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The west and the great steppe in the history of Rus and Russia

Keywords: Rus, Russia, dualism of civilisation, Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev, theory of ethnogenesis, passionarity, eternal enemy

Born to the famous poets Anna Akhmatova and Nikolay Gumilev, Lev Gumilev achieved fame in his own right, in the social sciences, as the creator of the innovative historiosophic concept called the theory of ethnogenesis. The original and controversial methodology adopted by him ensured that his entire scholarly output and legacy, both during his life and after his death, was subject to interpretation only on his own terms of reference. This flaw also attaches to Polish scholarship in this discipline. Of the research touching on his legacy, that of “the last Eurasian” as Gumilev was to describe himself, only his “theory of ethnogenesis” can be assumed to have been thoroughly examined. Ryszard Paradowski did this in his study, published in 1996, *Idea Rosji Eurazji i naukowy nacjonalizm Lwa Gumilowa*, which, after being supplemented with a chapter on the output of Aleksander Dugin, was republished in 2001 under the titled *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji – studium idei*.¹ Other aspects of Gumilev’s legacy which are very interesting from the conservative vantage point of the history of Russian thought, or historical thought in the broader sense of the word, still constitute a blank on the Polish roadmap of the social sciences², and this is despite the fact that several works devoted to Lev Gumilev have been published. The bibliography in the recently published book of Małgorzata Zuber *Wpływ koncepcji euroazjatyizmu na pisanstwo historyczne Lwa Gumilowa*³, which takes no cognizance of the more exhaustive Russian sources that are now available, totally disqualifies her

1 See: R. Paradowski, *Eurazjatyckie imperium Rosji – studium idei*, Toruń 2001.

2 I omit here the chapter in Paradowski’s book which is based almost exclusively on L. Gumilev’s article: Меня называют евразийцем, see: *ibid.*, pp. 196-214.

3 See: M. Zuber, *Wpływ koncepcji euroazjatyizmu na pisanstwo historyczne Lwa Gumilowa*, Będzin 2008.

book in terms of scholarship. Another publication in the pipeline, Bartosz Gołabek's thesis on the two faces of Eurasianism in Russia, as exemplified by Lev Gumilev and Alexander Dugin, though in many aspects complementing our knowledge of Gumilev⁴, does not purport to address the central issues in the historical thought of "the last Eurasian" in a more comprehensive manner. The task of discussing the historiosophical and historical themes in Gumilev's writings should be considered particularly important because of his impact on the history of Russian thought.

Gumilev belongs to those Russian philosophers who supported the anti-occidental orientation which took root in the first half of the 19th century with the Slavophiles who espoused the need to resist European influence and return to the ideal of Slavonic conciliarism.⁵ Russian conservatism in the second half of the 19th century found expression in the great historiosophical syntheses of Nicolai Danilevsky and Constantin Leontiev, whose works were a source of great inspiration to Gumilev. Gumilev's direct predecessors were, however, thinkers of the Eurasian movement inaugurated in 1920 by Russian refugees in Sophia. This movement, in its parts, constituted both a supplement to and a denial of the principles of Slavophilism. With an absolutely negative attitude towards Western Europe and its legacy, Eurasians rejected the view of the Slavic character of Russian civilization, counterpoising the idea of Russia-Eurasia as a separate civilization.⁶

Of the Russian conservative thinkers contemporary to Gumilev, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was of incomparably greatest importance. A comparison of the two may be cast as a confrontation of Neo-Euroasians with Neo-Slavophiles. Gumilev searched for the roots of Russia civilization in the plains of Eurasia, whereas Solzhenitsyn harked back to the traditions of the Orthodox Empire in the spirit of the Slavophiles. Both thinkers shared the same negative attitude towards Western Europe, they both saw danger coming from China, and they were united in the conviction that communism was alien to the spirit of Russia. But whereas Solzhenitsyn's criticism of the West boiled down to his abhorrence of the secularization of society which began with the Renaissance and was endorsed by the Enlightenment, in Gumilev's writings it is difficult to find any trace of anything positive reflection on the superethnos of Western Europe.⁷ Solzhenitsyn's relatively positive assessment of Catholicism and Catholic Poland was in no way shared by Gumilev.⁸

The compact form of this monographic sketch allows for no more than a cursory glance at select aspects of Lev Gumilev's historical vision. But because there is no reliable biographical study of Lev Gumilev in Polish literature, I feel obliged to give the reader a thumbnail sketch of "the last Eurasian".

4 See: B. Gołabek's monograph study: "Lew Gumilow i Aleksander Dugin. O dwóch obliczach eurazjatyizmu w Rosji po 1991 roku".

5 A. Walicki, *Rosyjska filozofia i myśl społeczna od oświecenia do marksizmu*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 16263.

6 I. Massaka, *Eurazjatyzm: z dziejów rosyjskiego misjonizmu*, Wrocław 2001, p. 55.

7 L. Suchanek, Aleksander Sołżenicyn. Pisarz i publicysta, Kraków 1994, pp. 102103.

8 P. Głuszkowski, *Antyrosja. Historyczne wizje Aleksandra Sołżenicyna. Próba polskiego odczytania*, Warsaw 2008, pp. 151152.

Per aspera ad astra

Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev was born on 1st October 1912 and died on 15th June 1992. He spent his early years in the keep of his grandmother, initially at the Gumilev family estate in the village of Slepnievo, and after the Bolshevik coup, in the nearby town of Bezhetsk. Gumilev's somewhat irresponsible mother – Akhmatova, finally parted with her son, when he was six. His father, Nikolay Gumilev, was accused of taking part in a counter-revolutionary conspiracy and was executed by firing squad in 1921.⁹ Despite his family's difficult situation and unfavourable educational conditions¹⁰, Gumilev gave note of his broad range of interests from the earliest years of his life. The first impulse stimulating his imagination was the literature available in Bezhetsk public library.¹¹ It was then that he was consumed by a love of history which he nourished voraciously reading old books from the beginnings of the 20th century. Years later, Gumilev described those early intellectual encounters in the following way: В начале XX в. гимназическая история ограничивалась Древним Востоком, античной и средневековой Европой и Россией, причем изложение сводилось к перечислению событий в хронологической последовательности. Китай, Индия, Африка, доколумбова Америка и, главное, Великая степь Евразийского континента были тогда Terra incognita. Они требовали изучения.¹² History, his fascination with ancient civilizations and distant journeys, gave young Gumilev inspiration in his other passion – poetry.¹³

In 1929 Gumilev graduated from secondary school in Bezhetsk and moved to St Petersburg. His background initially barred him from tertiary education as a result of which – as he was to reminisce – “I went on archaeological and geological expeditions throughout the whole country. It was then that I was in Tajikistan where, in helping to fight malaria mosquitoes. I, myself, went down with malaria, but I learnt Persian.”¹⁴ The experience he gained opened the way for him to work in the Geological Institute, but he opted for history.

The year when Gumilev began his studies coincided with Kirov's murder and the gradual intensification of Stalinist terror in consequence of which his “reactionary” descent turned out to be something of a liability. Akhmatova's son spent a few days in gaol for the first time in 1933. Two years later, Gumilev was imprisoned for the second time. Soon after his release in 1938, Gumilev got himself embroiled in the

9 B. Gołąbek, op. cit.

10 His school in the 1920s did not have history on its curriculum and included a minimum number of hours of geography, *ibid.*

11 Young Gumilev read among others Jules Verne, Jack London, H. G. Wells, James Cooper, Henry Maine, Л. Гумилев, Биография научной теории или автонекролог, «Знамя». 1988. No. 4, pp. 202216 <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article11.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

12 *ibid.*

13 B. Gołąbek, op. cit.

14 L. Gumilow, *My chodzimy własnymi drogami*, [in:] A. Żebrowska, *Portrety z Arbatu*, Rzeszów 1991, p. 176.

defence of his father's good name at a lecture he attended as a result of which he was arrested and sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted to hard labour – on the White Sea – Baltic Sea canal (Belomor canal) project and then, via the Kirost prison in St. Petersburg, to the mines of Norylsk.¹⁵ As it turned out later, his pre-war prison camp experience was to furnish him with numerous interesting observations which allegedly inspired his theory of ethnogenesis. As he mentioned in the 1990s: Мысль о пассионарности пришла в 1939 году, когда я находился в Крестах. Там раздумья о научных проблемах были предпочтительнее мыслей о личных обстоятельствах. Луч света проходил сквозь маленькое окошко и падал на цементный пол. Свет проникал даже в тюрьму. Значит, подумал я, и в истории движение происходит благодаря какой-то форме энергии.¹⁶ The claim that his theory of passionarity was created in the dark cell of a Leninist prison does not hold water, but there is much to indicate that this experience – to use his own terminology – gave him some kind of passionary impulse. Also, the experience of великих строек коммунизма sparked off his concept of ethnic diversity. Describing the reality of his labour camp, Gumilev noted: там же были и казахи, и корейцы и русские, и немцы, и китайцы, и латыши. Отличались ли они друг от друга? Еще как! И каждый помогал своим. И каждый в случае чего держал за своих.¹⁷

Having served his time, Lev Gumilev took part in the fighting in East Prussia in 1944, and in taking Berlin the following year. Upon returning to St. Petersburg after the war, he defended his PhD thesis on Политическая история первого тюркского каганата VIVIII в. н.э in 1948. He was arrested again the next year and deported to labour camps in Karaganda, Mezhdurechensk and one near Omsk. During his second banishment, Gumilev's health significantly deteriorated, but he did not forego his scholarly pursuits which bore fruit in the shape of his works Хунну and Древние тюрки which were published in the 1960s. These works were actually written during his years of banishment on the basis of materials sent to him by his mother.¹⁸ Even the thaw that followed Stalin's death did not change Gumilev's fate. As he mentioned himself: releasing "Banderites" [members of the Ukrainian extreme nationalist organization founded by Stepan Bandera during World War II], "Vlasovites" [commonly used term denoting the two infantry divisions of the Russian Liberation Army formed at the end of 1944 from Russian prisoners of war by general Andrei Vlasov], because they served their time and they did not know what to do with me. In 1956 prisoners were released on Khrushchev's orders, and then I was free.¹⁹

15 B. Gołąbek, op. cit.

16 Id., Никакой мистики, [in:] id., Чтобы свеча не погасла. Сборник эссе, интервью, стихотворений, Москва 2003, p. 53.

17 id., Никакой мистики, [in:] id., Чтобы свеча не погасла. Сборник эссе, интервью, стихотворений, Москва 2003, p. 53.

18 B. Gołąbek, op. cit.

19 L. Gumilow, *My chodzimy własnymi drogami*, [in:] A. Żebrowska, Portrety, p. 180.

Immediately after leaving the camp, Gumilev entered into correspondence with Pyotr Savitsky, one of the interwar ideologists of Eurasianism, which lasted from 1956 to 1968. Their meeting in 1960 was the culmination point of their correspondence. Savitsky, also facilitated an indirect exchange of letters with Gieorgij Vernadsky, however, it never developed into something more vital.²⁰ But there is a footprint of all this correspondence in the legacy of “the last Eurasian”.

Leaving prison camp did not put an end to difficulties in Gumilev’s life. Having returned to Leningrad (St. Petersburg), the history teacher remained under the watchful eye of the Soviet authorities. This came together with the ostracism of the academic community which treated his theories with distrust and his prison record with self-preservationist reserve. Being denied the title of doctor of geographical science for his thesis on *Этногенез и биосфера земли* submitted in 1976 was the high point of his exclusion. Even the arrival of Gorbachev and the onset of *Perestroika* (especially in its *glasnost* aspect) did not change the attitude of the authorities towards the son of Akhmatova. Gumilev’s entreaties were ignored and only the determined intervention of the historian, Dymitry Likhachev, helped change the situation. As from 1988, Gumilev’s works were slowly becoming known to the public.²¹

Ethnogenesis

The circumstances in which Lev Gumilev was to challenge established views on the watershed lines of the world’s cultural and civilizational domains understood as cohesive unities were correlated with his theory of ethnogenesis – the process of creation, development and disappearance of ethnos. Gumilev’s view of the circumstances of generating an ethnos are closely connected with Vladimir Vernadsky’s distinction of the notion of the energy of living matter in the biosphere, but in taking Vernadsky’s classification he distinguished three types of energy sources powering the Earth’s biosphere: solar energy, underground radioactive disintegration and the scattering energy beam in the galaxy.²² Actually, the latter type of energy, bundles of which hit Earth from time to time with 200-300 km, long strips struck Gumilev as a source of mutation, which he defined as a passionarity impulse. It means an ability to adopt supernatural behavioural patterns which are often irrational and at variance with natural self-preservation instincts, which stems from the accumulation of an excess of biochemical energy in the biosphere. The passionarity charge, which maintains an ethnos, is a single shot that is used up with the passage of time. Earlier, however, the ethnos undergoes many phases, whose length in principle lasts 1500 years from the moment of impulse to its complete dissipation. The first ethnic phase is the so-called spurt, which is divided in two: a hidden phase lasting 150 years (also called the incubation phase) and an open phase. The result of the spurt

20 This is due to anxiety in sending correspondence to the USA, which, given the escalating Cold War, could have led to further problems in Gumilev’s life, B. Gołabek, op. cit.

21 *ibid.*

22 Л. Гумилев, *Конец и вновь начало*, Москва 1992, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/EAB/eab01.htm#eab01chapter08>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

is the birth of an ethnos – of a different ethnic group which constitutes a homogeneous whole cemented with passionary energy. A high level of passionarity make people take risky decisions leaning towards readiness for greater self-sacrifice.²³ The accumulation of ethnic energy occurs in the acmatic phase of ethnogenesis, which does not stimulate people to create a whole but, quite the opposite, to be insubordinate to commonly accepted rules and depend only on their own nature. This is reflected by the expression “be yourself” in face of a change in stereotypical behaviour. This phase is accompanied by strong internal competition which temporarily arrests the process of ethnogenesis. It means that ethnos enters a breakthrough phase which is accompanied by a peak development of culture and art, but it does not signify an increase in the level of passionarity; indeed, quite the opposite, it determines its decrease. This period usually ends with bloodshed, as a result of which the system rejects the excess passionarity and some balance is restored to society. Then ethnos begins to live with the power of inertia – huge countries and great material resources are created while passionarity gradually wanes. The result of its disappearance is that the dominant position in the system is occupied by subpassionaries²⁴ – individuals with reduced passionarity. The reverse phase begins, in which decomposition processes are irreversible. The moment when decomposition reaches all aspects of life and nothing is left of the heroic era, the final phase begins – the memorial phase. Then even the memory disappears and homeostasis, the balance-with-nature period, begins, which may be disrupted by another impulse.²⁵ It should be noted that several themes can be evolved from these phases of ethnogenesis.

The passionary impulses coming from cosmic energy resulted in the not so very usual production of ethnic groups. Ryszard Paradowski does the same as Gumilev, i.e. he states that the author singles out nine shocks of passionarity.²⁶ When analysing interviews with

23 *ibid.*

24 Using precise notions, Gumilev defined a subpassionary as a person, whose self-preservation instinct is greater than the power of passionarity.

25 L. Gumilow, *Od Rusi do Rosji*, Warsaw 1993, pp. 1215.

26 Gumilev enumerated the following shocks that had occurred up to the 13th century. The first one took place in the 18th century BC and set up the Egyptians, Hyksos and Hittites. The second occurred in the 11th century BC and spread over northern China to Central Asia (Scythians). As a result of the third one (8th century BC) was the ethnos of ancient Romans, Samnites, Etruscans, Gauls and Greeks. A few new ethnos impacted on south-east Asia and Persia. The fourth impulse came in the 3rd century BC and spread over the territories of northern China (from North Korea to Central Asia and Kazakhstan). The ethnos of the Sarmatians, Koreans, and Huns came at that time. For the fifth time the Earth was irradiated with a dose of cosmic energy in the 1st century. Slavs, Dacians, Christians (written with a capital letter, because Gumilev recognizes them as a distinct force activated by ethnos), and Jews were born. In the 6th century there was another shock which was particularly important to the history of the Arabs, Indians, second-line Chinese and Japanese. The impulse of passionarity of the 8th century gave birth to European peoples: Spaniards, Germans, French, Scandinavians. As a result of the eighth shock, the Mongol and Nuzhens peoples were formed. The ninth shock ran in a straight line from Lithuania via Turkey, to Ethiopia, giving birth to Lithuanians, Ottoman Turks and the Great Russians. The shock had a sudden change in giving birth to the Great Russians, which resulted in the creation of the Principality of Moscow, *id.*, *Конец и вновь*, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/EAB/eab03.htm#eab03chapter06>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

the Russian scholar, Paradowski did not take into consideration the fact that his conception needs a greater degree of fine-tuning. Gumilev singled out the creation of the American nation²⁷, though in his opinion the nation was secreted from a greater, superethnic whole as a separate ethnos.²⁸ It is difficult to view this position as something grossly at variance with reality. A totally different situation took place at the end of the 18th century, when the last passionary impulse was said to have occurred – affecting in the area between Japan, China and Burma and further, right up to South Africa.²⁹ The conception of how these ethnoses appeared was not specified by Gumilev, but their existence should still be emphasized.

The passionary impulse delivers an energy charge to the given ethnos and then its role is over. Interactions determining the shape of the ethnos come from the regions lying much closer to it. As Gumilev argues: Следовательно, неповторимое сочетание ландшафтов, в котором сложился тот или иной этнос, определяет его своеобразие – поведенческое и во многим даже культурное.³⁰ But the landscape surrounding the place where the ethnos was born [emphasis added – M.W.] is not just a factor which forms its shape. It is also its homeland (родина). For Gumilev, the notion of homeland understood in this way constitutes one of the conceptual elements of ethnos.

As a result of this interpretation, Gumilev refers to human groups changing their “ecological niches” with obvious reluctance. This was reflected in Gumilev’s story about “improving” the irrigation system of the Tigris and Euphrates by the Chaldeans. According to Gumilev, Narbonid, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, brought his wife from Egypt. Along with her came many Egyptian engineers with know-how acquired in devising the irrigating system of the Nile, but they had no idea about the specifics of Mesopotamia. The effects, as can be imagined, were tragic. Several centuries later, a similar degree of incomprehension of an alien landscape was shown by Arabs.³¹ Gumilev supports his conception with examples from the history of the Goths and the Vandals, and the colonizing predispositions of Europeans. Iwona Massaka subjects Gumilev’s views to criticism claiming that he offered flimsy explanations of the damage done Eurasia by his fellow countrymen, notably Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev.³² Massaka’s judgment would be justified if Gumilev had actually

27 В XVII веке англичане стали заселять Америку, и через полтора столетия возник новый этнос: американцы, *idem*, Я не был одинок, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article19.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

28 *id.*, *Etnogeneza czyli o cyklicznym rozwoju ludzkości. Rozmowa z prof. Lwem N. Gumilowem*, [in:] *Zrozumieć świat: rozmowy z uczonymi radzieckimi*, ed. W. Osiatyński, Warsaw 1980, p. 317.

29 Signs of this impulse, according to Gumilev, could be seen in the modernization of Japan and in China through the stimulation of Taiping, and then the Kuomintang. Here the fact that the beginning of reforms of the Meiji period took place before the end of the 150 year period commenced by the impulse as singled out by Gumilev draws attention. It may signify failure to work through to the end in all its details the conception of the last impulses singled out by Gumilev, Л. Гумилев, *История – наука естественная или визит к профессору Гумилеву*, [in:] *idem*, *Чтобы свеча*, p. 30.

30 *id.*, *Ритмы Евразии*, [in:] *idem*, *Ритмы Евразии. Эпохи и цивилизации*, Москва 1993 p. 189.

31 Л. Гумилев, *История – наука естественная или визит к профессору Гумилеву*, [in:] *idem*, *Чтобы свеча*, p. 21.

32 I. Massaka, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

considered those communist leaders as “his friends”, but, in fact, Gumilev did say that: Коммунисты изначально представляли собой специфический маргинальный субэтнос, комплектуемый выходцами из самых разных этносов. Роднило их всех не происхождение, а негативное, жизнеотрицающее мироощущение людей, сознательно порвавших всякие связи со своим народом.³³ Because in this interview, Gumilev specifically names Konstantin Chernenko among the communist leaders, the above statement applies not only to the initiators of the October Revolution, but also to all later dignitaries of the All-Union Communist Party (the Bolsheviks) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Superethnic division is also conditioned by geographical factors, Gumilev proposed an unconventional division of Earth into continents, in which seas do not divide but connect separate areas to create one whole. Here, the Mediterranean, combining areas of the Greco-Roman superethnos in the past, can serve as an example. An identical role is played by the seas surrounding the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. More often than not, borders determine areas of land difficult to travel. Sometimes it goes in the air: Western Europe is separated from Eurasia by the negative isotherms of January.³⁴ Gumilev distinguishes several “continents”, which are the seats of the superethnoses: Western Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, India, and China.³⁵

The eternal enemy

The historical thought of Lev Gumilev is characterized by counterpoising the civilizations of the West and Russia. Its sources should be looked for in the period of Kievan Rus. Gumilev paints an uncompromisingly negative picture of the West from start to finish. We come across his criticism of Europe for the first time in his reference to the Khazar state. Khazaria is described negatively by Gumilev as an ethnic chimera³⁶ or anti-system³⁷, enumerating the imperial regimes of the Carolingians and

33 Л. Гумилев, В. Ермолаев, Горе от иллюзий, [in:] Л. Гумилев, Ритмы Евразии, p. 187.

34 It should be noted that Gumilev (in *Od Rusi*, p. 19) states that the isotherm of January goes through Ukraine and Belarus to the Black Sea while Paradowski (in *Eurazjatyckie imperium*, p. 12) sees it as going along the Elbe, with which Gumilev would allegedly justify the post-Yalta borders of the USSR. The real route of the isotherm of January does not coincide with any of those descriptions, Л. Гумилев, Ритмы Евразии, p. 189.

35 *ibid.*

36 Форма контакта несовместных этносов разных суперэтнических систем, при которой исчезает их своеобразие. Выросшие в зоне контакты люди не принадлежат ни к одному из контактирующих суперэтносов, каждый из которых отличается оригинальными традициями и ментальностью. В химере же господствует бессистемное сочетание несовместных между собой поведенческих черт, на место одной ментальности приходит полный хаос царящих в обществе вкусов взглядов и представлений, *idem*, Этносфера: история людей и история природы, Москва 2004, p. 561.

37 Системная целостность людей с негативным мироощущением выработавшая общее для своих членов мировоззрение. Все антисистемные идеологии и учения обединяются одной центральной установкой: они отрицают реальный мир его сложности и многообразии во имя тех или иных абстрактных целей, see *ibid.*, p. 518.

Ottomans, as he describes them, among the allies of the Khazar state.³⁸ He was more comprehensive in his criticism of the West when discussing the circumstances of the conversion of Rus. Vladimir apparently rejected the “Latinisers” with the words: *Go back, since our fathers did not accept this*³⁹, which Gumilev associates with the situation prevailing in mid-10th century Rome. *If the Pope was only a hunter, a player, a womanizer and a drunkard, that would not be so bad. But the Bishop of Rome organised feasts in honour of the ancient gods and drank Satan’s health*⁴⁰ – writes Gumilev arguing that information about the devil’s grip on Rome must have reached Rus. But his elaborate reconstructions of chains of events⁴¹ (цепочки событий) when discussing the history of the Great Steppe, unexpectedly lapse into uncritical blind faith in his sources. Oddly enough, this happens when the issue relates to the Western European superethnos. According to Gumilev, the Pope’s abominations were only part of what motivated Vladimir to reject the Latin proselytizers. His views are supplemented by his perception of the anti-systems that developed in the West, and the possibility that they would spread to Rus. В обоих случаях они не могли спорить с теологами, изучившими Коран и Библию, но они ощущали, что их хотят не просветить, а использовать. Таково свойство антисистемы – ее невозможно опровергнуть логически, но она ощущаема, и каждый вправе ее не принять.⁴² Gumilev does not know whether the western missionaries included members of anti-systems in their number, but the suggestion is explicit and indirectly touches on the whole civilization.

Confirmation of this adumbrated hostility to the West is reflected in Gumilev’s narration the origins of Rus in the first half of the century and its emergent polarised factions. The pro-Western party is the object of Gumilev’s relentless criticism. In his view, Sviatopelk I was the first prince representing the interests of Rus.⁴³ In later centuries, its demands were expressed among others by Izyaslav and Sviatopelk II.⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, Kiev’s Pechersk Lavra was also under the influence of Occidentalism.⁴⁵ This trend also got the thumbs down from “the last Eurasian” because he felt that the West, where a new and aggressive superethnos came into being in the 9th century, was alien to Rus.⁴⁶ This sense of alienation conditioned the motives of its representatives.

38 id., Древняя Русь и Великая степь, Москва 2000, p. 111.

39 ibid., p. 55.

40 ibid.

41 For Gumilow “chains of events” constitute the foundation of ethnical history: этническая история не беспорядочный набор сведений, “без начала и конца” (А. Блок), и не просто “дней минувших анекдоты” (А. Пушкин), а строгие цепочки причинноследственных связей, с началом и концом, переплетенные между собой, то, чтобы попасть в цель, надо учитывать прошлое процесса, его окружение в изучаемый период и общую панораму после пятого акта трагедии. Да, именно трагедии, ибо каждый “конец” – это гибель того, чему было посвящено историческое повествование, ibid., p. 9.

42 ibid., p. 178.

43 L. Gumilow, *Od Rusi*, p. 57.

44 id., Древняя Русь и Великая, pp. 115, 201.

45 ibid, p. 115.

46 ibid, p. 231.

Describing the circumstances of Bolesław Chrobry's expedition against Kiev, Gumilev writes without particular indignation: *foreign warriors were placed in Kievan homes and the surrounding villages. Suddenly conflicts with local people began. A lot of Poles were wiped out literally within one night.*⁴⁷ No doubt Gumilev justified such conduct by reference to the sins of the aliens of which there were several. We find among them: succumbing to negative systems⁴⁸, a lack of religious tolerance⁴⁹, and cruelty.⁵⁰ But perhaps the most grievous sin of the West was its propitious attitude to the oppressors of Khazaria – the Jews. According to Gumilev, these were the convergent goals of the Carolingians and Ottonians on one side and the Jewish community on the other, based on economic interests, in particular on the slave trade concentrated on Slavic countries.⁵¹ It is no coincidence that whenever Gumilev identified Western influence on Rus, Jews immediately came into play: they were in the army of Sviatopelk I coming back to Rus, and they supported Izyaslav in order to gain a pronounced if short-lived influence on the country at the time of Sviatopelk II.

Historical alternative

In view of the continuing threat of an alien civilization from the West and its accompanying Jews, Rus was forced to seek support for its survival. According to Gumilev, this could only be forthcoming from two centres of civilization: the Byzantine Empire and the Great Steppe. The beginnings of the synthesis of Steppe and Byzantine elements can be found in Gumilev's writings on Kievan Rus. The Byzantine Empire entered the Ruthenian arena bringing about the conversion of Vladimir. Gumilev's rapturous tone in assessing the conversion of Rus at the hands of the Byzantine Empire was more of a panegyric when he wrote: Они остановили свой выбор на греческой ортодоксии, потому что в ней не было двойного дна. Византия хотела получить от Руси только дружбу и прекращение бессмысленных набегов на побережья Черного моря. И она не сдобривала проповедь православия хитросплетениями,

47 It should be honestly admitted that there are not too many examples of Gumilev's indifference to the wanton aggression and cruelty of the ethnic groups that were close to him, but then again he did not cite too many examples of such cruelty. id., *Od Rusi*, p. 59.

48 According to Gumilev, Tsar Henry IV conducted black masses on the body of his wife, Kievan Princess Prakseda; he emphatically believed that this would impress the princesses of Burgundy or Italy. However, Prakseda ran away from her husband. For Gumilev, this is evidence of another aspect reflecting the conscience of Rus and its de facto lack in the West. The fact that Henry in reality belonged to the sect of the Nicolaitans is not an important issue for us. More important is the fact that Gumilev again absorbed negative information about western Europeans completely uncritically. Also, it is Gumilev's a priori assumption that the women of Burgundy or Italy enjoyed black mass rituals conducted on their bodies, *ibid.*, p. 74.

49 According to Gumilev, after the occupation of Halicz by the Hungarian King Koloman, the Bishop was expelled, the Orthodox churches were turned into Catholic ones, and people were forced to convert to Catholicism, id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 236.

50 One of examples can be the conduct of Germans towards Elbe Slavs, *ibid.*, p. 242.

51 *ibid.*, pp. 148149.

пусть даже неумышленными.⁵² His evaluation of Vladimir Monomakh's Greckophile policy⁵³ runs in similar vein. At the same time, the Byzantine Empire of Gumilev had a fairly superficial power structure; it was deprived of a strong and centralised system of government and at a relatively safe distance with little influence on Ruthenian affairs. Gumilev saw the Byzantine Empire as an enduringly vital beacon of culture and religion. This combination of elements ensured that the Byzantine Empire merely remained a source of spiritual inspiration on the cultural development of Rus. The huge remaining "cultural area" remained to be developed, and this, according to Gumilev, was done with the help of people of the Great Steppe.

The author thereby totally reassessed the role of the Polovtsy, Pechenegs and Torks, and finally of the Mongols in the history of Rus. This is his most original contribution to the treasury of historical thought. "The last Eurasian" decidedly broke with the concept of the eternal struggle of the forest with the steppe, viewing it as the projection of 18th century relations into the distant past.⁵⁴ He pointed at the geographical unity of the region at that time and argued that, relations between Rus and the Polovtsy were based above all on intensive trade. This did not exclude clashes because, as he averred, кочевое хозяйство не может существовать вне связи с земледельческим, потому что обмен продуктами одинаково важен для обеих сторон. Поэтому мы наблюдаем, наряду с военными столкновениями, постоянные примеры симбиоз⁵⁵ but stable relations were in the interest of both parties. It did not pay for the Polovtsy to fight with Rus, because they were definitely the weaker side. The number of nomads amounted to several hundred thousand as opposed to 5.5 million Rusyns,⁵⁶ whose numerical superiority came in tandem with their greater manoeuvrability. In changing their campsites, the Polovtsy tribes were forced to move by carts which could move at a maximum speed of four kilometres per hour, which made them virtually defenceless against Rusyn cavalry attacks.⁵⁷ In addition, Gumilev factors in the inability of the Steppe people to take fortresses by siege and the Ruthenian advantage in weaponry.⁵⁸ But conflicts with the Polovtsy did visit quite a few problems on the Rusyns. The annihilation of an opponent, whose encampments stretched from the River Dniester to the Irtysh, was not possible for the Rusyn princes.⁵⁹ The stalemate was finally broken by Vladimir Monomakh who – according to Gumilev – ended the pointless war.⁶⁰ From that moment on,

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ L. Gumilow, *Od Rusi*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *id.*, Древняя Русь и ее соседи в системе международной торговли и натурального обмена, 'Известия ВГО', т. 119, 1987, вып 3, pp. 227234, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article63.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

⁵⁵ *id.*, Древняя Русь и Кыпчакая Степь в 945-1225 гг, [in:] *idem*, Ритмы Евразии, p. 529.

⁵⁶ *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 323.

⁵⁷ *id.*, Древняя Русь и ее соседи, pp. 227234, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article63.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

⁵⁸ *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 216.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 222.

their mutual relations ran peacefully. Gumilev saw evidence of this in the record of Codex Laurenziana, according to which twelve Polovtsy attacks on Rus took place in 1055-1236, with the same number of Rusyn invasions of the Polovtsy, whereas there were allegedly over thirty joint Ruthenian-Polovtsian operations. The participation of nomads in the internal conflicts of Rus reflects the access of the Polovtsy to the land of Rus, or, to put it in ethno-historical terms, to the Ruthenian superethnos.⁶¹ The fate of the Torks was virtually analogical.

Gumilev extended the concept of “Ruthenian land” to the areas inhabited by nomads, but not only. He also performed this operation in relation to the Finno-Ugric peoples. Gumilev maintained that: Русская земля включает угорские, финские, балтские (голядь) и тюркские племена, являвшиеся компонентами суперэтнической целостности.⁶² And he further argued that the Ruthenian sub-ethnoses (later changed into ethnoses), as formed in the 12th century, were not possessed of a fully Slavic character when he says: Пусть суздальцы сложились из кривичей, мери и муромы, новгородцы – из кривичей, веси и словен, рязанцы – из вятичей и муромы, половецкие – из кривичей.

The role assigned to the Polovtsy and Torks by Gumilev turned out to be trivial. Negating the picture of the conflict between the Great Steppe and the Forest and replacing it with a picture of harmonious coexistence of nomads and settled peoples, “the last Eurasian” created the bases for negating the destructiveness of Batu-Khan’s invasion and presenting the period of Tatar subjugation as the blessing of history for Rus. The Finno-Ugric peoples in this picture play only a supporting role.

Winds of change from East and West

Lev Gumilev’s theories arouse the biggest controversy in two spheres. The first of these is the theory of ethnogenesis. The second concerns his specific assessment of the history of Rus in the period of the so-called Tatar yoke and the impact of the Mongols. Without getting bogged down in a detailed discussion of the history of Genghis-Khan’s state, we can establish that the positive attitude towards his legal principles as expressed in the Great Jasa [*a code of laws for the various spheres; it dealt with religious beliefs, court ceremonial, civil rules, general conduct and justice*]⁶³ and the conviction that the Mongol invasions in Asia were not of particularly devastating proportions.⁶⁴ Soon the storm from the East was supposed to have reached

61 *ibid.*, pp. 222, 251.

62 Elsewhere in the same work, Gumilev expresses the following opinion completely contradicting himself. Русичам грозила худшая судьба: они перемешались с мерей, мордвой, муромой, яхвягами и куманами, так что их ожидало превращение в этническую химеру, а затем и аннигиляция, *ibid.*, p. 370.

63 L. Gumilow, *Od Rusi*, pp. 9596.

64 Gumilev rejected the descriptions of taking the cities of Khorasan left by Muslim chroniclers during which Mongols were to put the inhabitants to the sword as myths, which were born of “the black legend of Mongol bestiality, *ibid.*, pp. 101102.

Ruthenian lands, over which, simultaneously, ominous storm clouds were blowing from the West. Which way did Rus head?

Lev Gumilev's historical writings on Kievan Rus, contain numerous vestiges of the Great Steppe's growing influence on the history of the Rurik dynasty's domain. This influence was not exclusive because Gumilev also acknowledged Byzantine and Latin influences. This image, as a result of the Mongols' Great Expeditions for the West, was completely changed. The relative pluralism of civilizational influences was replaced by pure dualism.⁶⁵ The decisive sea-change came in 1236-1252.⁶⁶

That period was characterised by the parallel expansion of two worlds into Ruthenian lands – Mongolian and Western. Batu-Khan's expedition came in tandem with the apogee of German and Swedish expansionism along the Baltic coast. These two historical windstorms constituting real historical processes were the object of Lev Gumilev's specific interest.

The eastern hurricane razing cities to the ground⁶⁷ was for Gumilev some kind of summer breeze. "The last Eurasian" opened his attack on established views in historiography by negating the size of Batu-Khan's army.⁶⁸ He argued that in the 13th century the Mongol tribes numbered six hundred thousand people in total, and their military clout was based on a force of no more than 130-140 thousand men.⁶⁹ This army was forced to fight on three fronts. About 60 000 warriors were bogged down in China, another 40 000 were committed on the Persian front. As a result, according to Gumilev's calculations, the forces which Batu could throw against Rus, did not exceed – 30-40 000 men.⁷⁰ At the same time, he estimated that the Ruthenian population stood at 11 million.⁷¹ The balance of forces therefore made any imposition of the Tatar yoke impossible.

Apart from the lack of the possibility to do so, there was also no wish to establish control over Rus. The Great Expeditions for the West, in its aims, were only supposed to disperse the Polovtsy who, in cooperation with the Naimans – the enemies of the Mongols, caused a conflict lasting till 1240. The Steppe vendetta had to be brought to an end. The expeditions were, in fact, great cavalry raids.⁷² No wonder that upon

65 Here it is suggested that the border between Lithuania and Moscow corresponded to the border between the Western European superethnos and steppe superethnos.

66 The initial date may have been eventually postponed until 1201, which would be connected with the establishment of Riga and the beginnings of Western expansionism along the Baltic Sea.

67 Small towns and fortresses were simply razed to the ground by this avalanche; *Bielogorod, Iżesławiec, BorysowGlebow znikły po tych wypadkach raz na zawsze z historii Rusi. W XIV wieku podróżnicy płynący w górę Donu widzieli na jego pagórkowatych brzegach tylko ruiny i pustkowia, tam gdzie jeszcze stosunkowo niedawno znajdowały się miasta i wioski*, B. Grekow, A. Jakubowski, *Złota Orda i jej upadek*, Warsaw 1953, p. 73.

68 For example, Romuald Wojna estimated that Batu's strength did not exceed 150 000 people, R. Wojna, *Wielki świat nomadów. Między Chinami i Europą*, Warsaw 1983, p. 235.

69 Л. Гумилев, *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 410.

70 id., *Od Rusi*, p. 111.

71 id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 410.

72 id., *My chodzimy własnymi drogami*, [in:] A. Żebrowska, *Portrety*, p. 177.

defeating their opponents, the Mongols did not impose taxes, and neither left garrisons nor entered into unequal legal treaties with the princes.⁷³

The size of the army and the aims of its leadership almost automatically tell us of the relatively small scale of cruelty that came with the war. Gumilev propounded this view having read about the fate of the Duchy of Vladimir where, in 1238, the Mongols were supposed to have burnt down only fourteen cities out of a total of three hundred, and even those were rebuilt in the next year.⁷⁴ He resorted to empirical argument describing Batu-Khan's raid on Ruthenian lands in the course of an interview thus: *The next one on its bloody route was Kiev turned into ruins and ashes... But have you visited the 11th century Kievan Pechersk Lavra and Saint Sophia's Cathedral?*⁷⁵ Other places of worship which survived from the period of Kievan Rus, are also evidence against the thesis of the devastating effects of Mongol raids for Gumilev. Interestingly enough, "the last Eurasian" does not apply a similar argument in relation to the Kremlin and Saint Basil's Cathedral, which survived the year of Polish occupation in the 17th century.⁷⁶ The few cities which really were razed to the ground and their inhabitants were wiped out, had only themselves to blame. In the stereotypical behaviour of Mongols there was the conviction that envoys were inviolable. According to Gumilev, the rulers of those cities, who did not understand that and murdered envoys, brought retribution upon themselves. An archetypal example of this seems to be the fate of Kozel which was razed to the ground.⁷⁷

The irreversible collapse of Kievan Rus in the 13th century is an objective fact usually connected with the invasion. Gumilev has a totally different opinion on this subject. He connected the whole collapse only with ethnic history, in face of which Rus entered the reverse phase of ethnogenesis.⁷⁸ Summing up, in his own words: *следует признать, что поход Батыя по масштабам произведенных разрушений сравним с междоусобной войной, обычной для того неспокойного времени.*⁷⁹ We can only ask why the memory of those events was quite different. According to Gumilev, the West is to blame for the myth of Mongol savagery. He did not unequivocally name any one guilty person, and satisfied himself with pointing an accusatory finger in the general direction of the Knights Templars⁸⁰ or Sigismund Herberstein.⁸¹ The anti-Occidental thread perennially weaving its course through the world-picture of the *ethnogenetic* Russian sage, again gave note of itself.

73 id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 361.

74 ibid, p. 314.

75 id., *My chodzimy własnymi drogami*, [in:] A. Żebrowska, *Portrety*, p. 173.

76 ibid, p. 180.

77 id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 339.

78 ibid, p. 345.

79 ibid, p. 350.

80 Л. Гумилев, А. Курчки, *Черная легенда: историкопсихологический этюд*, 1989, N 1, pp. 543. <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/bl04.htm#para73>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

81 Л. Гумилев, *Всем нам Завещана Россия*, [in:] idem, *Чтобы свеча*, p. 35.

“The last Eurasian” offers a totally different assessment of the second historical windstorm, which broke out over Rus in the 13th century. The expansion of the orders of knights is not a phenomenon that may be taken out of its historical context. Quite the opposite; Gumilev sought to restore the balance by emphasising the continuity of the process: Натиск на восток, начавшись в XI в., продолжался в XIII в., и в XIV в., когда были завоеваны литовцами Киев и Чернигов, и в XVII в., когда поляки сожгли Москву; в XIX в. то же самое проделали французы и в XX в. хотели учинить немцы.⁸² Whereas Batu-Khan’s expedition appears to be a single historical episode, the expansion of the German knights along the Baltic Sea is another chapter in the Rusyn, and then Russian struggle (in any case all Orthodox Russians) with “the predatory Western European superethnos”. Not surprisingly, he found this second superethnos to be far more dangerous. Gumilev leaves us in no doubt on that score. The terror appeared in two forms: *The population of Rus was treated by Germans with even greater cruelty than the Balts. If, for example, captured Estonians became slaves, Rusyns were simply killed without exception, even babies.*⁸³ When we add to this absolutely inhumane image the conviction that the lands of the Baltic basin provided an indestructible power base for the whole of Western European knighthood, we can see the gravity of the problem which exercised this Russian mind.⁸⁴ Immense cruelty and power went hand in hand. The Prince of Novgorod, Alexander Nevsky, who halted the Swedes in Finland and the Germans in Estonia, faced the cruel oppressors. However, just after that Gumilev adds that: *the threat of German aggression was not eliminated by the victory, because the knights had much greater forces than the Novgorodians.*⁸⁵

For Gumilev, the real mark of Prince Alexander’s greatness was his final⁸⁶ choice of political line based on an alliance with the Golden Horde [emphasis added – M.W.]. An agreement could be reached because Batu-Khan needed to secure himself against the germinating power of Kurultai in Karakorum. За помощь, оказанную Батю, он потребовал и получил помощь против немцев и германофилов.⁸⁷ The military support was soon supposed to be formalised in the shape of the so-called “Wykход” [a kind of a tax by which the Golden Horde supported its army], which meant: тот взнос, на который Орда содержала свое войско, помогавшее в войнах с немцами, литовцами и всеми врагами Великого княжества Владимирского.⁸⁸ In this way Gumilev sought and found Russia’s salvation in the East – in Eurasia.

82 Idem, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 320.

83 id., *Od Rusi*, p. 116.

84 Л. Гумилев, А. Панченко, Чтобы свеча не погасла. Диалог, Ленинград 1990 <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/TNEC/tne02.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

85 L. Gumilow, *Od Rusi*, p. 117.

86 This way was cleared earlier by the father of Alexander, Jaroslav, who in 1243 was to enter into an alliance treaty with Batu, id., Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 419.

87 Л. Гумилев, А. Панченко, Чтобы свеча не погасла, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/TNEC/tne02.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

88 id., Меня называют евразийцем, ‘Наш современник’ 1991, No 1, pp. 6270 <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article111.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

In response to the “Westernisers”, Gumilev counterpoised Prince Alexander who *was recognized as a saint for his unparalleled heroism in defence of the homeland of the Russian Orthodox Church*.⁸⁹ Gumilev seems to have zoomed in on Daniel of Galicia whom he identified as the most pre-eminent Westerniser of all. As a matter of fact, pre-eminent is not the operative term for it. According to Gumilev, the Prince of Vladimir-Galicie deluded himself that it was possible to unify Rus at that time. He desired to *use these knights to unite all the powers of the princes and expel the Mongols*.⁹⁰ This programme, being the Occidental line of approach, was completely unreal because the Pope and the Prince desired to use the Rusyns in a struggle with the Mongols, and then subordinate Rus. Thus the cruel and deceitful face of the Western European superethnos was unmasked yet again by the relentless Eurasian analyst.

Paradoxically, despite its atomisation, in its own way, Rus started to unite around two camps. One camp attracted those of an anachronistic turn of mind, who did not understand the risks that the new era was bringing upon them. Their fate was to be sealed as a result of Lithuanian expansionism. The second camp consisted of people attuned to the new era who were gathered around Prince Alexander who well comprehended the interests of the Ruthenian domain. Their activity is recognized by Gumilev as a manifestation of a fresh, if hidden, spurt of ethnogenesis.⁹¹ It could happen because those modernisers evidently found themselves unexpectedly charged up with the ninth type of passionary impulse as identified by Gumilev. According to him, this took place at the beginning of the 13th century, and its line ran from Pskov to Brusy and then on to Abyssinia.⁹² As a result, two new superethnoses, those of the Great Rusyns and Lithuanians, ostensibly entered the historical arena.

The birth of Russia

Gumilev divided Muscovite-Tatar relations into two periods, with the final date being 1312, the year in which Uzbek khan officially converted his state to Islam. Gumilev's assessment of the period to 1312 was unequivocally positive. He wrote about the symbiosis of Moscow and the Tatars. In his view, the Russian princes did not stop to go to Sarai after the outbreak of internecine strife in the Golden Horde after the death of Berke khan, when there was the possibility of breaking off relations. What is more, Smolensk for fear of Lithuanian aggression in 1274, was to opt for voluntary subordination to the Mongols.⁹³ Conviction politics clearly underpinned Gumilev's

89 id., *Od Rusi*, p. 119.

90 *ibid.*, p. 122.

91 In another place Gumilev again writes that Novgorod was defended by the inertial end-phase of passionarity. This interpretation appeared only once, but we should flag its existence. (Л. Гумилев, *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 354), Л. Гумилев, А. Панченко, *Чтобы свеча не погасла*, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/TNEC/tnc02.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

92 Л. Гумилев, *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 370.

93 *ibid.*, pp. 364364.

revision of the picture of day-to-day Russo-Mongol relations when he wrote: Князья ездят в Сарай и гостят там, чтобы вернуться с раскосыми женами, в церквах молятся за хана, смерды бросают своих господ и поступают в полки баскаков, искусные мастера едут в Каракорум и работают там за высокую плату, лихие пограничники вместе со степными батурами собираются в разбойничьи банды и грабят караваны.⁹⁴ This repainted picture fits in perfectly with the romantic myth of the Orient that is extant in Russian literature. Its interpretation suggests that, to Gumilev's mind, the picture of "the pastoral East" is connected with the Great Steppe. Neither Cairo nor Baghdad, but Sarai and Karakorum turn out to be places, from where the light shines – *ex orient lux* indeed.

The assessment of the mutual relations between Moscovite Rus and the Golden Horde were supposed to have changed in 1320. The adoption of Islam by Uzbek as the Golden Horde's official religion was interpreted by Gumilev as a break with the traditions of the Steppes and its entry into the Muslim superethnos orbit.⁹⁵ Gumilev expressed his disapproval of this by observing that: Вместо этнического симбиоза появилось соглашение Орды с Москвой и жестокий нажим на Тверь и Рязань. Этот союз не был искренним. Обе стороны не доверяли друг другу.⁹⁶ Gumilev's change of attitude to the Golden Horde did not mean a complete reappraisal of his position. Even though the Islamic world was cast as a cruel and dangerous force in the writings of Gumilev, who abhorred its inquisitorial fanaticism⁹⁷, the Golden Horde, even in its guise as a Muslim sultanate and an ethnic chimera⁹⁸, still seemed to be something infinitely preferable to the West.⁹⁹ Although "the last Eurasian" tried to talk us into believing that the dissimilarities generated by stereotypical behaviour makes whatever positive contacts there may be between ethnos of given super-ethnos impossible, one cannot escape the impression that this theory has almost no application to the Muslim world and completely none to the Byzantine Empire. The use of this rule is fully manifested in regard of Russia's relations with the West and those of the Steppe peoples with China, but this issue would take us far beyond this article's terms of reference.

Gumilev argued that the negative changes taking place in the Golden Horde in the first half of the 14th century had a significant influence on the shaping of Russia. Those Tartars who refused to change their religion at Uzbek's behest started to settle in Zalesie. Gumilev emphasizes this by enumerating many noble families

94 *ibid*, p. 368.

95 *ibid*, p. 364.

96 In his other speeches, Gumilev emphasized that nobody tried to convert Rusyns to Islam, which tells us something about the independence of Zalesie land and that Moscovite-Tatar relations were reminiscent of этнический симбиоз и союз двух крупных держав, нуждающихся друг в друге, а не покорение Руси Золотой Ордой. *Idem*, Меня называют евразийцем, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article111.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

97 *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 364.

98 *ibid*, p. 386.

99 Гораздо напряженнее был контакт с католиками. Его в полной мере ощутили западные русские спустя два века, хотя и в конце XIV в. им было несладко. *ibid*, p. 388.

that descended from mixed Ruthenian-Tatar marriages.¹⁰⁰ In Gumilev's opinion, it was because of the principle of ethnic tolerance introduced by Ivan Kalita; in Moscow eligibility for military service was based purely on need.¹⁰¹ Thanks to that it was not just Tatars but also Orthodox Lithuanians, the Christianized Polovtsy, the Finno-Ugric Merens, the Mordvins and the Muroms, who were all invited to settle in Zalesie. The only condition of accepting those people into service was their conversion to Christianity according to the Orthodox rite.¹⁰² The high passionarity of the ethnos was to enable to absorption of members of other ethnos into its composition, which contributed to enhancing the diversity of the system.¹⁰³ However, Gumilev argued that this whole motley mix merged with the Ruthenian tribes into one ethnos, but it lacked one more thing – a feeling of common historical destiny.¹⁰⁴ The guide in the fulfilment of that destiny proved to be the Orthodox Church.

Gumilev considers the historical birth of Moscovite Rus to have been more difficult than that of its neighbour Lithuania. This was because of its different starting point: in Kievan Rus, the impulse overlapped with the reverse phase, as a result of which subpassionaries were to disturb a vigorous people. Those people were to find sanctuary in monasteries. It was precisely there where they: развернули такую деятельность, которая определила культурно-политическое развитие России более чем на 200 лет.¹⁰⁵ The strengthening of Christian traditions in North-Eastern Rus favoured the increase in importance of the Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁶ In Rus this resulted in the development of a consortium of great passionarity whose programme could be described as "Orthodox theocracy". Among the names Gumilev mentioned were the Metropolitan Bishops Alexei, Sergey Radonezhsky, Dionysius of Suzdal and Feodor of Smolensk. Unfortunately, Gumilev did not specify exactly the political purposes of this party, but only highlighted their unificatory trends and the role of the Orthodox faith in furthering them.¹⁰⁷

The Orthodox party became head of the union. It was this party that was destined to lead the fragmented Rus on Kulikov Field, where its fate was determined.

A division was to occur in face of the intensifying conflict with Mamai, the chief of the Golden Horde, in Moscow. The priority activity of the national party was Защита самостоятельности государственной, идеологической, бытовой и даже творческой означала войну с агрессией Запада [emphasizes M.W.] и союзной с

100 For example: Ахakov, Bulghakov, Chadayev, Karamzin, Tiutchev. *ibid.*, p. 365.

101 *idem*, *Od Rusi*, p. 136.

102 Митрополии служили тверичи, рязанцы, смоляне, суздальцы, киевляне, белорусы, крещенные татары и крещенные зыряне, карелы и ижоряне, новгородцы и псковичи. А Москве – только москвиты, *idem*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 388.

103 *ibid.*, p. 385.

104 *id.*, Эпоха Куликовской битвы, «Огонек» 1980 N 35, pp. 1617 <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article47.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

105 *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 374.

106 *id.*, *Od Rusi*, p. 137.

107 *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 390.

ней ордой Мамай.¹⁰⁸ The subpassionaries focused around the Metropolitan Bishop Mitaj, opposed this route. The picture outlined by Gumilev has several elements. One of them is Dimitri's loyalism. However, Mamai is presented as a rebel, while the Prince of Moscow was in alliance with the legitimate Khan – Tokhtamysh (admittedly not present on Kulikov Field). To be sure, Tumennik was not an entirely independent politician; Gumilev noticed Genoese merchants, whom he abhorred, lurking behind the scenes.¹⁰⁹ He believed the war broke out against the background of trade privileges. When we add to this the actual alliance of Mamai with Lithuania, it becomes quite comprehensible why Gumilev was convinced that the Rusyns faced Western forces on Kulikov Field. Hence, did Dimitry Donsky represent the East? Bearing in mind the fact that Gumilev emphasised the Prince's loyalism and the alliance with the legitimate Khan, there are no grounds to reject this hypothesis. An additional circumstance confirming that state of affairs was the presence of many Mongols in Dimitry's army, to wit those Mongols that *found shelter in Rus (at the time of Uzbek) and became the core of the Moscowite army that crushed Mamai*.¹¹⁰ Thus, in Gumilev's opinion, the East and the West exchanged roles on Kulikov Field, and Mamai, who does not fit this picture, is reduced to the role of a not insignificant extra in the screenplay. When the battle was lost, an unnecessary element in the form of the lost chief could be removed. The assassination of Mamai in Kaffi is interpreted by Gumilev as further evidence of the stereotypical behaviour of people from the West. As Gumilev wrote: У генуэзцев была иная этика. Они считали, что главное в жизни – выгода, что монголы и турки почти не люди, а объект для коммерческих операций. Когда они сильны, их надо использовать, когда ослабли – выкинуть. По сути это была психология зарождавшегося капитализма.¹¹¹ In this way, a strain of genocidal capitalism was injected into the picture of the West. It did not necessarily mean a transition from physical cruelty to financial ruthlessness though this first element was also present on Kulikov Field because Gumilev managed to find a place in that conflict for Jagiello's Lithuanians who, in his scenario, arrived late and merely finished off the wounded lying on the battlefield.¹¹² But what was important, Rusyns constituted the majority of Jagiello's army.

108 In another place in the same articles, Gumilev suggests that the uprising with Mamaia meant a struggle of the superethnic ethos between nascent Rus and the Islamic world. This assessment does not contradict the above quoted view, however, here Islam played the role of a performer, which I will try to show below, id., *Эпоха Куликовской битвы*, pp. 1617, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article47.htm>>[retrieved: May 15th 2011].

109 Genoese built a fortress on the Kremlin and began lively trade firstly with Povolzhye, and then with Rus, spreading its influences to the Great Ustiug. Nothing good resulted from it for the local population: not without reason Dante in his *Divine Comedy* wrote that the lowest circles of hell are occupied by the Genoese, among whom there are only villains, id., *Od Rusi*, p. 139.

110 id., *Dzieje etnosów Wielkiego Stepu*, Cracow 1997, p. 93.

111 id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 391.

112 id., *Меня называют евразийцем*, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article111.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

In Gumilev's opinion, the victory of Kulikov Field was a defining moment in the shaping of the Russian ethnos and Muscovite Rus: На Куликово поле вышли жители разных княжеств, а вернулись оттуда жителями единого Московского русского государства¹¹³ – Gumilev argued. The perception of a common ethnos was born, thanks to which the diverse population of Ruthenian Zalesie merged into one ethnos. Contact at the ethnic level and the passionary dividend were complemented with a feeling of a common historical destiny. The way was mapped out ahead. Novgorod¹¹⁴ and, what is more important, Lithuania, were to evade it.

Lithuania's error

Lithuanians were the second Eastern European ethnos that was to be set up by a passionary impulse in the 13th century. Gumilev's hero Alexander Nevsky, and King Mindaugas, were among the first of a new generation in his perception. Ancient Lithuanian tribes were supposed to be in a state of homeostasis as a result of which new passionaries were able to convince the whole population of their own destiny, and harness their natural valiant spirit to the chariot of conquest.¹¹⁵ Earlier, however, a period of internecine feuding was to characterise their birth pangs as an integrated and coherent grouping, which came to an end with the victory of Gediminas. This prince set Lithuania on the road to expansion. Gumilev's relatively positive attitude towards this emperor draws attention: *Gediminas, a man of wisdom and strong will, though a pagan himself, was able to take account of the Christian Ruthenian population.*¹¹⁶ This assessment refers only to Gediminas, because Gumilev draws attention to the fact that *the characteristic features of fourteenth-century Lithuania were adhesion to the belief in the pagan God Perun and a very hostile attitude towards Christians – both Eastern and Western.*¹¹⁷ Gumilev's negative assessment of Lithuania was additionally supported by his conviction that Algirdas (nota bene the Orthodox emperor) visited pogroms on eastern Christians.¹¹⁸ This was further affirmed by his evaluation of Lithuanian's invasions. Gumilev emphasized: Летописи [emphasizes M.W.] свидетельствуют, что набеги литовцев, хотя и пеших, были намного более жестокими, нежели набеги татарских разбойников, которых было много, как во всякой стране в то время, но которых наказывали сами татарские ханы.¹¹⁹ "The chains of events" referring to the history of the Mongols, passionatel recon-

113 В какое время мы живем? (Диалог Льва Гумилева и Димитрия Балашова), *idem*, Чтобы свеча, p. 95.

114 *id.*, Эпоха Куликовской битвы, pp. 1617 <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article47.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

115 *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 379.

116 *id.*, *Od Rusi*, p. 134.

117 *ibid.*

118 Gumilev thinks that Algirdas converted to Orthodoxy for economic reasons, *ibid.*, pp. 135 and 147.

119 *id.*, Меня называют евразийцем, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article111.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

structed as befitted “the last Eurasian”, were replaced again by a simple face-value belief in the veracity of the source document, when it came to evaluating the ethnos which finally tied Lithuania to the West.

According to Gumilev, the increase of Lithuania’s passionarity required the choice of a new culture which would determine its further development.¹²⁰ Gediminas’s conquests and then those of Algirdas, made Lithuania a powerful state in which Orthodox people were in the vast majority of the population. However, in order to achieve a balance of power in terms of group influences, Gedyminas was to give consent to крещение Литвы в католичество.¹²¹ The successors of the Grand Prince, Algirdas and Kiejstut, were supposed to rule in the country with преимущественно русским населением и причудливой смесью западной и древнерусской культур.¹²² Gumilev’s theory would suggest that the longer duration of such an arrangement would probably have led to ethnic chimera, hence a choice had to be made. Gumilev reemphasized this by referring to the siege of the fortress of Kaunas by the Teutonic Knights, after Gediminas and Kiejstut decided not to clash with the far better armed knights, and as a result of which Kaunas was taken. Gumilev’s comment on this was that, even this valiant ethnos could not exist without friends.¹²³ The choice was simple: either Orthodoxy or Catholicism.

The conversion of Wladyslaw Jagiello to Catholicism came in for some rough handling by “the last Eurasian”. Если бы литовцы сумели слиться с покоренным большинством культурного населения своего государства, то они стали бы великой державой. Но этому помешал сладкий соблазн – католическая Польша.¹²⁴ – Gumilev averred. One would be wrong to think that this missed opportunity to become a great Orthodox state was the only minus point registered by Gumilev in support of his thesis on the “Lithuanian error”. Their higher degree of passionarity was to cause changes in Lithuanian behavioural stereotypes. The conduct of the leader of the Occidentalists, Jagiello, with Kiejstut heading the pro-Orthodox option, was to be its example. The Grand Prince lured his uncle to a feast and had him murdered while Kiejstut’s son Witold was imprisoned. But evidently, that the Gumilevian increase of ethnic energy could also lead to other results. The girl who was delivering food to the imprisoned Prince, was able to sacrifice her own life in order to save the Prince. Interestingly enough, those particular stereotypes of behaviour were appropriately assigned to individual members of the Polonophile faction and the Russophile factions. In face of that fact, in Krewo, Lithuania was to choose either the path of selfless sacrifice or that of cruelty and treachery.¹²⁵ In this way, both East and West entered the history of the Grand Duchy. Lithuania chose the West, as a result of which, contrary to the compromise-minded Prince Witold,

120 *ibid.*, p. 397.

121 *ibid.*

122 *ibid.*

123 *ibid.*, p. 398.

124 *ibid.*, p. 371.

125 *id.*, *Od Rusi*, pp. 152153.

the polarization of religious standpoints was to come. The dilemma that came with Lithuania's geographic location between Poland and Moscovite Rus, had the effect of postponing its passionarity. Some Lithuanians opted for Orthodoxy and some for Catholicism.¹²⁶ Would it have been similar had the Orthodox Church triumphed? Would Moscow also have offered the advantages that came with the Catholic option? Gumilev does not answer those questions, and leaves us to speculate on the issue.

From Rus to Russia

The presentation of the battle of Kulikov Field as a defence of Rus against the West's designs was a complicated operation. The conquest of Moscow by Tokhtamysh, the legitimate khan of the Golden Horde, two years after that event, in no way could be similarly presented. Indeed, Gumilev acknowledges the fact that the destruction of the capital by the Tatars wrought emotional changes in their bilateral relations. *The khan's power is still perceived as something obvious, but it starts to be a burden, the whole of Rus tries to be free from it all the more so because at the end of the 14th century the alliance with the Horde did not give Moscow the old benefits.*¹²⁷ – we are told. At the same time, Gumilev maintained that Tokhtamysh's invasion was only the result of a successful intrigue of the Souzdal princes who misled a man (Tokhtamysh) who was a stranger to insincerity.¹²⁸ The example of Tokhtamysh shows some modification in Gumilev's attitude towards Tatar supremacy at the end of the 14th and in the 15th century. However, it was not a qualitative change. In the next generation, Shadibek was to defend Moscow against the Lithuanians.¹²⁹ Several years later, Vasily II was to hire the services of a number of emigrants from the Horde, which – according to Gumilev – strengthened Moscow and weakened the Tatars.¹³⁰ We should add that a similar policy of tolerance was also employed in regard of refugees from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who fled their country as a result of the pro-Western policy of Zbigniew Oleśnicki to settle in Zalesie.¹³¹

The weakening and dispersal of the Horde into independent khanates devalued the military alliance which no longer guaranteed the traditional benefits for Moscow. This standpoint informed Gumilev's interpretation of the events of 1480, which, in his opinion, were only an episode in the long lasting struggle of two coalitions – of Novgorod-Lithuania-the Horde and Moscow-Kasimov-Kremlin. *All the more so because there are no reasons to claim that the notion "stand on the Urga" meant casting off the Tatar-Mongol yoke. As we can see, the father of Ivan III, Vasily the Blind, who included ethnic scraps of the Golden Horde in the composition of his*

126 *ibid.*, p. 135.

127 *ibid.*, p. 156.

128 *ibid.*, p. 153.

129 *ibid.*, p. 164.

130 *id.*, Древняя Русь и Великая, p. 464.

131 L. Gumilow, *Rozmowa z Lwem Gumilowem*, interviewed by Zbigniew Pogorzec, "Tygodnik Powszechny", August 11th 1974, p. 8.

*Grand Duchy, practically ceased to take any note of the Horde*¹³² – Gumilev argued. At the beginning of the 16th century the incorporated Tatar element was to play an important role in the struggle with Lithuania. Moscow went back a long way in its relations with the Horde, but, on balance, they were invariably positive. The symbiosis changed at some point into a military alliance, and when it ceased to be useful for the princes, Moscow strengthened itself by helping itself to considerable territories at the expense of the disintegrating Tatar domains. And when in 1502 the Golden Horde fell under the blows of Mengli Giray, the state of Ivan's successors, by virtue of their legacy, was destined to revive the empire of Genghis Khan.

Earlier, however, Moscow had to put an end to different Old-Ruthenian traditions. In Gumilev's opinion, their last bastion in Rus was Great Novgorod. The merchant republic was to duck the issue of participating in the Old-Ruthenian issue at the time of Kulikov Field. At the end of the 15th century, in opting for an alliance with Catholic Lithuania, Novgorod was not regarded as "theirs" by anyone in Zalesie. Ivan's victory finally deracinated the Old-Ruthenian traditions.

The rejection of the Union of Florence by the Grand Duchy of Moscow was the ideological basis for the maturing country. Gumilev interpreted this choice, which was different to that of the Byzantine Empire, as a kind of dominant behavioural trait. The unilateral election of the Metropolitan Bishop Jonah disturbed the eternal rule of dependence on Constantinople in Orthodox Church affairs; Gumilev interpreted this as a sign of a shot of passionarity which took Moscow beyond the level of assuring its existing ethnos. Rus was really far advanced along the way of transforming its ethnos into superethnos. But upsetting the relation with patriarchate could also be interpreted differently i.e. as the establishment of an individual Orthodox church, different to its Byzantine version. As Gumilev argued: Можно сказать, что в России возродилась... нет, не Византийская империя, а скорее мечта о царстве пресвитера Иоанна, которую не смогли осуществить центральноазиатские несториане.¹³³ The Steppe absorbed the golden domes of the Orthodox councils.

The period of Muscovite Rus was decisive for Gumilev. That was when its fate was finally resolved. The western part, defined by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was finally to bind with the West, thereby confirming its captivity. The very different Zalesie – Muscovite state first became an ally and then the successor of the Mongolian world. This choice opened the way to greatness which was illuminated by the brightness of the Orthodox Church. All that followed was its continuation.

Consequences

The historical choice made by Russia determined its further path. The colonisation of Siberia by Russia should be regarded in exactly these categories, i.e. as the

132 id., *Od Rusi*, p. 178.

133 id., *Древняя Русь и Великая*, p. 464.

reunification of Eurasian area of civilization. Gumilev's descriptions presenting the idyllic nature of this Russian expansion, in which he invoked Dostoyevsky who said that *the French people are characterized by pride and love for beauty, Spaniards are characterized by jealousy, Englishmen are characterized by honesty and scrupulousness, Germans are characterized by pedantry, whereas Russians have the ability to understand and accept other nations.*¹³⁴ This type of talk seemed to be heading in the right, Eurasian direction. Russia's role in the Khmelnytsky Uprising can be interpreted in similar vein – though in anti-Western (as the opponent of the Polish Commonwealth) rather than Eurasian terms. He was far more emphatic when assessing the European policy of Sophia and Peter. Gumilev described the political u-turn made by the Tsarina as unpopular and incomprehensible. Moreover, it was to signal a departure from the principles of Christian Orthodoxy [sic! – M.W.] because the cruel treatment of Orthodox people by Catholics was incomparably worse than that of Balkan Christians under the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁵ According to Gumilev, the latter was bearable. Gumilev once again gave vent to his anti-Western emotions, admitting openly that Russia was much closer to the pastoral steppe of the East and to despotic Muslim East, than to the West. Any form of alliance with the latter was to be disastrous for the Tsars. To Gumilev's mind, the fiasco of Golitsyn's expeditions only confirmed that state of affairs. Peter's policy came in for a similar pasting by "the last Eurasian", though it did change its thrust in relation to Sophie's policy by entering into alliance with Protestant countries, it did not acquire the hallmarks of independent-mindedness. *European politicians decided to use Peter against Sweden as they previously used Golitsyn and Sophie in the struggle against Turkey*¹³⁶ – and they succeeded in their designs Gumilev argued.

Western influence on Russia's identity in 19th century, which Gumilev associated with decreasing levels of passionarity, was particularly strong and disastrous in its effects. Оказалось, что западнические влияния, то, что А. Тойнби называл оксидентализацией (от английского occidentally – «на западный манер»), очень развились, что сыграло в нашей судьбе самую роковую роль.¹³⁷ – Gumilev explained. But, following the 19th century, the Soviet era was viewed somewhat differently by Gumilev differently, Communism, like Occidentalism, was a denial of Russia's Eurasian identity. According to Gumilev, the communists who take power in Russia in 1917, constituted a huge subethnos of negative outlook on the world.¹³⁸ In this context, Soviet rule should be regarded as a kind of disease. Its end con-

134 id., *Od Rusi*, p. 243.

135 ibid, p. 257.

136 ibid, p. 262.

137 id., Меня называют евразийцем, <<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/articles/Article111.htm>> [retrieved: May 15th 2011].

138 The question concerning the character of elements which came together to make the Bolshevik Revolution was posed more than 14 years ago by Ryszard Paradowski, who did not find the answer at that time. It seems that the above mentioned interview with the scholar gives the answer, Л. Гумилев, В. Ермолаев, Горе от иллюзий, [in:] Л. Гумилев, Ритмы Евразии, p. 188.

nected with the period of perestroika meant for “the last Eurasian” a transition from the break-through phase to the inertial epoch. He used the imperfect tense to say that the further existence of the Eurasian superethnos, and the further existence of Russia as a separate civilisation, depends on its internal identity. Lev Gumilev left us in no doubt that Если Россия будет спасена то только как евразийская держава и только через евразийство.¹³⁹

Conclusion

The factual dualism of civilisation of Rus and Russia devised by Lev Gumilev is distinctive in comparison with other Russian Conservative ideologists. He went even further in his criticism of the West and its influences than most of his predecessors. The spiritual patron of Gumilev, Constantine Leontiev, was full of admiration for the old world of cathedrals, castles, and knights, and only criticised contemporary bourgeois Europe. Alexander Solzhenitsyn also spoke in the same spirit. But the son of Akhmatova, even in periods of Catholic orthodoxy in the history of the West, constantly sniffed out signs of negative thought, the development of anti-systems, genocide and treachery. A similar negative attitude to the West was a characteristic feature of Nikolay Danilevsky and inter-war Eurasianism-minded thinkers. Gumilev's rejection of Panslavism and endorsement of Eurasianism distinguished him from Danilevsky. But in endowing the theory with a powerful scholarly apparatus (or pseudo-scholarly to be more precise) he distinguished himself from mainstream Eurasians. Lev Gumilev created a conception which is fascinating and overpowering with its immensity of elements. The superficial pluralism of civilisations in Gumilev's thinking in reality boils down to dualism. In the period of Kievan Rus, the basis for the creation of civilisational opposites were established. On one side there was the West and the Jews who always supported the West and constituted a constant threat to Kievan statehood. But on the other side was the Great Steppe and the Byzantine Empire exerting an equally strong and positive impact on Rus, albeit in other aspects.¹⁴⁰

In the following epoch the existence of these counter-forces was confirmed firstly by the alliance of Batu-Khan with Prince Alexander Nevsky and then by “the betrayal” of Lithuania. The later period was a continuation of the choices made in the 13th and 14th centuries. More astonishing than the juxtaposition itself was its character. However, neither the Byzantine Empire nor Slav lands were to be the antithesis of the West but the civilisation of the Great Steppe. The history of Steppe nomads was for Gumilev a tale of sacrifice and heroism, which definitely differentiates it from the traditional narrative of historiography. Was that justified? Bearing in mind the

139 id., Скажу вам по секрету, что если Россия будет спасена то только как евразийская держава..., [in:] *ibid.*, p. 31.

140 Using the terminology proposed by a 19th-century German school, you can assume that Polovtsy shaped the civilisation image of Rus, whereas the Byzantine Empire was responsible for its cultural aspect.

aims of the nomads and taking into account the Great Steppe's cultural diversity, I believe that there is still a need to pose questions about the historical assessment of the Great Steppe and Mongol-Rusyn relations as done by Gumilev. However, there are still doubts. They are aroused especially by the chain-of-events method repeatedly invoked to the history of the nomads which, when applied to the history of the West, transform themselves into an uncritical approach to his sources. Various other inconsistencies in his theory remain open to criticism, not least the view that Rus was able to maintain stable relations with the Muslim superethnos, and even positive relations with the Byzantine Empire while the theory of mutual hostility at the level of the superethnos always finds application with reference to the West. This way of thinking made the West and the Great Steppe to respectively become synonyms for annihilation and salvation. And given such alternatives, the historical choice of Russia could only be one.