

## From the Editorial Board

Below we publish two reviews of Marina Mogilner's book, *Homo imperii: istoriya fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii* [Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia].

To say they are different is putting it mildly. These reviews are polar opposites both in their author's starting points and in their attitude to the book under review, and even in their style; and the reviewers themselves are dissimilar in all respects. One is an eminent physical anthropologist, the other a specialist in modern social anthropology. One admires the book, the other regards it as extremely harmful. For one of them, the fact that the book under review is part of a project initiated by the editors of the journal *Ab Imperio* with the aim of creating a 'new imperial history' evokes approval and sympathy, while for the other it is a matter for sarcastic distaste. Even the fact that Mogilner's book is based on extensive factual material, including archive material, is greeted by one reviewer as a sign of its solidity ('an impressive work, based on a large number of new archival sources and a solid historiographical basis') while for the other it is surprising and irritating: yes, Mogilner has read a great deal, but it has done her no good ('the paradoxical combination of erudition and ignorance, a fantastical distortion of vision to serve an ideological project').

Anyone who reads these reviews will feel the desire to argue. The editors feel it too. We could argue with Aleksandr Kozintsev, who is surprised at the fact that Russian physical anthropologists should have to learn about their own field from a historian and philologist. We could argue with Ekaterina Melnikova, who thinks there is no research in Russia dealing with the social context of science, including its social history. We could condemn the harshly polemical, 'ideological' intonation of one review, and argue with the demonstratively estranged tone of the other. We could find assertions in both reviews that seem questionable in their harshness, their certitude, and their one-sidedness. We could talk long and passionately about the comparative strengths and weaknesses of classical structuralism and of postmodernism, of positivism and of 'new historicism'...

Every member of the editorial college probably has their own opinion on the question. But the task of a journal's editorial board is not to condemn, to argue, or to pronounce a final verdict, but to stimulate discussion and to allow varying opinions to express themselves. For that reason, we are publishing both reviews in the order in which they reached us, and we hope (indeed, we are confident) that these texts will not leave readers indifferent to the profoundly serious questions that arise from the collision of these diametrically opposing views on the aims, duties, and vector of development of modern anthropology.



Mogilner M. *Homo imperii: istoriya fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii* [Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia]. M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008. 512 pp.

### Science Minus Science

Marina Mogilner has not, hitherto, crossed paths with physical anthropology. The physical anthropologists, for their part, have not crossed paths with Marina Mogilner. They have led separate lives. But now they have met, and the meeting has proved a dramatic one. Its circumstances will become clearer if we mention the chief landmarks in Mogilner's professional biography. She studied at Kazan University, and then at the University of Central Europe in Budapest. Her Cand.Sc. dissertation ('The Artistic Text as a Historical Source') was defended at Kazan. She received her Ph.D. in the United States, for a dissertation on the treatment of political radicalism in literature; her book on that topic appeared in 1999, published by *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*—the same house that has issued the work now under review.

Mogilner is a co-editor of the journal *Ab Imperio*, published in Kazan but affiliated to the American

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Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. The overwhelming majority of members of the editorial committee are Western scholars. The journal's orientation is 'to study the new imperial history and nationalism in the post-Soviet area'. As for NLO, it, according to Mogilner and her colleagues, 'is engaged in forming professional standards in the sphere of the humanities, in reviewing (and challenging) the disciplinary identities and geographical boundaries of the professional community. What Western historians learnt "at first hand", from anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers themselves, Russian historians are obtaining thanks to forward-thinking Russian philologists' [Glebov, Mogilner, Semenov 2003].

And now another 'disciplinary identity' has been 'reviewed and challenged'. On this occasion it is Russian physical anthropology that has suffered this melancholy fate. This will not seem particularly surprising to anyone familiar with the poststructuralist tendencies in Western thought, and especially with the 'new historicism' that has flooded from American academia into our Western-oriented scholarly community, laying waste all that lies before it. We physical anthropologists are not the first, and we shall not be the last. But, all the same, one would like to ask: why were we destined to hear of the fate of our subject only at second hand? It would be one thing coming from a close colleague, but from a philologist and historian, even a 'forward-thinking' one... What kind of a strange, roundabout way is this, for scholarly ideas to move in?

The fact that we are positivists, that we are hopelessly behind the times and trapped in the framework of 'disciplinary identity'; the fact that we are marginal and provincial in the globalised post-Soviet world; the fact that our incorrigibility is connected to our sense of humiliation, and our sense of humiliation to our meagre salaries—all these facts have been brought home to Russian academics who don't have Western Ph.D.s long ago, in articles by the new historicists (O. Proskurin and others) in the pages of the *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* journal. And yet... If 'advanced' philologists and historians, with their Ph.D.s, are 'really engaged in forming professional standards in the sphere of the humanities', then the cards would seem to suit their hand, but one might have thought that physical anthropology is only 'physical' because it has some kind of connection to the sphere not of the humanities, but of the natural sciences.

On the other hand, why should we imagine that our house of learning, open to every wind that blows, should be free from onslaught? When philologists and historians with advanced Western orientations had not even been born or thought of, our own indigenous philosophers were already warning us about the possible consequences of our ideological backwardness. The criteria for being 'forward-thinking'

were different then, it's true: now it is a Ph.D., a Western grant, and if possible a Western salary, then it was a keen nose for the Marxist-Leninist dialectic and the current tasks of communist construction. But forget the criteria, they are historically transient: being forward-thinking, on the other hand, that's something we need whatever the epoch. Incidentally, even the criteria aren't so very different, if you look to the essence rather than to the rhetorical veneer. As early as 1949, Academician M. B. Mitin gave us a clear warning: 'It would be wrong to think that the natural sciences are sciences standing outside social interests, outside and above the questions of the class struggle'. Just what they're saying today. Which of the new historicists wouldn't sign up to that? It's not for nothing that Foucault and Kristeva were both admirers of Mao. And positivists cannot escape the icy wind of the philosophical critique of science. The geneticists and cyberneticians tried to wall themselves off from social interests behind a framework of their disciplinary identity, and they paid the price for it. How are we any better?

'Many people think that anyone can do history, and that is probably true', say Mogilner and her colleagues [Ibid]. As far as the history of physical anthropology is concerned, I can confirm that it is the absolute truth. Anyone indeed: at least nowadays. If proof were needed, it can be found in the numerous books of V. B. Avdeev, an electrical mechanic by training and a racist and Nazi by conviction. And even anthropology itself, according to Avdeev's co-author, the former Motherland party deputy A. N. Savelyev (who actively publishes racist literature alongside Avdeev), 'is not a science of any great difficulty. It's not quantum mechanics or the theory of relativity. There's nothing difficult here that can't be taken on and understood by anyone with a higher education of any kind, so long as they're used to thinking and analysing [...] The state has given minimal payment to the sometimes heroic work of anthropologists. Over long years a bureaucratic layer built up in this sphere, a sphere that was deprived of the means to develop, and that bureaucratic layer was incapable of understanding the heritage of the founders of anthropology' [Savelyev 2009]. I know, I know, we've read all about it in *NLO*. But let us turn, finally, to the book under review.

'In essence', it says on the very first page of the introduction, 'this is the first history of Russian anthropological thought, whose richness and diversity are doubted neither by modern historians nor by anthropologists studying the post-Soviet (post-imperial) space, nor even by those who look to "Russian racial theory" for a precursor and inspiration for modern Russian nationalism' (p. 5). 'Even those' is Avdeev. Despite the 'even', indicating that Avdeev is generally closer to the truth than the others (including, it seems, physical anthropologists themselves, who are in a state of total blindness with regard to their own subject), Mogilner tries to separate herself from

him by calling Avdeev's works 'an ideological project'. The argument is blatantly unsatisfactory. What, then — is her own project not an ideological one?

Please do not misunderstand me. Let a thunderbolt strike me down if I put Mogilner in the same category as Avdeev, even in the depths of my heart. He is a troglodytic obscurantist, while she is a bearer of the most progressive research paradigms. Avdeev's writings should interest the public prosecutor and no-one else (for our unsuccessful attempts to remind the prosecutor's office of this responsibility see, e.g., [Kozintsev 2008]).<sup>1</sup> Mogilner, meanwhile, is a member of the professional community, albeit at some distance from physical anthropology, but decidedly forward-thinking; and I can see nothing in her work that should attract the attention of the courts. Even so, however, I shall allow myself to mention five points on which, as far as I can understand it, there are some fairly serious parallels between the two thinkers. (1) Neither has any connection with physical anthropology. (2) Neither is interested in it, or in science in general. (3) Both are interested in politics and only in politics. (4) Neither sees a difference between racism and the study of races. (5) Both are convinced that racism has deep historical roots in Russia in general and in Russian scholarship in particular. The differences, in essence, are only of evaluation: what Avdeev likes, Mogilner does not.

So, then, 'the first history of Russian anthropological thought'. The first, be it noted, not the second, not the hundred and twenty-second. And again, to avoid any doubt: 'The book is dedicated to 'the history of Russian physical anthropology, which has hitherto not been studied at all'' (p. 18). Yes, literally, black on white: 'not been studied at all'. M. G. Levin's book *Oчерки по истории антропологии в России* [Sketches in the History of Anthropology in Russia] never existed; G. F. Debets, V. P. Alekseev, Ia. Ia. Roginsky, B. E. Raikov, V. V. Ginzburg, T. D. Gladkov, and M. I. Uryson wrote nothing about it. We dreamt the lot. N.G. Zalkind's book on the Moscow school of anthropologists gets two quick mentions, in the footnotes. Marina Mogilner isn't interested in these writers. Positivists living in a backward empire, they could only occupy themselves with trivia: it was not granted them to understand their own activity. Giving meaning, providing a bird's-eye view, generalising—these are jobs for the forward-thinking. And neither residency nor place of publication is any guarantee of success. Thus, the many entries dealing with Russia in the two-volume *History of Physical Anthropology*:

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<sup>1</sup> Other anthropologists write about Avdeev in the same collection. See A. N. Savelyev's reaction: he calls us 'Russophobes' and 'paranormal scholars who have slept through a whole epoch and wrecked their professional lives with an incorrect methodology' <<http://savelev.ru/book/?ch+709>>. In a word, we are getting hit from all sides. And by rights, given that we have fallen behind the advanced tendencies in social thought.

*An Encyclopedia*, published in the United States, are also uncongenial to Mogilner, probably because the work was edited by Frank Spencer — a physical anthropologist and, therefore, another positivist.

Advanced historians are also fond of mentioning Geertz's method of 'thick description'. But Geertz borrowed the idea from Gilbert Ryle. Let us take Ryle's example: in looking at a person winking, the investigator must thoroughly uncover the meaning of what is not accessible to simple observation. The semantic content of a wink can be swelled by the growth of meanings: the physiological act, or sign, is an act of mimicry on the part of the person making the sign, and also a training in mimicry. Mogilner evidently believes that her description of the history of physical anthropology is much 'thicker' than anything the positivist scholars can provide themselves. But she is a poor reader both of Geertz and of Ryle. In order to master a lesson, as Ryle points out, one must master all the lessons at lower levels. No pedagogic tricks can teach a boy to imitate a person who winked without first teaching him to wink and to understand a wink. Mogilner has not mastered this lesson even at the most elementary level. One cannot pass direct to 'thick description' without going through the positivistic stage. One cannot study phonology without knowing phonetics. One cannot try to discover new meanings in a subject whose most ordinary meaning one does not know.

If Mogilner were simply a dilettante in anthropology, she would not do much damage. But she is a militant dilettante. She has no need for scholarship: it just irritates her. Facts as such do not exist for her: they are a survival of positivism. There are no facts, there are only their ideological implications—and those can be pulled out of nothing. Let us say that Gilchenko discovered that the female brain was smaller, on average, than the male brain (pp. 310–311). So what? Only an ignoramus would think that brain mass determined intellect. But it's already too late to stop our author: 'The woman and the female brain replace, in his schema, the colonised object'... 'Sublimated gendered colonialism'... 'The mythology of national femininity'...

It is striking that Mogilner has, nonetheless, read a great deal. Incidentally, this is one more point that she has in common with Avdeev: the paradoxical combination of erudition and ignorance, a fantastical distortion of vision to serve an ideological project. He will spend many pages promoting some 'Russian scholar of genius' like Eshevsky, whose contribution to anthropology consists solely of a couple of racist lectures, while Mogilner will publish detailed archival data on the budget of the Russian Anthropological Society, estimates of the geographical and anthropological office, membership dues...

All this is interesting not so much in terms of facts, as in those of research genealogy. Some of the book's conceptual principles are

perfectly sound. In particular, it is clear why the budget and the estimates should show up here. This is taken not just from the new historicists but from late formalism, when the idea of the immanence of literature had given way to the study of everyday life. But Eikhenbaum and Tynianov knew who and what they were writing about, in the late phases of their evolution as in the early ones. Their profession was philology, and the main object of their analysis never disappeared from view behind everyday details. The same cannot be said of Mogilner. However flawless her training in the humanities might have been, in the empire and beyond, the curriculum clearly never included the acquisition of knowledge in physical anthropology. This inadequacy of knowledge is made up for with fantasies that are riotous and even morbid. Thus, on p. 46 we read: *Measurements of living people [...] could be extremely painful, because the anthropologist had to apply the measuring instruments directly to the bone, cutting through the fatty layer.* It's the stuff of nightmares!

Returning to philological sources, it must be said that Mogilner's professionalism falls catastrophically short not just of the formalists', but also of that shown by representatives of the school that we know as vulgar sociologism. Whatever may be said of V. M. Friche, he was still N. I. Storozhenko's pupil and Blasco Ibañez's translator; and V. F. Pereverzev knew what he was writing about. They can be blamed for a lot: but they knew how to spell writers' surnames, and they didn't confuse their first names. In Mogilner's book, by contrast, Armand Quatrefages appears as Armand de Quettréfage,<sup>1</sup> Ivanovsky is called sometimes Aleksei and sometimes Aleksandr, and A. A. Zubov is called Zubkov—three times, so it cannot be a misprint. Yet someone who does not know the name of A. A. Zubov cannot possibly write the history of Russian physical anthropology: anyone in that position would be looking at the subject not even from across the ocean, but from Mars. This reviewer would have equal success if he tried his hand at writing a history of, say, crystalline chemistry.

As for dogmatic and crude vulgarisation in the name of politics, Mogilner is not just immeasurably closer to Friche and Pereverzev than to Tynyanov and Eikhenbaum, but she even outdoes the former. The glaring similarities between 'new historicism' and vulgar sociologism have already been discussed [Shaitanov 2002], and I do not propose to return to this question.

The very first sentence in Marina Mogilner's book must evoke surprised questions: *This book is about the emergence and evolution of the category of race in the Russian Empire, and more precisely about the formation of the science of physical anthropology in Russia* (p. 5). 'More

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau (1810–1892), naturalist. His name is properly abbreviated Armand de Quatrefages, so neither author nor reviewer is, strictly speaking, correct. [Editor.]

precisely”? Perhaps the author has confused the general with the specific, and intended to say something different: ‘This book is about the formation of physical anthropology in Russia, and more precisely about the emergence and evolution of the category of race’? No: it seems that we are dealing not with a slip, but with a fundamental misunderstanding of what it is physical anthropology studies. P. 15 says that the basic category of physical anthropology is race. No physical anthropologist in the world would agree; but we already know that Mogilner does not regard professionals’ opinion as binding. She seems sincerely to believe that physical anthropology deals with nothing else but the study of race. She simply does not know what the term ‘anthropogenesis’, for instance, means, since on p. 492 she writes of ‘the anthropogenesis of the peoples of the USSR’. That kind of phrase would get a failing mark in school, let alone university.

It is not just that Mogilner has a very hazy idea of what physical anthropology studies; throughout the whole book, she stubbornly disregards any difference between racism and the study of race. Here she is in absolute accord with V.B. Avdeev, despite their different theoretical sources (German Nazism and racism in Avdeev’s case, American political correctness in Mogilner’s).

American political correctness needs to be discussed in particular. Its prime cause was a bad historical conscience, tormented by remembering the grievous sin of racism. The changes for the better inspired by Martin Luther King came too late in American society, only in the Kennedy era. Scholarly works with an openly racist flavour were published in the USA as late as the 1960s (including, for instance, the books of one of the pillars of American physical anthropology, Carleton S. Coon). This is not to speak of Arthur Jensen, whose racist article about IQ appeared in 1969 in no less a place than the *Harvard Educational Review* (his articles in the same vein, co-authored with J. F. Rushton, have been published very recently: since 2000). By the law of the pendulum, a significant section of American academia has swung to the opposite extreme: people have come to deny the very existence of races. Then, in full accordance with the Freudian principle of projection, some American anthropologists have gone on the offensive and started to look for racists in other countries. In Russian, this principle has a name that isn’t quite scientific: ‘from a sick head on to a healthy one’ [to shift the blame on to someone not guilty from someone who is]. Projection is a good defence mechanism. What is worse is that other people end up having to defend themselves, even though they are innocent, or at any rate guilty to a much lesser extent of whatever crime is tormenting the people who need to have recourse to such a mechanism.

I do not intend to defend either Russia or Russian physical anthropology against Marina Mogilner. There is no disagreeing: the scale of ethnic persecutions in this country has been considerable. But, due to a variety of historical circumstances, practitioners of the pogrom have had less need for the services of theoreticians here than their counterparts have in America or Germany. Whatever might be the reasons for such a situation, the fact remains: the infection of racism affected Russian scholarship very little. There is nothing in pre-revolutionary Russia comparable either in volume or in solidity to the publications on the biological inequality of the races that appeared in the USA, Germany, Great Britain, and France (let alone in the USSR, where racist literature of any kind neither could be published nor was published).

The efforts of the 'new historicists' have rescued from oblivion the horrendous anti-Semite and racist I.A. Sikorsky<sup>1</sup> (see a book on him that has recently appeared in the Ukraine: [Menzhulin 2004]). Mogilner allots him a whole chapter and calls him 'the creator of the anthropology of the Russians' (p. 277). No more and no less! She seriously takes Sikorsky's racist deliria as 'the theory of the Russians as a nation' (p. 259). He barely merited such praise even from his fellow Black Hundreds. And even Mogilner is forced to admit that Sikorsky interpreted the tasks of anthropology in a way that was 'quite unlike the majority of Russian anthropologists' (p. 105) and that he 'was not allowed even onto the threshold of liberal Moscow anthropology' (p. 124).

However Mogilner and Avdeev might try to attract attention to loathsome and marginal figures or to individual un-PC remarks by specialists with a high reputation (a whole section of the book is devoted to exaggerations of the anthropological aspect of Pushkin's personality, including in D. N. Anuchin's newspaper remarks about him), this does not alter the general picture. On the contrary, it makes it all the clearer. Before Avdeev and Mogilner's books appeared, it would have been possible to suspect that there might be some dirt that had remained unnoticed in the corners of Russian anthropology. Now, after two powerful vacuum cleaners have passed over the subject, such doubts have fallen away. We can really see all the 'filth and junk' (Gogol) that could be gathered up from every corner. It is advisable to look through the bag before throwing it away. It can happen that something you need has been sucked up by mistake: a coin, a button, or a thimble. In a sense, these items reveal something to us about our lives. But only 'in a sense': a limitation that the newfound reformers of the history of anthropology do not accept.

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<sup>1</sup> A specialist in pathological anatomy and psychiatry who became notorious for his appearance as an expert witness at the trial of Mendel Beilis for alleged ritual murder in 1913. Sikorsky vehemently supported the prosecution's case. [Editor.]

The leitmotiv of Mogilner's book is the way she counterposes 'two variants of the anthropological paradigm that have been manifested (though not always consistently realised) in Russia: roughly, the "public-spirited imperial" paradigm (Moscow) and, roughly, the "expert colonial" paradigm (Russian Anthropological Society at St Petersburg University)' (p. 134). Roughly, all too roughly! Or, to avoid beating about the bush: as vulgarly as can be imagined. The whole thing is made up. Moscow anthropology is liberal, Petersburg anthropology colonial. Moscow anthropology is imperial, Petersburg expert. 'The anthropological paradigm of the nineteenth century' is 'a product of the structural processes of modernisation in European societies and of the dissemination of imperialist "practices"' (p. 38). *The new knowledge of imperial human diversity or of the nature of the homogenous and harmonious national organism, created within the framework of physical anthropology, the advanced science of its time, seemed under these circumstances [...] to be a recipe for the modernisation of the empire* (p. 16). *The Russian creators of statehood were inevitably bound to possess a firm and well-argued doctrine that would allow them to gather a multi-ethnic conglomerate into a single, stable whole whose name was the Russian Empire... They needed their own race theory, that would clearly and definitively establish the position of the Russians as a racial and biological group among the subjugated peoples.* But I must apologise: that one isn't Mogilner any more, it's Avdeev [2002].

There is no hint either of science or of the history of science here, just politics and party interests. As M. N. Pokrovsky<sup>1</sup> put it, 'history is politics extended into the past'. Anuchin's Pushkin sketches, according to Mogilner, 'blatantly embodied the Westernising mood of anthropological and liberal political discourses, while at the same time revealing their limits' (p. 232). Just as in Pereverzev: *Oblomov is a bourgeois who has stumbled in the process of Europeanisation and turned back towards patriarchy*. In the twenty-first century, such brainwashing with regard to the party character of science is otiose. Thank you very much, we've heard it all before. Just when we were thinking the whole thing had been consigned to Lethe forever, now look at it: it's back, in its full flower. In some ways Mogilner's style is actually more scathing than either Pokrovsky's or Pereverzev's. All in all, it's a depressingly cheerless picture of Russian anthropology.

And then there is Fedor Volkov, a.k.a. Khvedir Vovk. He is both 'a nationally-minded Ukrainian intellectual' and 'a European anthropological scholar' (p. 140). He departed from the 'colonial paradigm' (p. 143), and his methods 'were received in their political context as Western, European, civilised, and advanced' (p. 142).

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Pokrovsky (1868–1932), Marxist historian, whose ideas dominated Soviet historical scholarship in the first 15 years of Soviet power. [Editor.]

Volkov's aim was 'to establish a single anthropological type of the Ukrainians as the basis of the Ukrainian people' (p. 480). Another strategic ally is A. N. Dzhavakhov, a.k.a. Javakhishvili. This researcher 'consciously developed a project for an "anthropology of Georgia",' 'aimed at constructing a homogeneous national body' (p. 284). Since the body in question is Georgian there can be nothing racist about this project: on the contrary it is the height of progressivism, just like Volkov's Ukrainian project. I am not indulging in any misrepresentation. Here is a quotation that gives a sufficient illustration of the double standards at work: *Dzhavakhov's most significant achievement, as a nationally-minded anthropologist, was to overcome the dogma of a 'mixed type' in favour of a unified Georgian racial type* (p. 289). If Georgia had its own Avdeev, he'd sign up to that with both hands. This is the real price of political correctness!

Anthropology as such, outside politics, does not interest the author of this book in the least. How can the author's grotesque distortion of the scale of scientific figures and of their contribution to science be explained, except in terms of a complete lack of interest in the (scientific, not political) essence of the matter? According to the index, Sikorsky is mentioned on 59 pages and E.M. Chepurkovsky on only 10. Sapiienti sat!

As Mogilner sees it, the revolution changed little. There was a backward empire before it, there was a backward empire after. Even now, the picture is the same. 'Soviet researchers,' she writes, 'practically did not react to the discrediting of the category of 'race', which, after the Second World War and the horrors of Nazism, was definitively recognised as a category without strict scientific foundation' (p. 493). We shall return to scientific foundations in a moment; but Soviet researchers, unlike Mogilner, definitely never wrote about any Russian, Ukrainian, or Georgian national racial types. And, unlike her, there was no way they could have written about a racial type as the basis of a nation.

As for the discrediting of the category of 'race', the author's logic here is rather peculiar — especially if we remember that Mogilner considers herself a historian of science. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was the category of 'atomic nucleus' recognised as one without strict scientific foundations? Are scientific theories verified on the basis of whether they can be abused? It had seemed to us, hitherto, that what was definitively discredited after the horrors of Nazism was racism. Evidently we were mistaken, because racist literature continued to be published in the USA even after the Second World War. In other countries the situation was different. G. F. Debets, who devoted his life to studying races and created the Soviet school in that field, was elected in 1968 as vice-president of the International Union for Anthropological and Ethnographical

Sciences. Perhaps Mogilner can inform us how many members of that organisation were racists?

‘It was definitively recognised’... Where, when, by whom? There’s no need to be sly: the horrors of Nazism are neither here nor there. To convince ourselves of this, it’s enough to read the UNESCO declarations on race adopted by the leading world specialists in Paris in 1950 and 1951, when the memory of those horrors was much livelier than it is now [The Race Problem and Society 1957]. Both documents are written from thoroughly decent positions, both speak of races, provide a scientific definition of the term, but state that one must distinguish between ‘race’ as a biological category and ‘the myth of race’ [Ibid: 305]. The first document also addresses the dangers connected with the everyday use of the term ‘race’, and even proposes replacing it with ‘ethnic group’. But Ashley Montague, one of the most radical supporters of the ‘non-racial’ study of human variation, clarifies in his special opinion that such a substitution is unsatisfactory on scientific grounds, and should apply only to popular literature [Ibid: 303]. No, it wasn’t ‘the horrors of Nazism’, it was excessive political correctness, arising long after those horrors and connected not with them but with a ‘defensive reaction’ of American academia against the works of Coon, Jensen, and other American racists, that eradicated the difference between racism and studying races in the minds of the general public and of many in the humanities.

Some of Mogilner’s other remarks on anthropology in the Soviet period are beyond good and evil. *Eugenic thought [...] in the 1920s was perhaps the only more or less scientifically acceptable justification for the existence of physical anthropology that was also politically legitimate* (p. 483). *Physical anthropology in all its variants came to be associated with ‘biological determinism’ and to seem a threat to the plans for collectivisation and industrialisation* (p. 486). *Despite Yarkho’s anti-Western and “anti-bourgeois” attitude, he treated anthropology in full accordance with the German canon as ‘race science’, whose main category was “race” (not, say, “physical type”) determining “culture”* (p. 487). *Soviet scientific discourse on human diversity, almost unconnected with the real demands of life and the views of the population, was not just marginal: it was openly redundant* (p. 493). And so on, in the same vein.

In small doses this kind of thing is amusing, but in large doses it is unbearably tedious. Where does all this one-sided nonsense come from? It is rooted in the author’s inverted and vulgar idea of what it is scientists essentially do and of how their activity is related to the life of society. Here, for instance, is what Mogilner writes about V. V. Bunak: *Bunak, who had the reputation of being a leading Soviet anthropologist and who also occupied a corresponding position, [...]*

*nonetheless* [! — A.K.] felt obliged to prove his own significance as a scientist by participating in various medical, biological, and social projects (p. 463). This ‘nonetheless’ contains the whole essence of the book. It exemplifies a genre that one might call ‘science minus science’. I should like to inform Mogilner that scientists do not just ‘occupy positions’, ‘prove their own significance’, and ‘participate in projects’: first and foremost, they engage in science that they find interesting. The fact that this aspect of their activity does not remotely interest Mogilner is itself of interest only with reference to her personal biography. Scientists may be drawn into politics, either by their own will or against it, but only supporters of Pokrovsky and Mitin can believe that science is itself a form of politics. To resurrect outdated and odious historical paradigms by reformulating them in a new manner is a hopeless errand.

And I would stop there, except that the review would not be complete without at least a couple of words about the language in which the book is written. One must give the author’s predecessors their due: Friche, Pereverzev, Pokrovsky, and Mitin mocked literature, history, and natural science, but not the Russian language. In the olden days, meanwhile, they’d have called the language of Mogilner’s book ‘a mixture of French and Nizhny Novgorod’; but the times have changed. The modern variant of this newspeak is as follows:<sup>1</sup> *Here [in the language of Petri’s works — A.K.] there is no reflection of the ambivalence of the position of Russian “aliens” and of the Russian people itself vis-à-vis Culture* (p. 116). Texts of this sort are produced by the imperfect translation software that New Russians use to master American manuals on ‘branding’, ‘marketing’, and ‘merchandising’. If the program can’t translate something, it leaves it ‘as is’. Or it creates calques: ‘*Vpolne predskazuemo*, it was precisely by mastering racial discourse...’ (p. 210; ‘Quite predictably, ...’ in the original). Against this background, the rendering of ‘racialism’ as *rasoizatsiya* or as ‘raceising discourse’ is a masterpiece of artistic translation. But these days Mogilner isn’t the only one to use words like *moderny* (‘moderne’) or *idiosinkraticeskii*. As a certain philologist has observed, people now are ever more inclined to translate not from English to Russian, but from the Latin script to the Cyrillic.

‘Many NLO publications’, says the publisher’s prospectus, ‘have been included in humanities students’ compulsory reading lists not just in Russian universities, but also in the USA, Canada, Germany, Finland, and other European countries.’ I do not know whether Mogilner’s book is one of them; but — in company I am sure with all Russian physical anthropologists — I profoundly hope that it is not.

<sup>1</sup> Since Kozintsev is drawing attention particularly to the influence of English on Mogilner’s Russian, it has not been possible fully to bring out the stylistic features under discussion. [Translator.]

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*Aleksandr Kozintsev*

### From Homo Imperii to Anthropology in Russia, and Back

Science is interesting. It's interesting not just to practise it as a craft, but also to study it in itself, like any other subject for analysis. There are several reasons why. Longer than other spheres of human life, science has maintained its status as something inviolable, like the luggage of a diplomat crossing the border. You can't touch it,

because it's too important. You can't touch it, because the inspector won't know enough to give a reliable assessment. You can't touch it—and, just for that reason, you really do want to find out what's in that suitcase.

In fact, the suitcase in question has been a subject of study for some time. And there can hardly be anyone left who doubts that 'The "pure" universe of even the 'purest' science is a social field like any other, with its distribution of power and its monopolies, its struggles and strategies, interests and profits, but it is a field in which all these invariants [original italics] take on specific forms' [Bourdieu 1975: 19]. The social context of science, including its social history, is now much investigated, by representatives of the most diverse schools and tendencies.

But what is happening in Russia? In Russia there are no such investigations going on. Well, or hardly any. We hold our breath: what kind of investigations aren't going on? Let us pause on the history of anthropology. Are there really no books on the history of anthropology and ethnography? Of course there are. More than a few. But I'd like in all sincerity (and this is a sincere review) to add: 'And the point of them?' A lot of point, if we want to find out when chairs and institutes were established, who wrote which works and when. In other words, if we want to let the diplomat onto the aircraft, we shall need to know his name, the origin and destination of his journey, ticket please. But, alas, none of that lets us get a glimpse into the suitcase — and that's what we're after.

It would be interesting to know why human thought and activity took precisely those forms just at that time, why people suddenly got into measuring human skulls, what ambitions moved them, especially given that many of them were far from being nonentities in the Russian State. What depended on them? And what did they themselves depend on? The genealogy of scientific theories is a costly business, of course, but we do already know that if, at hour X, person N had happened to be at point B instead of point A, there couldn't have been any scientific influence at all. If Z hadn't received a research grant in the year such-and-such, then... But, in any event, what actually happened is what happened. And science is all the more interesting as a form of the organisation of human life, with the concomitant question: how is what scientists do connected with what other people are doing? And that is what is hardly being investigated at all in Russia. Marina Mogilner's book is the first Russian-language monograph about anthropology in its social context. In principle, the review could be ended there. That one fact, it seems to me, is enough to ensure that the study should be included in the obligatory reading list of every specialist and should occupy an appropriate, high, place among works on anthropology.

But I cannot end there, because the job of a review is not just to indicate a book's general significance. Even so, I should like to say another few words about just that. What is a good academic book in general? It is a book that makes one want to write more. That's my opinion. It is impossible for a good investigation to close a problem — to dot every i, solve every question, make everything secret known and everything obscure comprehensible. Comprehensible, what is more, to all readers without exception. That would be a bad book, without question: because beyond it there would be a dead end, and continuation would be impossible. A good book always demands a continuation: not a sequel in the manner of *Alien*, but new studies which might confirm or refute the book's conclusions, find new evidence and arguments, thereby gradually clearing a path into the forest. A good book opens up the jungle: it doesn't lay down asphalt around a familiar megalopolis.

By this criterion, Marina Mogilner's book is definitely a good one. It cries out to be continued. There need to be a lot of books like this. Anthropology needs to be written about, just as does the history of the other social sciences and humanities. One needs to return again and again to the same facts, names, and details, to find new ones, to establish links between them, and so on. When (if?) a lot of such investigations have been written, it will be possible to have a real discussion about the role that anthropology has played in Russia. So far, however, there is only this one book by Mogilner. So let's talk about that.

The monograph *Homo imperii. A history of physical anthropology in Russia* is an impressive work, resting on a mass of new archival sources and on a solid historiographical basis. Its author is one of the founders and editors of the Kazan journal *Ab Imperio*. Marina Mogilner defended her Cand.Sc. dissertation at Kazan State University in 1998, and then in 2000 took a Ph.D. at Rutgers University in the USA. She returned to Russia, taught at Kazan State University, and began to publish. What do these words mean? Not a lot. Let's try again.

Marina Mogilner is a professional historian. She has been educated in history both here and overseas, at the Kazan department of historiography and source studies and at the history faculties of the University of Central Europe (Budapest) and Rutgers University (America). The main area of her interests is the new imperial history. This tendency emerged around the year 2000, linked above all with the activities of *Ab Imperio* itself. 'New imperial history' arose as a response to the difficulties that had arisen in Russian studies as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. For Western researchers these difficulties were caused by the loss of a subject to study, while for Russian scholars they were caused by the elision of the barrier between Soviet and Western historiography, which caused the differences in methodo-

logical foundation to become obvious. The injections of Western theories could not go unnoticed, and the question of what Russian historians should study, and how they should study it, turned out to be unexpectedly acute [Gerasimov et al. 2004].

*Ab Imperio* began as an attempt to transfer the format of the famous Western journal *Nationalities Papers* onto Russian soil [Gerasimov and Mogilner 2007: 219]. It soon became clear, however, that concepts such as ‘nation’, ‘nationalism’, and ‘empire’, which had become more or less traditional in Western historiography, worked poorly on the Russian material, or at least required supplementary justifications and definitions that bounded on a complete refusal to use them. That gave rise to the idea of ‘new imperial history’. As the journal’s editors write, *within the framework of the New Imperial History we propose to study not structures but the practices and discourses that intertwine to form the dynamic open system of the ‘imperial situation’* [...] *The imperial situation is characterised by the parallel existence of incommensurate social hierarchies and systems of values, with a very approximately established “exchange rate” of status — while the ideal model of the modern national state presupposes the universality and equivalence of social categories in all corners of society* [Gerasimov and Mogilner 2007: 225]. The new imperial history aimed to study not empire as such, but the system of relationships that manifests itself primarily in empires (but not exclusively so) and which has been dubbed ‘the imperial situation’. To a significant extent, this orientation was connected with a critique of the basic ideas of the social sciences, and took the form of an ‘archaeology of knowledge about empire’ [Gerasimov et al. 2004: 26].

The new imperial history is counterposed ‘above all to the view of empire as a real ‘thing’, equal to itself; to any monologic metanarrative of the imperial space (whether it be a view ‘from the centre’, identified with the higher imperial bureaucracy, or an exclusive view ‘from below’, reproducing the tropes and rhetoric of activists in the national movement); and, finally, to the paradigm that fixates on the unequal dialogue of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ (while ignoring the multitude of ‘horizontal’ links and local hierarchies)’ [Ibid: 231]. *Like the nation, empire is not a ‘thing’ but a system of relations. And the logic of the nation can triumph in an empire (Russian or British), while the imperial situation can manifest itself in the most modern ‘national’ society* [Ibid: 228].

Such an approach obviously claims totality,<sup>1</sup> and can easily be subjected to criticism. I am far from being a specialist in imperial history,

<sup>1</sup> This is confirmed by the journal’s editors: ‘We have printed articles on the history of Kievan Russia and on analysing the political language used by V. Putin. The editors of AI are specialists on the history of Russia, the journal is dedicated to the history of the Russian Empire and the USSR, but we also publish articles examining—in a perspective close to ours—the past and present of Western Europe, Central Asia, and the USA’ [Gerasimov et al. 2004: 229].

whether old or new, and I certainly have no intention of going over the specificities of this particular tendency. This modest excursion into the new imperial history has been necessary purely in order to clarify the scientific context within which *Homo imperii* has appeared.

It seems to me that this study should be viewed as part of the ‘new imperial history’ project. It aims to analyse the imperial system of relations as realised in the discourses and practices of physical anthropology in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century — that very ‘imperial situation’ which is ‘characterised by the parallel existence of incommensurate social hierarchies and systems of values’.

The work is based, to a significant extent, on historiography connected with the study of empires, but it refers to this tendency as a metatext, employing the terminology that is accepted within this research paradigm. That is why such concepts as ‘empire’, ‘nation-state’, and ‘project’ are nowhere defined or discussed in the book. In this case these concepts are not instruments of analysis, required for an adequate study of the chosen subject (physical anthropology). They are used as fundamental structural units, dictated by the course of the research. The author leaves any discussion about the meaning of these terms on one side, and similarly fails to explain why she is not taking part in these discussions. Both are connected with the fact that *Homo imperii* is part of a dialogue, or perhaps more accurately, a monologue, about how imperial relations are realised in various spheres of the social life of the Russian State.

In other words, the subject of Marina Mogilner’s book is not physical anthropology, it is empire—albeit empire understood not as a ‘thing’, but as a system of relations between various social categories. So, in the book’s introduction, the author devotes particular attention not to the historiography of anthropology, but to those peculiarities of the Russian Empire that determine research interest in the concept of ‘race’ and in the functioning of a science for which this concept had to be of central importance. *The Russian Empire is a limitless, badly structured union of lands, jurisdictions, and peoples, which imagines itself to be relatively weakly ordered [...] In such an empire, is there a place for ‘race’—one of the key categories of Western modernity and Western imperialism [...]? The Russian Empire, which had no classical overseas colonialism and which embarked late on the path of a distinctive and limited modernisation, described itself in the categories of dynastic power and of romantic nationalism, and at the same time of imperial civic loyalty, the common status of the subject, “Russification”, etc. (p. 6).*

Obviously ‘race’ was something marginal in Russia: it could not and did not become a central category in describing social reality. But

that only lends added interest to the question of what it did become in Russia, of the form in which and the purposes for which it was needed, of who used it, of the intellectual and political context into which it was inscribed. Marina Mogilner identifies three such contexts: 'the anthropology of imperial diversity', linked to the activity of the Moscow anthropological school, 'the anthropology of Russian nationalism' represented by the works of I. A. Sikorsky, and 'the anthropology of multi-nationality', which found expression above all in scholarly work by anthropologists who were of non-Russian nationality and studied the anthropology of the non-Russian peoples. These three discourses represent different ways in which the category of 'race' was used in various kinds of scientific constructs, which were far from always devoted to 'race' as such.

Here it is necessary to register a few reservations. The three contexts identified by the author are not sufficient to characterise physical anthropology as a whole. They do not describe the whole range of discourses represented in anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They only exemplify three different ways of dealing with the concept of 'race', each of which is defined by a multitude of social, political, and institutional factors. It would be possible to go beyond Mogilner's conclusions and to try to clarify the extent to which Russian physical anthropology at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century can really be described using these three models, and whether there are any others (and what they are).

We are faced with a curious situation. In the complete absence of books on Russian anthropology as a social phenomenon, we are dealing here with a study that examines its marginal features in exhaustive detail. Not that this is an original approach. If anything, it is the opposite: many significant works have been devoted to analysing just such unique and exclusive cultural phenomena. *The Cheese and the Worms* by Carlo Ginzburg, *Captain James Cook* by Marshall Sahlins, *The History of an Exorcist* by Giovanni Levi. Marina Mogilner's book differs in many respects from these studies, including in the fact that the centre of attention is occupied not by one subject but by a diverse multitude of them.<sup>1</sup> But the author follows the same path: from the analysis of improbable, strange, awkward, and curious instances from the life of 'race' in the Russian context to an understanding of the general laws governing the interaction of political and intellectual elites, the role of scientific knowledge in the formation of imperial ideology, the role of ideology in the formation of scientific knowledge, and the particular features of the legitimisation of scientific knowledge within the Russian Empire.

<sup>1</sup> Such as the history of the preparation of, and subsequent reactions to, A. A. Ivanovsky's anthropological classification (pp. 151–186), or the anthropological variations on the theme of Pushkin as performed by D. N. Anuchin and I. A. Sikorsky (pp. 216–236, 245–252).

The study's fundamental problem is that the concepts of the general and the specific, of the background and the frame, are not discussed in the book. The first page of the introduction is devoted entirely to listing the work's basic questions. But they are so various that they hardly allow the reader to grasp what the book is actually about. 'About the emergence and evolution of the category of race in the Russian Empire'? 'About the formation of the science of physical anthropology in Russia'? 'About people who discovered the scientific concept of "race"'? Or 'about the processes of self-regulation and self-reformulation in the empire, about the limits of the modernisation projects of Russian intellectuals, about the way mass imperial society is modelled in thought, and about the problems of modern nationalism in an empire'? And although the author does draw a line under this list by naming the two chief questions around which the book is built — *was there 'race' in the Russian Empire and what did 'race' mean in Russian?* (p. 5) — this does not, sadly, suffice to explain what the book is about, why it has been written, and who it is for.

The situation is made worse by the fact that the book includes neither a review of the literature on the history of physical anthropology itself, nor any more or less clearly formulated conclusions. Its structure is distinguished by its inconsistency: the same individuals appear and are discussed, with varying care, in different chapters and sections. This 'chaos' is especially glaring against the backdrop of a conventional exposition of the history of anthropology, divided into Russian/Soviet and foreign, and further set out by epochs, schools, and individual scholars. These complaints would, of course, carry more weight if the book's subject really were the history of anthropology.

All these observations, of course, sound too much like a student textbook or a supervisor's run-of-the-mill comments on an undergraduate dissertation. They can be ignored, and they even should be ignored, for the sake of grasping the author's main thought. The difficulty is that the author herself has done extremely little to make this thought comprehensible to the famous 'wide circle of readers', or even to the narrower circle of representatives of the social sciences and the humanities.

The work touches on a number of interesting questions which have every chance of going unnoticed because its real objectives are not set out clearly enough, while its proclaimed objectives are likely to mislead the reader. On p. 22 the author writes: *Instead of history of science in the strict sense (as the history of scientific schools, tendencies, and institutions, in the framework of the emergence of the given scientific discipline) I reconstruct the motives and logic of the community of Russian scientists and associated professional practitioners, who took part in forming the anthropological paradigm on the most varied levels.*

And further: *In other words, I try to understand not only how the anthropological paradigm turned the Homo imperii—man of the empire—into the object of its own study, but also the extent to which it was itself defined by this Homo imperii, who was far from being uniform. My reconstruction of the imperial situation is characterised by a competition between the subjects and objects of anthropological discourse, in the course of which the semantics of “race in Russian” took shape. This is the process that will be analysed in the current book on race in the Russian Empire (p. 23).*

Thus, the author postulates three different levels of analysis: the reconstruction of the motives and logic of the community of Russian anthropologists, the analysis of the dependence of the anthropological paradigm on the *Homo imperii*, and the characterisation of the imperial situation within which the semantics of ‘race in Russian’ took shape. Marina Mogilner does not specify the hierarchy of these questions, with the result that the reader forms the impression that the author herself sees them as three different ways of phrasing one and the same problem. In practice, however, the monograph is devoted only to the last of these questions, which permits an approach to solving the first two but cannot at all either replace or exhaust a solution to them.

In including the phrase ‘history of physical anthropology’ in the book’s title and in the list of its main aims, Marina Mogilner dips her toe in a river that she obviously has no intention of diving into. I am sure the author would be quite prepared to admit that a history of physical anthropology in Russia cannot be limited to a history of the adoption and use of the category of ‘race’. The book only mentions in passing, if that, questions of the interaction—discursive, political, academic, institutional—between physical anthropology, ethnography, and the study of folklore.

The question of physical anthropology’s claim to the status of an exact science runs through the whole study, but nowhere does it occupy the central place, and nowhere is it formulated as a specific, significant question in the discussion about the history of the social sciences. The period with which Mogilner’s book deals was the ‘axial age’ of research in the field of the sciences of culture, linked with serious discussions about the concept of ‘objectivity’ in science and the possibility of objective science as such [Oexle 2000]. This same period was connected with the emergence and rapid growth of empirical natural science, which itself did much to provoke discussions in the last third of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries; and, finally, it was connected with the emergence of physical anthropology itself. The reconstruction of the motives and logic of Russian anthropologists, which in this case can easily (even too easily) be identified with the deconstruction of anthro-

polology as a science, requires particular consideration of the way in which natural science as a model of scientific cognition was incorporated into the system of coordinates employed by Russian intellectuals — and not only intellectuals.

Physical anthropology arose and existed as a natural-scientific twin of anthropology / ethnography. When Marina Mogilner sets about analysing the ‘unscientific’ component of this science, she is touching on something bigger than an analysis of anthropological discourse. The paradox linked with the study of the natural sciences and natural objects by students of society has been well explained by Bruno Latour: *Because for many sociologists, to provide a social explanation of something means to destroy this object, to debunk the false beliefs that ordinary people entertain about them, and then to replace the idols by a true object of science; or to show that such a replacement is impossible [...] Since social scientists themselves believe that a social explanation destroys its object, what will happen if the natural sciences are undergoing this radical treatment??* [Latour 2000: 110]. The development of research into science and technique, the sociology of scientific knowledge and the sociology of knowledge *tout court* show that such an approach is not only possible, but even productive. It is another matter that such a serious act of ‘vandalism’ should require authorial commentary and explanation of the author’s own approach—not just with regard to the interaction of imperial institutions and scientific workers, but also with regard to what remains of science itself after the motives and logic of the community of Russian scientists and their associates have been reconstructed.

In other words, from a history of physical anthropology one expects more thinking about anthropology, and I can quite understand those whose expectations from the book were disappointed. The monograph certainly does open up many new facets of the life of anthropology in Russia, and does contain a mass of interesting materials and talented interpretations. But *Homo imperii* is a book about the imperial situation within which the semantics of ‘race in Russian’ took shape.

The monograph is intended for readers who are well familiar not so much with anthropology itself as with recent research in the field of imperial history, associated with the names of such writers as Seymour Becker, Andreas Kappeler, Mark von Hagen, Aleksei Miller, Zenon Kogut, and also the work that has appeared in *Ab Imperio* itself. Is this a good or a bad thing? I think the trick hidden in the question will be clear. It is neither good nor bad; but one must understand the general backdrop against which Mogilner’s exposition is conducted. Does this orientation influence the quality of the research? Marina Mogilner is not a specialist in physical anthropology, and her work may contain some inaccuracies in that area. Incidentally, my own experience proved insufficient to uncover any.

Can we trust the author of a study of anthropology who is not herself an anthropologist? If we allow a negative answer to this question, we shall have to abandon anthropology itself, because anthropologists always (by definition) study traditions of which they are not a part, societies to which they do not belong, and phenomena that are so estranged as to be unrecognisable. In the first instance, of course, we shall have to forgo the anthropology of science. But one would like to believe that a negative answer to the question is not actually possible.

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