exhibition after its closure in 1851.<sup>62</sup> Particularly taken by the ethnological display of non-European peoples organised by their geographical positioning, Bogdanov wanted to recreate something similar on Russian soil, exhibiting the Crystal Palace collection and supplementing it with displays of the peoples of the Russian Empire. Bogdanov would

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<sup>60</sup> Iskra Churkina, 'Etnograficheskaya vystavka I slavyanskyi s'ezd v Moskve' in *Slavyane i Rossii: Slavyane v Moskve*, ed. by S.I. Danchenko, (Moskva: Institut Slavyanovedinia RAN, 2018), pp. 48-80 (p. 51).

<sup>61</sup> Marina Mogilner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Nathaniel Knight, 'The Empire on Display: Ethnographic Exhibition and the Conceptualization of Human Diversity in Post-Emancipation Russia' (hereafter, Knight, 'The Empire on Display'), *NCEEER Working Paper*, (2001), pp. 1-28 (p. 7).

eventually return to the idea for an ethnological exhibition in 1864, all to promote Russian anthropology as an academic field. However, Bogdanov's original plan failed, and the Crystal Palace collection never made it to Russia. As a result, the scope of the Exhibition was limited to the Russian Empire.

At least that was the case until Nil Popov, Moscow University history professor and a member of the Slavic Benevolent Committee who would eventually publish the Society's *History*, submitted a memorandum to the Society of Lovers of Natural History asking for the participation of Slavic peoples outside of the Russian Empire at the exhibition.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, he would head the organisation of the Slavic section.

The opening of the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition coincided with the Pan-Slav Congress in 1867. This was purposefully planned by the Benevolent Slavic Committee. In fact, one publication documenting the preparation and outcomes of the Exhibition states that it was a pretext for the organisation of a Pan-Slav Congress.<sup>64</sup> The volume also recounts the expansive transnational communication on behalf of the Committee that took place in order to plan both events. As Popov was inquiring about ethnographic material for the Exhibition from his Slav colleagues abroad, he would also send out invitations for the Pan-Slav Congress. As a result, about 80 delegates participated in the Congress, arriving from Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Saxony, Turkey, Montenegro, and the Paris Universal Exposition.<sup>65</sup> Among them, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenians, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians.<sup>66</sup>

The Pan-Slav Congress amounted to a series of celebrations in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, culminating with attendance of the Ethnographic Exhibition in Moscow. Maiorova holds that the reunion of all the Slav delegates in Moscow itself represented a metaphor of an All-Slavic national consolidation — it placed Russia at the centre of the Slavic historical narrative.<sup>67</sup> This

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Vserossiyskaya etnograficheskaya vystavka, ustroennaya Imperatorskim Obshchestvom lyubitelei estestvoznannia, sostoyavshchim pri Moskovskom universitete v 1867 godu*, (Moskva, 1867), p. 80  
<[https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199\\_000009\\_003577804/](https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_003577804/)> [Accessed 28 July 2023].

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Maiorova, 'Slavyanskiy S'ezd 1867 goda'.

message would be repeated once again in the halls of the Exhibition, placing Russia not simply at the centre of the Slavic historical narrative but being the epoch-making entity to realise the end-goal of history — Slavic reunification.

The Exhibition was constructed as an imitation of the geography of the Russian Empire, described by the *Guide of the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition* as ‘a living ethnographic map of Russia’.<sup>68</sup> The exhibits were organised into the various peoples and nations that made up the Empire; some under Russian imperial rule for centuries, others recently conquered by the Russian Imperial Army, others still imagined as future objects of imperial expansion. These nations were not simply represented by collections of clothing, domestic utensils, and folk art in glass cases. Rather, the organisers recreated ‘typical’ scenes from the life of the various peoples within their ‘natural environment’. One of the key elements in facilitating this were the life-like, human-sized mannequins dressed in traditional clothing and placed within these scenes. They appeared frozen in time, essentialised as part of the Russian Empire.

The largest section, and the one right in front of the Tsar’s lodges, were the Great Russians.<sup>69</sup> The *Guide* describes that this section ‘dominated over the other objects’.<sup>70</sup> In an adjacent exhibit there were the other Slavic groups within the Empire such as the Little Russians (Ukrainians), Poles, and ‘foreign’ Slavs — Czechs, Croats, Serbs, and Montenegrins — which are represented as different from the ‘native’ Slavs but still sharing a cultural and civilizational commonality. The sections moving rightwards, shrinking tens of thousands of kilometres from the Caucasus and Ural mountains towards the Pacific Ocean to fit the halls of the Manezh, represented the non-Slavic peoples of the Empire. The *Guide* produces a generalisation of the non-Slavic peoples inhabiting that area, listing: Caucasians, ‘Asian nomadic peoples’, Tatars, Mordvins, Kyrghyz, peoples of Siberia (Tungus and Yakut), and others. The *Guide* reads like a

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<sup>68</sup> *Putevoditel’ po Moskovskoi Etnograficheskoi Vystavke*, (Moscow: Universitetskaya Tipografia, 1867), p. 6, <<https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01003569000>> [Accessed 5 January 2022].

<sup>69</sup> The dominant model of Russian nation-building in the nineteenth century was the tripartite Russian nation, purporting that there were three Russian ‘tribes’: Great Russians (Russians proper), Little Russians (Ukrainians), and White Russians (Belarusians). For a more in-depth analysis of the rise of the tripartite Russian nation, see: Serhii Plokyh, ‘Great, Little, and White’, in *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the making of the Russian Nation from 1470 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), pp. 105-36.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

registry of the imperial possessions, real and imagined, and an idealised mental map of Russian domination in one physical space.

The extent to which the Exhibition was a realisation of Russian imperialist and Pan-Slavist aspirations becomes evident when we note that the peoples and territories not *de facto* under Russian control were also being included in the exhibits. Despite the Russian Imperial Army overthrowing the Caucasian Imamate only in 1859 and the ongoing resistance to Russian conquest in Central Asia by the Khanate of Khoqand, the generalised Caucasian and Kyrghyz groups were already represented as part of the Russian imperial space.<sup>71</sup> The *Guide* also acknowledges the Aleut and Kolosh (Tlingit) peoples, indigenous inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands and the Island of Sitka, as ‘former Russian subjects’ motioning to the sale of Alaska to the United States in March 1867.<sup>72</sup> The sale was officiated at the time of the Exhibition’s organisation, and yet, the organisers still included these peoples within the Empire. This underlined its immensity, spanning not just the Eurasian continent but beyond, into North America.

A similar logic is applied to the other geographic extremity of the Exhibition, the Slavic peoples living beyond the Russian Empire. The *Guide* makes an effortless transition between Slavic peoples in the Russian Empire and the Slavic peoples living abroad, ‘Here ends the Russian section and begins the section of Slavs of other tribes.’<sup>73</sup> No border is acknowledged. Despite this already being foreign territory, the only guide to the distinction between the peoples is their dress and the authoritative voice of the *Guide*: all of the Slavic peoples exist in one space. Knight accurately summarises this, ‘If the exhibit as a whole could be seen as a microcosm of the Russian Empire, then including the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe would inevitably create the impression that the Slavs were part of this microcosm and should ultimately be

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<sup>71</sup> For more detailed account of the conquest see: Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Adeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (London and Ithaca: McGill-Queens’s University Press, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> *Putevoditel’*, p.35.

<sup>73</sup> *Putevoditel’*, p. 20.

integrated, at the very least culturally and perhaps even politically, into the Empire.<sup>74</sup> The location of all Slavs, both ‘native’ to the Russian Empire and ‘foreign’ united under one roof, realised the end of history *per* Slavic philosophy of history. The Great Russians dominating the Exhibition was also not coincidental, it reflected the primacy of the Slavs over the other peoples of the Empire and the Great Russian nation among the Slavs.

The Exhibition, like any scientific venture, was supposed to represent an objective outlook on the life of each people. And it did, to the extent that the design of the Exhibition revealed its organisers’ belief in a Slavic philosophy of history. The Exhibition realised the reconciliation of the Slavic nation within the Russian Empire and in turn completed the conceptual elevation of the Russian Empire. This was the realisation of the Slavic nation as the historical ‘epoch-making’ nation headed by the Empire. Whereas the non-Slavic peoples functioned as objects of comparison to present the Slavs as more developed. The *Guide* described the various Slavs people in detail over sixteen pages, while the discussion of the non-Slavic peoples, who were arguably more ethnically diverse, only counted six pages. Most shockingly, however, the *Guide* ends with the following exclamation about the Samoyed peoples of the Far East: ‘How many centuries divide this primitive way of life and these cattle-like faces from the pure European type, even on the lowest step of the social ladder!’<sup>75</sup> This seems to divulge the point of this Exhibition: to ridicule the peoples considered ‘prehistorical’ and at their expense elevate ‘developed’ peoples. Despite this racial periodisation elevating the Europoid type to the ‘developed’ peoples, it is the reunion of the Slavic nation that is visualised as the ultimate realisation of history. ‘Nonhistoric’ peoples could not have an effect on history and served only as comparisons, to highlight the epoch-making nation.

About 90,000 individuals attended the Exhibition, among them the eighty Slavic delegates who attended the Pan-Slav Congress and numerous Russian intellectuals.<sup>76</sup> Thus, tens of thousands of people were able to witness the reconciliation of the Slavic nation with the Russian Empire and interpret the primacy of the Russian nation among the Slavic nations. The introduction of the general public to the complex Slavic philosophy of history through an ethnographic display and a Pan-Slav Congress cemented its main theses in the public and intellectual imaginations.

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<sup>74</sup> Knight, ‘The Empire on Display’, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> *Putevoditel’*, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> *Vserossiyskaya etnograficheskaya vystavka*, p. 91.



The purely abstract image of the Russian Empire as a pioneering epoch-making entity found a physical iteration: uniting the Slavic nations under its (quite literal) aegis and dominating that space. The Exhibition served as a miniature prototype of the promised 'spiritual union' of the Slavic nations, implying at least a cultural and at most a political extension of that union, which would be headed by the Russian Empire.

## Conclusion

Under the guise of entertainment and education, the exhibition of Slavic philosophy of history in Moscow in 1867 finally brought the abstract conceptualisation of Russia vis-à-vis other Slavs and non-Slavic peoples to the wider public. The interactive experience of walking through the exhibits expanded the public's imagination to what was real and what was possible. It made the union between Slavs tangible, the headship of the Russian Empire over it natural, and the presence of non-Slavic peoples necessary only for the purpose of exotification, denigration, and comparison. Furthermore, the evident absence of a Europe outside of a Slavdom beyond the Russian Empire imagined a world beyond European domination of history. For the learned public, this spectacle was further supplemented by the periodicals and lectures printed by the Slavic Benevolent Committee, found at the Moscow University campus, specialised amateur societies, and the homes of particularly zealous followers of Pan-Slavism.

Pan-Slavism conceptually elevated the Russian Empire by reimagining it not only as a historic nation but a nation at the avant-garde of world historical development: the nation closest to the purpose of history, which was the spiritual union of the Slavic peoples. The Slavic nation may have been the vector of history, but Russia had the most important role among the Slavic peoples — facilitating and protecting this union. Since Pan-Slavism was a school of thought and offered an attractive philosophy of history, its elements were eventually selectively adopted by other Russian intellectuals not originally part of the Slavonic Benevolent Society to support their own conclusions.

Adherents of Pan-Slavism in the early 1870s, now manifested in terms of a metaphysical-militarism, called for Russia's intervention into territories predominantly populated by Slavs and Orthodox Christians. For instance, Nikolai Danilevsky (1822–1885) acknowledged that the end-goal of Slavic philosophy of history was a Pan-Slavic union in Russia and Europe (1869). For him, however it was to become a political entity assembled under the banner of 'Orthodoxy,

Slavdom, and Obshchina!'. Danilevsky specified that this union had to be achieved through a civilizational war and Russia's (now representing Slavdom as a whole) victory over Europe.<sup>77</sup>

Not long after, as if manifested by Danilevsky, the Serbian–Ottoman war broke out in the summer of 1876. In order to repel the Ottomans, Major-General and devout Pan-Slavist Nikolai Chernyaev was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army, recruiting numerous Russian officers to fight with him in the Balkans. In response to this, Fyodor Dostoyevsky offered his interpretation of the 'Slavic Idea' as a sacrifice for your brothers [Slavs], committed by the strongest of the Slavic tribes [Russia] to protect the weak and to bring them spiritual liberation and independence. This triumph would then 'set the foundation for a future Pan-Slavic union in the name of Christ's Truth, that is in favour of love and service for the whole of humanity'.<sup>78</sup> Dostoyevsky interpreted Slavic philosophy of history unfolding in front of him to be a realisation of the spiritual Slavic union through physical sacrifice and bloodshed.

When discussing the Russian officers who had joined Chernyaev, Dostoyevsky elevated them to a heroic vehicle of Slavic history: 'They [officers] glorify the Russian name in Europe and with their blood unite us with our brothers [Slavs] [...] These are the pioneers of the Russian political idea, Russian desires, Russian liberty, declared by them in front of Europe.'<sup>79</sup> When the full-scale war between the Russian and the Ottoman empires broke out in 1877, Ivan Aksakov, now the President of the Slavic Benevolent Committee, seemed to agree with Dostoyevsky in principle. Aksakov actively fundraised for the war effort and organised five thousand volunteers that his and similar committees helped send to Serbia.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the Slavic philosophy of history which developed in the aftermath of Russia's defeat in the Crimean War in 1855 returned with a vengeance in the late 1870s as a metaphysical rationalisation of the Russo-Turkish war. The Pan-Slavist intellectuals of the 1860s imagined a

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<sup>77</sup> Robert E. MacMaster, *Danilevsky: A Russian Totalitarian Philosopher*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 275.

<sup>78</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 'Iul'ii Avgust', in *Dnevnik Pisatelya za 1876 god*, (Saint Petersburg: Tipografia Yu. Shaufa, 1879), <[https://viewer.rusneb.ru/ru/000199\\_000009\\_003591983?page=228&rotate=0&theme=white](https://viewer.rusneb.ru/ru/000199_000009_003591983?page=228&rotate=0&theme=white)>, p. 216, <[https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199\\_000009\\_003591983/](https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_003591983/)> [Accessed 27 November 2023]

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

<sup>80</sup> Rogger, 'Russia', p. 469.

Slavic union established after the ‘liberation’ of the Slavic peoples through the ‘common spirit’ of Orthodoxy and Slavonic literacy, facilitated by Russia. In the 1870s, this was replaced by a physical military intervention led by Russia to defend ‘weaker, Slav brothers’ against a non-Orthodox Other. Nevertheless, Pan-Slavism’s later, more aggressive variant still operated within the structure of the philosophy of history originally developed by Pan-Slavists of the 1860s, most notably members of the Slavic Benevolent Committee.

This article sought to present Pan-Slavism as a school of thought in its own right as well as reconstruct the Slavic philosophy of history and Russia’s role within it. Pan-Slavist intellectuals reconceptualised Russia not only as a historic nation but also at the avant-garde of World History thanks to the inversion of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*. By identifying the influence of Hegelianism on Pan-Slavism, this article hopes to encourage the study of the persistence of Hegelian idealism in Russian thought more broadly, beyond that of Russian Left Hegelians. Furthermore, as established in the article, Russian intellectuals played an active role in glorifying the Russian Empire and promoting Great Russian chauvinism under the guise of benevolence. This too offers an avenue for further research into the ways Russian intellectual activity facilitated Russian imperialism.

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