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## THE EXCURSIONISM PROJECT AND THE STUDY OF LITERARY PLACES (1921-1924)

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One of the major challenges confronting the Bolsheviks in the aftermath of Revolution and Civil War was a comprehensive overhaul of secondary and higher education. The party leadership clearly understood its importance to the process of consolidating the new regime, and, early on, introduced a number of measures, such as the creation of workers faculties [*rabfaky*] and social science departments [*obshchestvennye nauki*] as portents of a radically new approach to learning. Forced removal of teachers and students on grounds of their ‘Trotskyist allegiances’ (1923-1924), likewise, foreshadowed some of the more brutal measures of arrest and incarceration of putative ‘enemies of the people’ that would be carried at the end of the decade.<sup>1</sup> But, as many commentators have noted, until roughly the mid-1920s, the party was in fact relatively open to experiments in curricula and prepared to co-opt the expertise of non-Marxist scholars and academics. In this connection, the role of Anatoly Lunacharsky, first Commissar of Narkompros (1917-1929), was key. Although his ideological loyalties were questioned by Bolshevik hardliners who found him too accommodating in his dealings with non-party intelligentsia, he nevertheless managed to resist demands for cultural monopoly and thus stave off the immediate onset of partisanship in education.

As Commissar, Lunacharsky set out two premises for an enlightened government: recognition of the autonomy of the sciences and the arts to pursue their respective goals, and support for their endeavours through generous subsidies in the belief that the advances made would ultimately benefit the state. It was his view that respect for scholarship was a mark of enlightenment and so he made it a point of principle to protect prominent traditional institutions, such as the

1. On the Academic affair (1929-31), see: J. Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1981.

Academy of Sciences, from challenges to their legitimacy, post-October.<sup>2</sup> Thanks, then, to this relatively clement cultural climate, the early 1920s witnessed a number of educational experiments, which if short-lived, demonstrate the creative means by which established scholars were able to apply their expertise acquired during the final decades of tsarist rule to the task of building new educational programmes in the spirit of revolution. The case of ‘excursionism’, a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of urban environments, is one such example. Pioneered by a group of natural scientists, geographers and historians around the turn of the century, the method was initially intended as a pedagogical tool for enhancing secondary school education.<sup>3</sup> At that time, however, its ‘learning for life’ ethos and cross-disciplinary optic were regarded as too radical a departure from the classical canon taught in gymnasia, and possibly too time consuming in terms of management and funding to be fully integrated into university curricula.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, its endorsement by Narkompros describes a fortuitous coincidence of aims between the old professoriate and the Bolshevik programme of educational innovation – as least, as Lunacharsky conceived it. Set up during the winter of 1920, the Petrograd Excursion Institute provided scholars in natural history, economics and history with a platform on which to refine their ideas, and for the next three years (1921-1924) it developed a programme of research and pedagogical seminars, edited a journal (*Ekskursionnoe delo*), and organized tours in Petrograd as well as further afield to a number of regional towns and cities.<sup>5</sup>

This article focuses on the programme of the Institute’s humanities department, in particular, the key concepts framing cultural-historical and literary approaches to urban localities which its director, the mediaevalist Ivan Grevs (1860-1941), developed in tandem with one of his former pupils at St Petersburg University, Nikolai Antsiferov (1889-1958). Drawing on the tools of social anthropology, physical geography, cultural history, art history and literary criticism/history, their goal was to capture the ‘*lik goroda*’ – its physical landscape, past and present, its way of life and material culture [*byt*], and, importantly, the power of locality on the psyche of its inhabitants. In this connection, the innovative way in which Antsiferov used works of creative literature as part of his

2. On educational reform in the early Soviet era, see, for example: S. Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*, London – New York, CUP, 1970; also by Fitzpatrick: *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca – London, CUP, 1992.

3. Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: the Russian idea of Kraevedenie*, Studies of the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, 2006, p. 98.

4. I. Grevs, ‘К теории и практике «экскурсии» как орудия научного изучения истории в университетах (Поездка в Италию со студентами в 1907 г.)’, *Журнал министерства народного просвещения*, 1910, n. 7, p. 64.

5. Recruited to run the department of natural history were Professors Fedchenko, Rimskii-Korsakov, and Raikov; the department of economics was led by Professors Dmitriev and Zelentsov. See: I. I. Polyanskii, ‘Опыт новой организации экскурсионного дела в школах. Экскурсионная секция и экскурсионные станции’, *Экскursionное дело*, 1921, 1, p. 1-20.

early pedagogical experiments with excursionism is of particular interest. For Antsiferov, understanding both the physical and non-material qualities of 'place', its aura, was key to understanding the historical process more broadly. He thus valued the literary text as a source of memories and images of everyday historical *realia*, but also as a resource for exploring collective belief systems and traditions.

#### THE LEXICON OF EXCURSIONISM: PRE-REVOLUTIONARY ORIGINS AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY ADAPTATIONS

In making the town an object of historical study the aim is not merely to familiarize ourselves with its outer physiognomy. [...] What is needed is its biography to uncover its peculiarity as a collective personality [...] to establish its 'geniya' [*dusha goroda*]. We have to comprehend the processes by, and out of, which this arose, together with the chain of influences and changes in circumstances that have shaped it over time.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the theory and accompanying lexicon of cultural historical excursionism originated in Ivan Grevs' early experiments with topography and 'visual traces of the past' [*naglyadnost'/podlinnost'*] which he had conducted as a young researcher during field trips to northern Italy in the 1890s, and thereafter in his seminars on mediaeval culture at St Petersburg University. In the classroom, Grevs combined the established practices of close philological source commentary with instructions in map reading, architectural history, and the study of artefacts and paintings. For Grevs, these exercises were essential for encouraging a more critical understanding of the daily experiences and worldview of mediaeval man. In addition, they prepared the students for field trips, providing them with the necessary skills to, as it were, visualize urban spaces historically. It is fair to say, though, that Grevs' formulation of a methodological template for 'excursionism' (or monumental history as he also called it) was largely experiential, a tentative trial and error approach that was heavily reliant on his descriptive accounts of the day-by-day itinerary of trips previously undertaken. His first proper methodological statement, published in 1910, for example, was essentially a report of a field trip he had led with seminar students to Italy in 1907. He did, however, identify a number of features, which, as Emily Johnson notes in her study of *kraevedenie*, later became standard for pedagogical excursions in the humanities and social sciences:

An interest in literary sites, the use of maps to trace the "biography" of cities, attempts to recreate the atmosphere of history by combining visits to actual sites with stirring narrative, a concern with group dynamics, and a conviction that weather and time of day needed to be factored in when considering how to present a site to the greatest emotional effect.<sup>7</sup>

6. Grevs, 'Монументальный город и исторические экскурсии (Основная идея образовательных путешествий по крупным центрам культуры)', *Экскурсионное дело*, 1921, 1 [offprint, 1921, p. 2].

7. *Ibid.*, 'К теории и практике «экскурсии»...'; Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned...*, p. 103.

A follow-up piece in 1912, albeit unpublished, further refined the ‘method’, introducing an anthropomorphic vocabulary and a more clearly articulated multi-disciplinary framework that would figure more prominently in Grevs’ publications dating from the post-revolutionary period:

The idea behind ‘monumental tours on foot’, he noted, ‘is to reflect on their characteristic features [*cherty litsa*]; these afford an initial understanding of the soul of the town as reflected on its face [...]. It is as if vital currents emanate from the living tissue of the town.’<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after the opening of the Excursion Institute, Grevs published a series of articles for the in-house journal.<sup>9</sup> With both methodological and practical questions now high on the agenda it became imperative to devise a programme of cultural excursions to regional towns and cities, and to provide some kind of theoretical ballast for the study of these sites as cultural-historical complexes. To this end, Grevs presented his lexicon of anatomical and psychological metaphors – *lik*, *dusha*, *genius loci*, *figura* – as the hallmarks of what he called a multi-disciplinary ‘biographical method’ of urban sites. Specifically, this involved:

The study of [the city’s] geography and its relation to the natural surroundings; it draws on the tools of anthropology and ethnology in the study of its population, and history in the study of the role of leading figures in shaping the city, such as founders, rulers, architects, and reformers, together with an analysis of monuments and buildings as sites of major political events.<sup>10</sup>

Equally central to the biographical method was the study of daily life, art and culture. Grevs placed a major accent on the aesthetics of a city and its function as a catalyst of cultural production, both in terms of the visual arts and material culture more broadly in the form of everyday objects such as clocks or crockery. But he was careful to draw a distinction between what could potentially fall into the remit of art history more narrowly defined (the study of art, architecture and sculpture) and his own proposed analysis of cultural artefacts as refractors of patterns of everyday life and collective beliefs. To his mind, it was clear that the biography of a collective being [*kollektivnoe sushchestvo/ kollektivnaya lichnost'/ zhizn' litsa*] had many facets:

It follows that the study of a city [...] should involve its economy, daily-life [*byt*], its social, political, intellectual, artistic and religious nature. Only the aggregate of these processes, studied separately and as a whole will yield a picture of culture and its development in a given setting.<sup>11</sup>

8. Grevs, ‘Экскурсии в Италию, 1912’, in: O. B. Vakhromeeva (ed.), *Человек с открытым сердцем: автобиографическое и эпистолярное наследие Ивана Михайловича Гревса (1860-1941)*, SPb., Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Arhiva Rossijskoj akademii nauk, 2004, p. 286-87.

9. Ibid., ‘Монументальный город...’: ‘Дальние гуманитарные экскурсии и их воспитательно-образовательный смысл’, *Экскурсионное дело*, 1922, nos. 4-6.

10. ‘Монументальный город...’, [offprint, 4].

11. Ibid., p. 8

For Grevs, then, excursion studies presented a revolutionary new educational programme in which theory, pedagogy and fieldwork each played an indispensable role. As he conceived it, the tools of physical geography and human geography provided a methodological baseline of sorts for a cultural historical study of man's material and spiritual worlds. Physical geography, he believed, was crucial for understanding the environmental setting out of, and within which, customs and forms of social behaviour develop; human geography or anthropogeography [*anthropo-geografiya*], a term Grevs borrowed from the nineteenth-century German scholar, Friedrich Ratzel, articulated the idea of 'human rootedness' [*chelovek mestnyi*] of man and the place he shapes, over time, through labour.<sup>12</sup>

#### LITERARY EXCURSIONISM: URBAN MYTHS AND LITERARY TOPOGRAPHY

Grevs' essays in methodology framed a dialogue of sorts with the ideas of his colleague and friend, Nikolai Antsiferov. Like Grevs, Antsiferov invested considerable energy in devising a typology of excursions and in refining a methodology for the humanities branch of the discipline. However, it was the accent he placed on artistic intuition as a vital component in the historian's task to uncover deeper, rationally unfathomable truths about man's emotional affinity with his habitat that established a place for literary topography within the excursionist project. By exploring city monuments or districts (in this instance, St Petersburg) through the prism of emotive responses that they generated in the lives and work of creative writers, Antsiferov not only brought a new dimension to the study of urban culture and collective psychology, but also afforded some valuable insights into the nature of the creative process itself.

In 1919, as Petrograd became the stage of civil war, Antsiferov began work on a series of related monographs about his adoptive city. The first of these, *Dusha Peterburga*, published in 1922, was an exploratory study of genius loci. As a setting within which various cultures coalesced – whether organically, or by design – Petersburg, he argued, fostered a distinctive mythopoeic culture, its monuments, nature, climate, topography and history correlating many complex layers of unconscious and symbolic meaning in collective experience.<sup>13</sup> Poets and novelists, from Lomonosov to Mayakovsky, harnessed these raw, unmediated responses to the cityscape and its watery surroundings in their fictional

12. 'As the study of man and the land he shapes through labour, anthropo-geography is the history of daily life [*byt*] in which the entirety of a local culture comes to expression [...]. Its principal object is man defined topographically and historically [*chelovek mestnyi*]' Grevs, 'Город как предмет краеведения', *Краеведение*, 1924, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 246. Grevs was also familiar with the works of Paul Vidal de la Blache and Jean Bruhnes.

13. N. Antsiferov, *Душа Петербурга*, Moskva, Kniga, 1991, p. 48. See also: S. Yu. Zimina, 'Проблема бессознательного в культурологии Анциферова', in: T. V. Pritykina (ed.), *Анциферовские чтения, материалы и тезисы конференции*, Leningrad, 1989, p. 88-89.

characters, plot, and lyrical evocations thereby giving rise, over time, to one of the nation's most enduring myths: the 'tragic essence of the city with its universal soul'.<sup>14</sup>

Two further studies about literary St Petersburg – *Peterburg Dostoevskogo* (1923) and *Byl' i Mif Peterburga* (1924) – were intended for use as primers, and contained practical guidance for three main categories of excursion: geographical/topographical, historical and literary. For the first two of these, where the aim was to reconstruct the city's origins and subsequent expansion, Antsiferov devised detailed itineraries, drawing on popular tales and literary citations primarily for their contrasts with standard factual sources such as maps, street plans, and other official municipal documents. For the third, literary component, he returned to his hypothesis concerning the self-contained links between popular image, myth and literary representation. In *Byl' i mif Peterburga*, for example, he examined Pushkin's narrative poem, *Mednyi Vsadnik*, in light of popular attitudes to Peter I. His point here was that in composing his tale, Pushkin was in fact giving epic form to a myth (a creative, ordering force confronts watery chaos in a cataclysmic struggle) that had deep roots in popular historical imagination. This 'myth of the miracle-working builder', (Peter the Great) as Antsiferov called it, also figured in *Dostoevsky's Petersburg* published a year earlier. Using the Mokrusha region of the city as a backdrop, here he explored Dostoevsky's complex attitude to the capital, showing how the novelist reworked, in darker, more sombre tones, the archetype lying at the heart of Pushkin's poem.

Antsiferov's early experiments with creative literature as cultural constructs took the pedagogical excursion into territory that, at the beginning of the 1920s, was still relatively unexplored.<sup>15</sup> Beyond a visual perception of the past, he recognized the need for a trained 'inner eye', which he later likened to the 'intuitive method of cognition of the artist', to grasp the city's 'spirit' [*psikhicheskii lik goroda* in Grevs' words].<sup>16</sup> His attention to works of poetry and fiction as expressions of St Petersburg's 'tragic essence' showed that while they might not be empirically viable records of the city's architectural or topographical history, as witnesses to deeper layers of collective psychology they afforded the

14. Antsiferov used this expression in the preface to his kandidatskaya dissertation on Dostoevsky's Petersburg (1944), which he defended just months after the end of the Leningrad blockade, adding: 'Now, more than twenty years on, undertaking a new study on a similar theme, I hope that, although it deals with Leningrad's past, it has some bearing on the events that have assailed this great city, as tragic destiny raises this city-hero through a path of suffering to the heights of world glory.' *Проблемы урбанизма в русской художественной литературе: опыт построения образа города – Петербурга Достоевского – на основе анализа литературных традиций*, Moskva, IMLI RAN, 2009 [1944], p. 16.

15. Johnson, op. cit, p. 128. See also the review by G. Flerovsky in *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 5. no. 13 June, 1926, p. 193-98.

16. Grevs, 'Монументальный город...', p. 4 (fn); Antsiferov, 'Беллетристы-краеведы. (Вопрос о связи краеведения с художественной литературой)', *Краеведение*, 1927, t. 4, no. 1: 'To a certain degree the method of artistic intuition [*intuitivnyi metod poznaniya mira khudozhnikov*] is both germane to [*rodstvennyi*] and necessary for the regionalist.' (32). In this connection, Antsiferov referred to the writer, Mikhail Privshin.

historian valuable insights into ‘the power of place as a source of knowledge’ about man and his sense of connectedness to the world that surrounds him.<sup>17</sup>

As one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Institute’s humanities sector Antsiferov was instrumental in ensuring a methodological base for literary excursions as part of its programme. In a mission statement published in 1923, he built on Grevs’ template by dividing the study of localities as cultural-historical complexes into two interdependent sub-categories: the cultural-historical, properly speaking, and the literary. Excursions falling into the first sub-category consisted in the study of ‘tangible’ objects, such as monuments or artworks, and would engage a variety of approaches – from the topographical, technical, economic to the aesthetic.<sup>18</sup> Literary excursions, by contrast, had the rather more ambitious aim of prompting a reflection on the creative writer’s ability to channel historical reality into symbolic images. Students were prompted to study representations of popular settings in Russian literature, such as Tsarskoe Selo, Gatchina, or the backstreets of St Petersburg, paying special attention to the emotive resonances of certain place-related words, such as *zemlya* or *kamni* in a given author’s lexicon. As Antsiferov readily acknowledged, the approach was especially challenging, but he believed that in addition to sharpening the students’ awareness of their environment, it would yield useful biographical material and throw light on what he called the ‘psychology of creativity.’<sup>19</sup>

We shall be looking for an understanding of the city’s surroundings, of boring ordinariness, and in light of this new approach, this boring ordinariness, this tedium will appear new; it will speak to us through the stones of bridges, through the forms and groupings of houses, street names, through all the things that we have got used to looking at with unseeing eyes. Then a new interesting book will open its pages, which we will learn to read [...]. The ordinary will be filled with the fascinating content of the past, which brings us closer to an understanding of those lives [of writers – FN] that were so filled with creative endeavour.<sup>20</sup>

This last comment might well read as an allusion to ideas of aesthetic distancing [*ostranenie, vnenakhodimost'*] that were gaining currency in contemporary literary theory. Certainly, Antsiferov was familiar with the formalist and dialogic methods of Skhlovsky and Bakhtin, and, as some have argued, his approach to the past through the prism of literature presents some intriguing points of comparison with the concept of chronotope which became one of the

17. Antsiferov, *Быль и миф Петербурга*, Petrograd, 1924, p. 5.

18. Ibid., *О методах и типах историко-культурных экскурсий*, SPb., Nachatki znanii, 1923, p. 21-22.

19. Ibid., see also ‘Беллетристы-краеведы...’, ‘When studying ‘literary sites’ [*gnezda*] one should not only collate material which throws light on biography and/or the degree to which the author interacted with his surroundings; more importantly perhaps it is a matter of studying the reflection of these surroundings in his creative writing [...] to grasp aspects of the creative person which, to date, have not received attention.’ (46)

20. Ibid., p. 7. See also: Antsiferov, *Пути изучения города, как социального организма : опыт комплекс подхода*, Leningrad, Seiatel', 1925.



hallmarks of Bakhtin's theory of meaning in language and literature.<sup>21</sup> But I would suggest that Antsiferov's appeal to the reader to 'look again' at St Petersburg and to explore a writer's sense of attachment to his surroundings remained fundamentally consistent with the principles of historical enquiry that he had first encountered as a student in Grevs seminars on the mediaeval world. In particular, it was, as he later recalled, the experience of his field trip to northern Italy (1912) as part of Grevs' Dante seminar which taught him that 'the past is contained in the present' and that, in order to 'connect' with the past [*priobshchit'sya k proshlomu*], one had to 'do an inverted reconstruction of lost monuments so as to discern the 'pulse' or spirit that once 'animated' them.'<sup>22</sup> This last remark, however, also had a poignant contemporary resonance that is hard to miss: given the period in which he was writing, Antsiferov's bid to 'connect with the past' reads as an oblique reminder of the importance of safeguarding a cultural heritage threatened by economic demise, the effects of war, if not the Bolshevik policy of renaming streets, demolishing statues and monuments as a means to consign the pre-revolutionary world to oblivion. As we know, by 1920 Petrograd had been reduced to a 'provincial town', its population effectively halved (through death and migration), factories and shops shut down, and private residences left to ruin. Moreover, if the NEP years witnessed the city's slow recovery, and the new leadership permitted the cause of architectural preservation embraced by numerous intellectuals – including Antsiferov, himself, as an appointed member of the Old Petersburg Society – this was not, of course, with a view to revering a bygone age: as contemporaries noted, the bells in the Isaac Cathedral, which had not chimed since the Bolshevik seizure of power, remained silent.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps, then, it was this sense of a lost world, which gave the excursion method its distinctive pathos as an enquiry into the realm of what was ultimately invisible, intangible, namely the 'soul' of the city, or as Antsiferov later called it the aetiology of place as myth [*etiologicheskaya legenda mestnosti*].<sup>24</sup> By mapping the past through fiction, Antsiferov's work arguably helped safeguard memory/historical knowledge not just of Petersburg's pre-revolutionary topography, but, importantly, the experiences and worldviews of successive generations of the city's inhabitants.

21. Antsiferov had known Yuri Tynyanov and Boris Eikhenbaum since their student days before the war, and during the 1920s met Bakhtin on several occasions at meetings of the Voskresenie circle. See Moskovskaya, "Жизнь сквозь город..." Н. П. Анциферов – автор локального метода в литературоведении', in *Проблемы урбанизма...*, p. 508-509.

22. *Ibid.*, *О методах...*, p. 18; See also, Antsiferov's memoir, *Из дум о былом*, Moskva, Feniks, 1992, 165ff;

23. It is worth noting that revolution, war and the blockade destroyed places on the outskirts of Petersburg – Detskoe Selo, Pavlovsk, Gatchina, Tsarskaya Slavyanka – all of which were closely intertwined with Antsiferov's personal and family memory –. See *Из дум о былом...*, 326ff; Moskovskaya, "Жизнь сквозь город..."", p. 512.

24. Antsiferov, *Проблемы урбанизма...*, p. 2.

EXCURSIONISM, *KRAEVEDENIE* AND URBAN CULTURE

Grev's 'local method' allows both the historian and philologist in equal measure to engage (*priobshchit'sya*) with the aetiology of the myth/aura of a place, with the complex social and natural processes that affect it and change it over time. For the historian, the local method yields an understanding of the realia of a locality, for the philologist it affords insight into 'place' as an embodied idea, and into the emotional individuality of a creative writer.<sup>25</sup>

Antsiferov's advocacy of excursion studies consisted in highlighting its versatility as a resource for cultural studies and local history. As I discuss in the final part of this article, certain motifs in his literary-historical based study of urban myth and culture would later enter the frame of cultural semiotics associated with the Moscow-Tartu School. In the more immediate term, however, his claim, cited here, signalled a last-ditch attempt to safeguard the excursionism project by integrating it with regional and borderland studies [*kraevedenie*] a subject area which, by the mid-1920s, had eclipsed urban studies as a formally organized entity. The closure, in June 1924, of the Institute was ostensibly due to budgetary cuts at the Commissariat of Enlightenment, but there is little doubt that the decision to support *kraevedenie* by establishing the Central Bureau of Regional Studies (Moscow) as its administrative hub was a strategic one.<sup>26</sup> With its focus on the history and culture of more remote regions across the Soviet Union, *kraevedenie* was arguably better suited as a scientific adjunct to *kor-enizatsiia*, the Soviet policy of assimilation through indigenization, than its urban-centred excursionist counterpart.

On paper, there were, of course, some obvious similarities between regional and urban studies: both were multi-disciplinary in approach, and both advocated the pedagogical principles of 'learning by doing.' Moreover, as one of several calques, along with *rodinovedenie* and *stranovedenie*, for the German *Heimatkunde*, the coinage *kraevedenie* had entered the language around the turn of the century, that is, at roughly the same time as excursionism, and, again, like excursionism, was originally used to bolster the campaign for educational reform.<sup>27</sup> However, as Emily Johnson argues, with the exception of specialist literature, the term, as such, never really gained currency in either pedagogical or public discourse until after the revolution. During the civil war, it was used as a qualifier [*kraevedcheskoe dvizhenie*] for measures to coordinate the efforts of local volunteers to protect valuable documents and artefacts that were at risk of being destroyed. It was only in 1921, when delegates at the first conference of Scientific Societies for the Study of Local Regions, chose *kraevedenie* rather than its more familiar synonym, *rodinovedenie*, to designate a comprehensive

25. Antsiferov, 'Беллетристы-краеведы...', p. 31-32.

26. Johnson, op. cit., p. 118-119.

27. Ibid., p. 158.

approach to the study of local resources, heritage and folklore that its position as a comparable, yet potentially, rival discipline was acknowledged among excursionist contemporaries. Significantly, by endorsing this relatively obscure term the regionalists had the advantage of a *tabula rasa*: unlike the excursionists who explicitly drew on their pre-revolutionary origins to remodel the discipline in line with Narkompros expectations, the regionalists were able to announce a clean break with the past, and thus launch *kraevedenie* as a revolutionary new science.

It is interesting to note that among excursionists, Grevs was one of the very few to incorporate the terms '*krai*' and '*kraevedicheskii*' into his excursionist lexicon, and as early as 1922, when the regionalists received their first institutional base under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences, he had begun arguing – against considerable opposition – for closer collaboration between the two 'brother' disciplines.<sup>28</sup> Two years later, as the future of the Institute was under discussion, he made a spirited, if somewhat misguided attempt to negotiate an institutional partnership by proposing to accommodate *kraevedenie* as a new 'social studies' [*obshchestvovedenie*] axis of excursionist enquiry.<sup>29</sup> Alluding to, but not naming, the social and political impact of the October Revolution ('the old is disappearing and the new is taking shape in peoples' lives'), Grevs argued that it was becoming all the more necessary to 'fix the bygone age through study, take note of the rise of new forms and trends, and elucidate the social, material and spiritual impact of these transformations [*peremena*] on populations across the regions.'<sup>30</sup> By that time, Grevs' hopes to bridge cultural historical and sociological enquiry on the basis of interdepartmental collaboration were, of course, no longer practicable. But, it is equally clear that the underlying rationale of his proposal belonged to a tradition in scholarship, which, ultimately, could not be readily co-opted to the task of consolidating the new Soviet space: if Grevs' 'scientific-empirical' pedigree could assure him a place, however tenuous, in an emerging intellectual climate increasingly dominated by a Leninist-Stalinist reading of Karl Marx, the 'man-centred' nature of his enquiry, his attachment to questions of mentality, emotions, and collective psychology and his view of the historical process as something fundamentally complex, slow moving, and non-linear would rapidly find him branded as *persona non grata*.

The arrest of Grevs and Antsiferov at the end of the decade along with many other leading scholars implicated in the Academic Affair (1929-1931) tells an all too familiar tale. Following the closure of the Excursion Institute, both men were employed as *kraevedy* by the Petrograd (Leningrad) Department of the Central Regional Study Bureau, where, for the next few years, they were able

28. Johnson, p. 155.

29. Grevs, 'Гуманитарный отдел Ленинградского Экскурсионного института (его общие задачи и ближайший план', a draft essay found among his papers, dated 1924. See: Vakhromeeva (ed.), op.cit., p. 307-310.

30. Ibid., p. 309.

to pursue their work in urban studies.<sup>31</sup> But with the strengthening of a centralized, top-down command from Moscow accompanying Stalin's 'great socialist offensive' in 1928 it was almost inevitable that *kraevedenie* which, by then, had acquired strong institutional foundations and prestige, would come under suspicion as a breeding ground for regional separatism. The repression of its leading figures effectively gave the political leadership carte blanche to transform the discipline into an extension of the state apparatus geared towards the fulfillment of five-year plans and the promotion of state propaganda. Redesigned, then, to support the massive industrialization and collectivization project in the 1930s, the focus of *kraevedenie* was, henceforth, on the potential of localities as sites of technical development and socialist modernization.<sup>32</sup>

#### BETWEEN EARLY LITERARY MODERNISM AND POST-STALINIST SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE

Grevs and Antsiferov were not just contemporaries of the symbolists, but saw themselves as scholar-humanists germinating on the cultural soil of Russian symbolism.<sup>33</sup>

In a short, but insightful article, Nina Perlina reminds us that although Grevs was formally trained in positivist historiography – and largely retained these credentials – his interest in spiritual culture, religious sentiment, and the importance he placed in man over the 'impersonal blind forces of history' tracked the shift in the wider cultural, philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities associated with Russia's Silver Age.<sup>34</sup> In particular, she argues, the re-evaluation by contemporary neo-Kantian philosophers of the substance of social and economic disciplines resonated with Grevs' ambition to rethink the terms and aims of historical enquiry, namely to gain an understanding of the formation of culture [*poznat' slozhenie kul'tury*] by using categories more typically associated with the history of aesthetics and religious thought, and literature.<sup>35</sup> But if, intellectually,

31. Grevs, 'Городские ландшафты (этюды из культурной географии)', *Вопросы географии в новой школе*, L., 1926; 'Город как предмет школьного краеведения', *Вопросы краеведения в школе*, L., 1926. Antsiferov: see notes 16 & 20.

32. Antsiferov was sentenced to three years in BelBaltLag. Following his release in 1934, he settled in Moscow, and for the remainder of his 'professional life' worked in a number of pedagogical institutions while he resumed research on literary urbanism. In 1944 he defended his *kandidatskaya* thesis at IMLI. Grevs was arrested, but not charged.

33. N. Perlina, 'Иван Михайлович Гревс и Николай Павлович Анциферов: к обоснованию их культурологической позиции', in: T. V. Pritykina (ed.), *op.cit.*, 84.

34. Fustel de Coulanges was an early influence, but Grevs soon rejected his views on the 'blind forces of history'. *Ibid.* On Grevs' intellectual trajectory see: G. M. Bongard-Levin et al (eds.), *История и поэзия: Переписка И. М. Гревса и Вяч. Иванова*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2006; B. S. Kaganovich, *Русские медиевисты первой половины XX века*, SPb., GIPERION, 2007; A. V. Sveshnikov, *Петербургская школа медиевистов начала XX века: попытка антропологического анализа научного сообщества*, Omsk, 2010.

35. Grevs, *История происхождения, развития и разложения феодализма в Западной Европе* [1902-1903]. Typescript of lectures read at the Higher Women's Courses, compiled by auditor, S. Svirodovaya, 5. Among contemporary thinkers, Grevs mentioned Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) for the emphasis he placed

he welcomed neo-idealism as confirmation of a cultural turn in historical enquiry, in temperament, as a self-styled ‘humanist realist’ (the novelists he most admired were Turgenev and Romain Rolland), professor-enlightener, and classical Russian liberal, Grevs was a man of pre-symbolist culture. Perlina’s comments may be corroborated if we bear in mind that the emphasis in excursionism on physiology, anatomy, psychology, and its tendency to individualize the characteristics of a city was, in fact, symptomatic of developments in historical and literary critical discourse, which, since the latter part of the nineteenth century, had been exposed to the expansion of the natural sciences into the sphere of humanities studies.<sup>36</sup> If anything, then, Grevs’ tendency to anthropomorphize, even spiritualize the features of the city belonged to a lexicon and conceptual apparatus dating from the 1860s and popularized by figures such as Hippolyte Taine (his view of historical events as psychological phenomena), and Ernest Renan’s ‘spiritual principle’ in his concept of the nation (1882).<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the intention of border crossing between disciplines and areas of studies such as geography, ethnology, history and literature was to equip scholars with ‘scientific’ (positivist) pathways towards a study of the intangible psychological resonances of place for human existence, not to overhaul the empirical inductive rationale of positivism itself.

Antsiferov inherited the excursionist glossary of physiological and psychological terms, and throughout his career, took a broadly ‘essentialist’ approach (as opposed to a functionalist or formalist) to the study of urban culture. But there was also a note of tension between his advocacy of a ‘visual understanding of history’ and the repercussions arising from a question he had posed in the opening pages of his first monograph about St Petersburg: ‘How’, he asked, ‘is one to learn to understand the language of the city?’ [*kak zhe nauchit'sya ponimat' yazyk goroda?*]<sup>38</sup> On this one occasion, Antsiferov seemed to be suggesting that the city might be considered as a single, composite text with its own peculiar semantics and language. Indeed, as Dmitrii Likhachev argued, while the literary citations in Antsiferov’s studies generally functioned according to scholarly convention as supporting evidence, in some instances they seemed to assume a ‘self-sufficient semantic entity’ in their own right. For example, the extensive range of literary citations making up the second part of *Dusha Peterburga* had no traditional explanatory function; rather, they appeared to coalesce into a new

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on understanding (Verstehen) as a defining feature of humanities scholarship in contrast to the explanatory (Erklaren) function of natural science.

36. See, for example, D. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Enquiry from Herder to Huizinga*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 212-217.

37. This is borne out by numerous references to ‘positivist’ literature in Grevs articles. Among these was a popular study by the Belgian art historian, H. Fierens-Gevaert, *Psychologie d'une ville: essai sur Bruges*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1908. Kaganovich, however, places Grevs’ ‘urban anthropomorphism’ in a lineage dating back to F. Guizot (his *Histoire de la civilisation en France: 1829-1832*) and the Russian romantics. See: Kaganovich, *op.cit.*, 50ff.

38. Antsiferov, *Душа Петербурга...*, 18.

‘supra-text’ or ‘Petersburg text’ as Antsiferov’s own personal evocation of the city’s beautiful, yet tragic essence [*lik*].<sup>39</sup>

As a contemporary of the Silver Age culture, Antsiferov was, like Grevs, intellectually receptive to its syncretism and semantic thinking. Not only did his work on the founding myth of St Petersburg build on motifs present in Russian symbolist poetry and prose, the unusually lyrical, evocative quality of his own ‘scientific’ prose was, itself, testament to the cultural sensibilities associated with Russian symbolism. But, of course, the main point of difference between Antsiferov, the historian, and his literary contemporaries was that, rather than perpetuate the myth of St Petersburg’s ‘tragic essence’ (*Dusha Peterburga* excepted), his goal was to uncover its sources and to reconstruct the process by which historical reality became mythologized. With respect to this last point, a handful of scholars have suggested that Antsiferov’s contribution to the excursion project anticipated semiotic *gradovedenie* during the Brezhnev era.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, collaborative articles by Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky on the symbolism of Petersburg and the semiotics of the city offer some rewarding parallels with the model that Antsiferov devised in the early 1920s. Not least, they shared the view that well before Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky ‘turned the Petersburg myth into a fact of national culture, the real history of Petersburg was permeated with mythological elements’, evidenced, they claimed, by the customs, beliefs, rumours and urban folklore patterning the lives of ordinary people.<sup>41</sup> There are other correspondences, too, between the two schools. Some may be considered incidental, such as the excursionist idea of the city as a ‘cultural historical complex’ and the semioticians’ concept of the city as a deeply ‘historical organism’, which they defended against the ‘technical’, functionalist accent current in much twentieth-century scholarship.<sup>42</sup> Other similarities are more consequential in that they feed into broader questions concerning the nature of historical understanding: the spatial-temporal characteristic of the city, which both excursionists and semioticians address, is a case in point. According to Lotman, architecture, municipal ceremonies, even the city plan, street names and the thousands of other relics of past ages: ‘act like coded programmes [*kodovye programmy*], continually regenerating texts [*tekty*] from the historical past. The city is a mechanism that constantly engenders its past, which is given the possibility to align itself [*sopolagat'sya*] with the present as if synchronically.’<sup>43</sup> If, then, the semiotic theory of ‘reading’ the city as a ‘complex semiotic mechanism’ transposed to a

39. D. S. Likhachev, *Николай Павлович Анциферов (1889-1958). Приложение к ремонтному воспроизведению: 1922-1924*, Москва, 1991, 17 & fn 10 with reference to V. N. Toporov, ‘Петербург и “Петербургский текст русской литературы”’, *Семиотика города и городской культуры*, Pbg – Tartu, Tartuski gosuniversitet, 1984, p. 4-29.

40. See: Pritykina (ed.), op.cit.

41. Yu. Lotman & B. Uspensky, ‘Символика Петербурга и проблемы семиотики города’ [1984] in: Yu. M. Lotman, *Избранные статьи*, Tallinn, Aleksandra, 1992, vol. 2, p. 14.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 14, fn 11.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

new discursive context the visual and anthropomorphic metaphors [*lik, obraz*] of excursionism, this did not fundamentally disturb their shared premises concerning the significance of the city as a site in which past and present (or the synchronic and diachronic perspectives, in semiotic terminology) converge.

From a political-ideological perspective, explanations for the rapid demise of excursionism as a recognized discipline are self-evident: its 'science for science's sake' ethos was obviously out of kilter with the increasingly prescriptive expectations of the Bolshevik leadership in its drive to consolidate the regime. As I suggested, with the exception of Grevs, excursionists failed to recognize the challenge posed by *kraevedy* whose remit was clearly better suited to the leadership task, during the 1920s, of maintaining its border regions. And even as he endeavoured to bridge the two subject areas, Grevs could not abandon his view that the ultimate object of excursionist study was the person, man defined topographically and historically [*chelovek mestnyi*].

Intellectually, the early 1920s excursion project comes across as a peculiar hybrid of ideas that were at once outmoded and ahead of their time. Although Grevs and Antsiferov were direct contemporaries of the avant-garde, their positivist inheritance, and what one might call an 'ethos of nostalgia' running through their work, placed them among an older generation of scholars, thereby obscuring the otherwise experimental nature of the ideas they were testing. There is, for example, a certain irony in the fact that Antsiferov's approach to literature received mixed reviews by contemporaries as a return to the old era of symbolism, and yet his latent grasp of the semantics of cityscapes anticipated – whether by accident or design – the semiotic approach to urban culture and myth.<sup>44</sup> Or again, as some Western and Russian scholars have suggested, Grevs early prescriptions for historical study dating from the turn of the century – to work '*ad intelligendum*' towards an understanding of 'phenomena' such as cult, forms of ownership and exchange, family life – made him an incidental precursor of the French *Annales*.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, the career paths of Grevs and Marc Bloch as mediaevalists were remarkably similar: trained in socio-economic history but quickly turning to the study of culture and historical geography, both men rejected the conventions of political historical narrative of national events with its built-in assumptions of progress, and its 'obsession with origins' for a multi-disciplinary study of human experience, beliefs and values articulated in local contexts. Even if it may more accurate to say that the two 'schools' complement

44. Antsiferov's three-part study of St Petersburg was reviewed by, among others, V. Bryusov, Tynianov, and L.P. Grossman. See: Moskovskaya, 'Жизнь сквозь город...', p. 516-518.

45. B. S. Kaganovich, *Иван Михайлович Гревс и петербургское краеведение*, SPb., Evropejskij dom, 2010; Sveshnikov, *Петербургская школа медиевистов...*; Daniele Beaune-Gray, 'Vers une histoire des mentalités', in: Marc Weinstein (ed.), *le Geste russe: comment les Russes écrivent-ils l'histoire au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle?*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, p. 329-343). For Grevs' early views of history, see his *История происхождения, развития и разложения феодализма в Западной Европе* [1902-1903]. Introduction.

each other by virtue of their differences (the *Annales*' emphasis on enduring structures versus the diachronic accent in excursionism; generic man versus 'vernacular' man), it remains that the coincidences between them could well present a worthwhile case study for research into patterns of development in national historiographies from a comparative perspective that, to date, has been largely overlooked.