

Archives in the Soviet Union: Their Organization and the Problem of Access

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SINCE the late 1950's increasing numbers of foreign scholars have been given access to archives and manuscript collections in the Soviet Union. This trend has increased the need for learning more about the rich Soviet repositories, their organization and finding aids. At the same time, the significance of developments in Soviet archival administration, on both practical and theoretical levels, and the renewed participation of the Soviet Union in international archival affairs has increased the interest of foreign archivists. Information available abroad about Soviet archives has hardly kept pace with these concerns. This article can only offer a few reflections about the general organization of archives in the Soviet Union and the problems of access to them confronting foreign scholars.

The October Revolution of 1917 had as monumental an impact in the realm of archival administration as it did in most other aspects of society and culture, for it brought to Russia the most highly centralized archival system and the most highly state-directed principles of management, preservation, and utilization of documentary records that the world had seen. Deeply entrenched in historical theory and inexorably committed to the necessity of historical interpretation, Marxism-Leninism as an ideology gave both extensive philosophical justification and crucial political importance to documentary control. This, in turn, brought innovations in archival management; both the Communist Party and the highly centralized

The author, currently a visiting associate professor of history at American University, adapted this article from a paper read at the convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Columbus, Ohio, on Mar. 26, 1970. The material is condensed from introductory chapters of a comprehensive directory of Soviet archives and manuscript collections to be published within the next year by Princeton University Press, under the sponsorship of the Russian Institute of Columbia University, where the author has been a research associate. The author appreciatively acknowledges the support as well of the American Council of Learned Societies and the International Research and Exchanges Board and the assistance of the Main Archival Administration and the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. in carrying out extensive research for the project in the Soviet Union.

state administrative system encouraged firm control over all archival records while developing the bureaucratic mechanism to ensure that control.¹

Although, in contrast to the decentralized, haphazard, and poorly organized archival developments in prerevolutionary years, centralization and state control became the hallmark of the Soviet system, there was continuity as well as change in the archival systems of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. The tremendous manuscript wealth that was carefully and systematically preserved in a variety of prerevolutionary repositories has become the real basis for the historical riches of Soviet collections today. Deep prerevolutionary roots are apparent in many current archival institutions, and some decentralizing elements persist in the general placement of archival repositories under different administrative organs. In fact the relation between highly centralized, bureaucratized aims and continuing decentralized elements explain many of the peculiarities of the system and the resulting advantages and disadvantages for scholars working there.

Potentially the most centralizing element, and at the same time the most significant Soviet innovation in the archival field, has been the state's appropriation of all manuscripts and archival records, regardless of their institutional or personal origin. The concept of the "State Archival Fond" (Gosudarstvennyi arkhivnyi fond), which was first decreed under Lenin's signature in 1918, to encompass the entire national documentary legacy has been the real basis for archival centralization. State proprietorship and control was gradually extended to all types and categories of manuscripts and archival records, and the definition and powers of appropriation were refined

¹ The most comprehensive description of the Soviet archival system in English is in the article by Director General of the Main Archival Administration G. A. Belov, "The Organization of the Archive System in the USSR," in *Archives*, 6:211-222 (Oct. 1964); also see Belov's more popularized account, "History That Lives Again—Archives in the U.S.S.R.," in *American Archivist*, 26:439-442 (Oct. 1963), and the earlier, more critical article by Fritz T. Epstein, "Archives Administration in the Soviet Union," in *American Archivist*, 20:131-145 (Apr. 1957). A more historical sketch is provided in articles by Soviet archivist V. V. Maksakov, "Archives in the Soviet Union: 1: Archives in Prerevolutionary Russia," and "2: Archives Since the Victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution," in *Indian Archives*, 12:63-75 (1958); 13:74-99 (1959-60). For a brief description of the major repositories, together with a bibliography of major published reference materials, see my article "Soviet Archives and Manuscript Collections: A Bibliographical Introduction," in *Slavic Review*, 24:105-120 (Mar. 1965). The most comprehensive bibliography of Soviet publications relating to archives is the small volume Z. A. Silaeva, I. F. Kovalev, and S. V. Nefedova, comps., and A. I. Loginova and I. N. Firsov, eds., *Katalog arkhivovedcheskoi literatury, 1917-1959 gg.* [Catalog of archival literature, 1917-1959] (Moscow, GAU, 1961); two supplements bring the coverage up to 1967: *Katalog arkhivovedcheskoi literatury i sbornikov dokumentov (1960-1963 gg.)* and *Katalog . . . (1964-1967 gg.)* (Moscow, GAU, 1964, 1970).

by successive legislation. Current regulations provide for state control of all governmental, social, and cultural records; define when they are to be transferred to state archival custody (now usually after periods of 5 to 15 years, depending on the records); and set up procedures for archival authorities to work with current record-making organs and to apply guidelines for sorting and retaining permanent files.

As a further step towards centralized planning and total state control, the concept of state proprietorship of all documentary records has been accompanied by the development of an independent state administrative agency charged with managing the entire "State Archival Fond." Designated "Glavarkhiv" (short for Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom, Main Administration of Archival Affairs) in the early twenties, the organ was first under the People's Commissariat of Education; later, as the Central Archival Administration (Tsentral'noe arkhivnoe upravlenie Soiuz SSR), it was an independent agency subordinated directly to the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. From 1938 to 1960 it was under the People's Commissariat (later Ministry) of the Interior, but now, freed from MVD control, the Main Archival Administration (Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Sovete ministrov SSSR, or GAU) functions as an independent administrative agency directly subject to the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. It is symbolic of the change and continuity involved in archival affairs that GAU today has its headquarters in the building constructed in the 1880's to house the Moscow Archive of the Ministry of Justice, the most extensive and best-organized state repository in prerevolutionary Russia, whose directors were at the forefront in the movement for archival reform and centralization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Main Archival Administration of the Soviet Union is undoubtedly the most active agency of its kind, and its activities are the most extensive. Its function goes well beyond managing the central and local state archives under its control. It has publication divisions that boast an extensive bibliography of documentary publications from many state archives and of reference works pertaining to all phases of archival affairs; the predecessors of its current bimonthly professional journal, *Sovetskie arkhivy*, date back to the early 1920's.² Its foreign relations division maintains international professional contacts and archival exchanges and handles foreign scholars' access

² In 1966 *Sovetskie arkhivy* [Soviet Archives] superseded *Voprosy arkhivovedeniia* [Questions of Archival Science], published quarterly between 1959 and 1965; between 1956 and 1959, GAU put out a mimeographed "Information Bulletin," which is generally not available abroad. Between 1923 and 1941, it irregularly published 58 numbers of *Arkhivnoe delo* [Archival Affairs].

to the archives under GAU jurisdiction. It has set up standardized procedures for all phases of internal archival organization, classification, cataloging, and storage procedures.³ Its recently established scientific research institute for archival affairs, VNIIDAD (Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut dokumentovedeniia i arkhivnogo dela), the only such archival institute in the world, among other projects is studying the application of automation to archives, particularly in the area of information retrieval systems. Although not operated directly under its auspices, GAU also coordinates resident and correspondence archival training programs for the college-level Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute, founded in the early 1930's.

The concept of a unified "State Archival Fond" and the development of centralized state archival administration has not, however, been accompanied by a thoroughgoing centralization of all archival repositories. In fact, many of the most politically and culturally significant archives and manuscript collections remain outside the state archives system and are administered independently of the Main Archival Administration. Many scholars who have tried to find documentary materials in the Soviet Union are amazed by the actual decentralization of holdings, which often necessitates research in a wide variety of repositories administered by different agencies.

To be sure, the management of official state archives is thoroughly centralized under the Main Archival Administration. Even there an effective degree of decentralization occurs in the actual storage of records because the Administration divides them among many specialized repositories on both the central and local levels.⁴ At present there are 11 official all-union central state archives in the U.S.S.R., each with its own management, under the general control of GAU. Two of these are located in Leningrad and nine in Moscow, but only four are housed in the building complex around GAU headquarters. Working out the geneology of those archives over the past 50 years is an exceedingly complicated task owing to the frequency of name changes, archival reorganization, and the extent of shifts and transfers of *fonds*. Although the divisions now ostensibly follow logical subject or period lines, inevitable overlapping occurs

³ Details about Soviet archival procedures are in the textbook for the archival training institute, G. A. Belov and L. A. Nikiforov, eds., *Teoriia i praktika arkhivnogo dela v SSSR* [Theory and Practice of Archival Affairs in the U.S.S.R.] (Moscow, "Vysshiaia shkola," 1966).

⁴ The only general directory of state archives, G. A. Belov *et al.*, eds., *Gosudarstvennye arkhivy Soiuza SSR. Kratkii spravochnik* [State Archives of the U.S.S.R.: A Short Handbook] (Moscow, GAU, 1956), is now considerably outdated by recent reorganization. It does provide the only description of many repositories, especially on the republic and oblast level.

and confusion arises because of the frequency of previous changes. With a few exceptions the contents of prerevolutionary archives and the records of specific governmental bodies or institutions are preserved intact as organized in their originating source according to the principle of provenance. The historical influence on the present location of various record groups or earlier collections is demonstrated by the fact that of the six state repositories containing major prerevolutionary records, four occupy the buildings that housed them (or at least their nuclei) before the revolution.

The following list of the 11 all-union central state archives gives a general idea of their current organization and subject divisions:

(1) The earliest historical records, principally those predating the 19th century are housed in the Central State Archive of Ancient Acts (*Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov*, or TsGADA) in Moscow.⁵ (2) Public records from the 19th and early 20th centuries, which before the revolution were housed in diverse Petersburg buildings under the control of individual ministries or other governmental organs, are now principally located in the Central State Historical Archive of the U.S.S.R. (*Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv SSSR*, or TsGIA SSSR). The Archive also contains a variety of *fonds* of private families, commercial and economic enterprises, and religious institutions from the prerevolutionary period.⁶ (3) Most postrevolutionary state records are now housed in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (*Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii, vyshikh organov gosudarstvennoi vlasti i organov gosudarstvennogo upravleniia SSSR*, or TsGAOR SSSR) in Moscow. A prerevolutionary division of the Archive contains most of the 19th-century police and censorship records and related documents that were brought together in the twenties to form the special Historical-Revolutionary Archive, and were later made part of the now defunct Central State Historical Archive in Moscow (TsGIAM).⁷ (4) The Central State Archive of the National Economy (*Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR*, or TsGANKh) was separated from TsGAOR in 1961 to house most of the economic-related records from the Soviet period. (5) More recently, a

⁵ TsGADA holdings are described in the somewhat outdated guide, *Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov. Putevoditel'*, S. K. Bogoiavlenskii, ed., pt. 1; A. I. Iakovlev, ed., pt. 2 (Moscow, GAU, 1946, 1947).

⁶ TsGIA SSSR holdings are described in the guide, S. N. Valk and V. V. Bedin, eds., *Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv SSSR v Leningrade. Putevoditel'* (Leningrad, GAU, 1956).

⁷ TsGAOR holdings, principally those dating from the 1920's are briefly described in the outdated guide, V. V. Maksakov, ed., *Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva. Putevoditel'* (Moscow, GAU, 1946). The prerevolutionary division is described in the guide to the former Central State Historical Archive in Moscow, I. Nikitinskii, P. Sofinov, and V. Maksakov, eds., *Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv v Moskve. Putevoditel'* (Moscow, GAU, 1946).

special Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv nauchno-tekhnicheskoi dokumentatsii SSSR, or TsGANTD) was established. It will gather *fonds* from TsGAOR, TsGANKh, and other sources but will in no way impinge on the autonomy of the scientific records of the various Academy of Sciences institutes. (6) The Central State Archive of Military History (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, or TsGVIA) holds most of the prerevolutionary military records of the Russian Empire.⁸ (7) TsGVIA's postrevolutionary counterpart, the Central State Archive of the Soviet Army (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sovetskoi Armii, or TsGASA), which originated in the twenties as the special Red Army Archive, houses the military records of the Soviet regime.⁹ World War II records, however, are still being sorted in a special depository under the Ministry of Defense and have not yet been integrated into TsGASA. (8) Naval records from both before and after the revolution remain in Leningrad in the Central State Archive of the Navy (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voenno-Morskogo Flota SSSR, or TsGAVMF).¹⁰ (9) The Central State Archive of Literature and the Arts (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva SSSR, or TsGALI), formed in 1941, brought together many literary, artistic, and general cultural *fonds* from a variety of earlier repositories;¹¹ but many documentary materials in this realm still remain in a wide range of other institutions, most notably the manuscript divisions of libraries, museums, and various institutes of the Academy of Sciences. (10) The Central State Archive of Documentary Films and Photographs (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kino-fotodokumentov SSSR, or TsGAKFD) houses undoubtedly the most extensive collection of its kind in the world.¹² (11) The

⁸ TsGVIA holdings are described briefly in the outdated guide, *Putevoditel' po Tsentral'nomu gosudarstvennomu voenno-istoricheskomu arkhivu* (Moscow, 1941). The holdings of the former Leningrad branch of the TsGVIA that were moved to Moscow in the late 1950's are described in the guide to the Leningrad historical archive, M. Akhun *et al.*, comps., and A. K. Drezen, ed., *Arkhivy SSSR. Leningradskie otdelenie Tsentral'nogo istoricheskogo arkhiva. Putevoditel' po fondam*, p. 167-196 (Leningrad, Lenoblizdat, 1933).

⁹ The earliest *fonds* in TsGASA, principally from the period of the Civil War, are described in the guide, P. Sofinov, ed., *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Krasnoi armii. Putevoditel'* (Moscow, GAU, 1945).

¹⁰ The holdings of TsGAVMF, which until 1934 formed part of the Leningrad branch of the historical archive, are described briefly in M. Akhun *et al.*, comps., and A. K. Drezen, ed., *Arkhivy SSSR*, p. 197-248.

¹¹ TsGALI holdings are well described in three directory volumes, *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva SSSR. Putevoditel'*: vol. 1: K. N. Kirilenko *et al.*, comps., and N. F. Bel'chikov and Iu. A. Dmitriev, eds., *Iskusstvo* (Moscow, GAU, 1959), covering artistic *fonds*; vol. 2: N. B. Volkova *et al.*, comps., and N. F. Bel'chikov and A. A. Volkov, eds., *Literatura* (Moscow, GAU, 1963); and vol. 3: I. I. Abroskina *et al.*, comps., and Iu. A. Krasovskii, ed., *Fondy, postupivshie v TsGALI SSSR v 1962-1966 gg.* (Moscow, GAU, 1968), covering new acquisitions to 1966.

¹² TsGAKFD holdings are described in the guide, L. D. Aksel'rod *et al.*, comps., and S. S. Ginzburg, ed., *Stranitsy zhivoi istorii. Ocherk-putevoditel' po Tsentral'nomu gosudarstvennomu arkhivu kino-foto-fonodokumentov SSSR* [Pages of Living History: Essay-Guidebook for the Central State Archive of Documentary Films, Photographs, and Sound Recordings of the U.S.S.R.] (Moscow, GAU, 1961).

recently formed Central State Archive of Sound Recordings (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv zvukozapisei SSSR, or TsGAZ) will become a separate repository for records and tapes that have hitherto been combined with TsGAKFD.

The Main Archival Administration of the U.S.S.R. directly controls the two central state archives of the Russian Soviet Federated Republic (R.S.F.S.R.), one formed in the late fifties in Moscow and the other in Tomsk for the Far East region. Through its subordinate regional level archival administrations, it also controls the state archives for every oblast throughout the Russian republic, as well as for autonomous oblasts and republics. The other 14 union republics have their own separate archival administrations, which follow the same basic pattern. GAU supervises documentary and reference publications in each republic and administers the republic-level central state archives; in turn, it controls the state archives, which have been established for every oblast and lesser administrative area under republic jurisdiction.¹³ This has in effect created a highly centralized state archival system throughout the Soviet Union, with all its parts following Moscow guidelines under the general supervision of the Main Archival Administration of the U.S.S.R.

What is revealing about the list of central state archives and the whole system of state archives down to the local level is the absence from it of the most politically important and sensitive records and some of the most culturally and scientifically significant. Their absence makes the decentralization of overall archival organization most apparent.

Undoubtedly the most important political records of the Soviet regime are deposited in the Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (Tsentral'nyi partiinyi arkhiv Instituta Marksizma-Leninizma pri Tsentral'nom komitete KPSS). Founded in the late 1920's, the Archive houses not only all the records of the Communist Party but also the Marx-Engels collection, the rich Lenin Archive, and the papers of Stalin and other prominent Communist Party members. Though the Central Party Archive in Moscow is the most important, a system of party archives, with separate repositories on the republic, oblast, and other administrative levels, has developed paralleling—but quite independent of—the state archival system.¹⁴

¹³ A short description of the regional state archival system and a preliminary list of the basic published finding aids are available in my article "Regional State Archives in the USSR: Some Notes and a Bibliography of Published Guides," in *Slavic Review*, 28:92-115 (Mar. 1969).

¹⁴ A description of the development and organization of the Communist Party archival system is available in the short volume by V. V. Maksakov, *Organizatsiia arkhivov KPSS (Uchebnoe posobie)*, Iu. F. Kononov, ed. (Moscow, Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi istorikoarkhivnyi institut, 1968).

The Foreign Ministry is another organization that maintains its own independent archival administration with two separate archives under its control—the post-1917 Foreign Ministry Archive, located in the main ministry building, and the Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russia (Arkhirv vneshnei politiki Rossii, or AVPR). The latter repository was formed in 1946 when the Foreign Ministry took over both the earlier Archive of Foreign Policy, containing 19th-century diplomatic documents from the prerevolutionary St. Petersburg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the 18th-century diplomatic documents from TsGADA, which had originally come from the prerevolutionary Moscow Archive of the College (later Ministry) of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Ministry thus controls all official foreign-office documents back to the reign of Peter the Great.

In the scientific and cultural realm, the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. independently maintains its own archives and manuscript collections, many of which grew up circumstantially around its institutes and libraries. Only in the last few years, with the formation in 1964 of a council on documentary materials for the Academy, has there been any real attempt to bring those rich and varied repositories into a centralized system. To give some idea of the riches of their holdings, one needs only to consider the Main Archive of the Academy in Moscow, with records dating from 1934, and its branch in Leningrad, containing the organizational records of the Academy and personal *fonds* of many members going back to the early 18th century.¹⁵ Also in Leningrad is the rich Manuscript Division of the Main Library of the Academy of Sciences (Biblioteka Akademii nauk SSSR, or BAN), which dates from the 18th century,¹⁶ and the Manuscript Division of Pushkinskii Dom (Pushkin House), which holds extensive literary *fonds*, along with medieval manuscript and folklore collections, under the Institute of Russian Literature.¹⁷ Other important Academy holdings in Leningrad include the Archive of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of History of

¹⁵ The Moscow and Leningrad sections of the Archive of the Academy of Sciences are well described in 5 vols., *Arkhirv Akademii nauk SSSR. Obozrenie arkhivnykh materialov* [Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.: Survey of Archival Materials] (Leningrad, Akademii nauk SSSR, 1933–63), which comprise vols. 1, 5, 9, 16, and 19 of *Trudy arkhiva AN SSSR*.

¹⁶ The Manuscript Division of BAN is well surveyed in *Istoricheskii ocherk i obzor fondov rukopisnogo otdela Biblioteki Akademii nauk* [Historical Essay and Survey of the Fonds of the Manuscript Division of the Library of the Academy of Sciences] (2 vols. and supp.; Moscow/Leningrad, Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956–61).

¹⁷ The Manuscript Division of Pushkinskii Dom is covered in the general survey, V. G. Bazanov, ed., *50 let Pushkinskogo doma* [50 years of Pushkin House] (Moscow/Leningrad, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956); the Medieval Slavic Division is covered in V. I. Malyshev, comp., and V. P. Adrianova-Perets, ed., *Drevne-russkie rukopisi Pushkinskogo doma (obzor fondov)* [Early Russian Manuscripts of Pushkin House; a Survey of Fonds] (Moscow/Leningrad, "Nauka," 1965).

the U.S.S.R.,¹⁸ the Archive of the Geographical Society, and the Archive and Manuscript Division of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. In Moscow many *fonds* of Soviet literary figures are in the Manuscript Division of the Institute of World Literature (Institut mirovoi literatury imeni A. M. Gor'kogo, or IMLI), which also houses the separate, distinctive Gorki Archive consolidating all documents relating to A. M. Gorki. There are also several important manuscript collections under the jurisdiction of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., notably in Novosibirsk and Ulan-Ude. In addition many of the institutes and libraries under the academies of sciences of the various union republics maintain important manuscript divisions, the largest of which is the Manuscript Division of the Ukrainian Academy library in Kiev. The Georgian and Azerbaijan Academies have even established special manuscript institutes containing rich local historical collections.

To add further to the decentralized aspect of manuscript holdings, there are the rich manuscript divisions of libraries and museums that, although administered by the Ministry of Culture, are actually relatively independent of each other, the Main Archival Administration, and the Academy of Sciences. Foremost here are the extensive archival and manuscript collections in the Manuscript Divisions of the Lenin Library and the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad, both of which are among the richest library manuscript holdings in the world. Among museums, the archival and manuscript holdings of the State Historical Museum in Moscow are probably the largest and best known.¹⁹

The Tolstoi museum in Moscow is the only one to have centralized

¹⁸ The Archive of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of History of the U.S.S.R. is well described by the guidebook, I. V. Valkina *et al.*, comps., and A. I. Andreev *et al.*, eds., *Putevoditel' po arkhivu Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta istorii* (Moscow/Leningrad, Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958).

¹⁹ The Division of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum is surveyed in S. Sakovich, comp., *Pis'mennye istochniki v sobranii Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeia* [Written Sources in the Collections of the State Historical Museum], pt. 1 (Moscow, 1958); the personal archival *fonds* in the Division are well covered by the guide, E. I. Bakst *et al.*, comp., and I. S. Kalantyrskaiia, ed., *Putevoditel' po fondam lichnogo proiskhozhdeniia otdela pis'mennykh istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeia* [Guidebook to the Fonds of Personal Origin in the Division of Written Sources of the State Historical Museum] (Moscow, "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1967). The Manuscript Division of the Museum is described in M. V. Shchepkina and T. N. Promasieva, comps., and M. N. Tikhomirov, ed., *Sokrovishcha drevnei pis'mennosti i staroi pečati. Obzor rukopisei russkikh, slavianskikh, grecheskikh, a takzhe knig staroi pečati Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzei* [Treasures of Early Writing and Old Printing: Survey of the Russian, Slavonic, and Greek Manuscripts and Old Printed Books of the State Historical Museum], vol. 30 of *Pamiatniki kul'tury* (Moscow, "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1958).

all documentary materials pertaining to a major cultural figure although many other commemorative museums have significant archival holdings. Art museums such as the Russian Museum in Leningrad or the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow have sizable manuscript divisions, especially rich in personal *fonds*. Documentary materials relating to music and the theater tend to be concentrated in museums or special libraries associated with specific theaters or educational institutions, or in such special collections as those of the Glinka State Museum of Musical Culture and the Bakhrushin State Theatrical Museum in Moscow or the Leningrad State Theatrical Museum and the Central Theatrical Library in Leningrad. Museums also contain such diverse documentary holdings as those relating to architecture and city planning in the Shchusev State Scientific Research Museum of Architecture in Moscow or those found in the archives of the special artillery history and communications museums in Leningrad. These examples of manuscript collections in Moscow and Leningrad are paralleled in museums and other institutions throughout the Soviet Union. In fact, the breadth and diversity of archival and manuscript holdings in museums and libraries in different parts of the country still defy description; but now, through the efforts of the Main Archival Administration and the museum research institute under the Ministry of Culture, many of those holdings are being thoroughly cataloged, and knowledge about them is being made available to researchers.²⁰

Many university libraries, particularly those founded before the revolution, have sizable manuscript holdings, not only in Moscow and Leningrad but also, for example, in Vilnius, Tartu, Kazan, and Odessa. In Armenia the famous Matenadaran (State Manuscript Repository) housing a collection having its origin in the fifth century A.D., is administered separately from the state or Academy of Sciences archival systems.²¹

The picture of diversity and decentralization that emerges in con-

²⁰ Space prohibits listing all the articles or published guides and descriptions to library and museum collections, but there is no comprehensive directory to their holdings. The most important Leningrad institutions are listed in the pamphlet, A. S. Myl'nikov, comp., *Rukopisnye fondy leningradskikh khranilishch. Kratkii spravochnik po fondam bibliotek, muzeev, nauchno-issledovatel'skikh i drugikh uchrezhdenii* [Manuscript Fonds in Leningrad Repositories: A Brief Handbook to the Fonds of Libraries, Museums, and Scientific Research and Other Institutions] (Leningrad, Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia biblioteka im. M. E. Saltykova-Shchedrina, 1970).

²¹ University libraries are listed in the handbook, E. Z. Levinson, comp., and R. T. Ablova, ed., *Biblioteka vysshikh uchebnykh zavedenii SSSR. Spravochnik* [Libraries of Higher Education Institutions of the U.S.S.R.: Handbook] (Moscow, Moskovskogo universiteta, 1964). A general description of the Matenadaran has been published in English by A. V. Abgarian, *Matenadaran* (Erevan, 1962). A more detailed Russian

sidering the overall organization and location of manuscript repositories has to be viewed in the context of the centralizing features of the general Soviet archival system. Although many of the various archival institutions appear to be going their own separate ways, the Main Archival Administration serves as a means for coordinating and planning archival development; its Learned Council, for example, meets four times a year with representatives from other archival systems and major manuscript repositories. GAU itself has increasingly been providing blueprints for the standardization of storage and cataloging procedures and coordination for many reference and documentary publications. Such an important reference publication as the impressive two-volume directory of personal *fonds* in the Soviet Union could hardly have been prepared without central organization and cooperation from many different repositories.²² Certainly the present overall situation is far from ideal, as Soviet archivists themselves would be the first to admit, but there is no denying the fact that in the course of 50 years the Soviet Union has built up one of the best planned and most progressive archival systems in the world.

It is very well to describe the riches in Soviet archives and manuscript repositories and their organizational characteristics, but the first question a foreign scholar is apt to ask would regard the possibilities of access. The question would be easier to answer if the Soviets had a clear rule on the subject. Even to the extent that there is a policy on paper, however, practice varies considerably, and exceptions more than general rules appear to guide individual cases at different times. Since 1956 Soviet archives have gradually been opening their doors to interested researchers from all parts of the world, and the archival administration has given more attention to the research-facilitating function of archives. This tendency corresponds to the increasing emphasis on archival research within the Soviet scholarly community and to the general expansion of the Soviet research establishment. To be sure, there remain certain archives such as the Party archives and the postrevolutionary Foreign Ministry archive that are virtually closed to foreigners from non-Communist nations, and there are many closed files in other repositories. Yet published lists of scholars who have worked in state

publication is by A. G. Abraamian, *Rukopisnye sokrovishcha Matenadarana* (Erevan, Armgosizdat, 1959).

²² *Lichnye arkhivnye fondy v gosudarstvennykh khranilishchakh SSSR. Ukazatel'* [Personal Archival Fonds in State Repositories of the U.S.S.R.: A Directory] (2 vols.; Moscow, GAU, Gosudarstvennaia biblioteka SSSR imeni V. I. Lenina, and Arkhiv Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962-63).

archives in recent years attest to the wide range of materials that have been opened and the many individuals who have taken advantage of Soviet archival riches.²³

Nevertheless, many impediments remain that make Soviet archives among the most difficult for foreign scholars' access. The most basic difficulty is, of course, that of traveling to the Soviet Union; one cannot simply arrive at a hotel and present oneself at an archive—as in most Western countries—without a visa and without making other complicated prior arrangements. Even the increasing ease of obtaining a tourist visa does not help the potential researcher because arrangements for archival access are so complicated for foreigners that such access is usually out of the question for anyone other than an official cultural exchange participant.²⁴ Without special connections or definite advance assurances, a scholar would be ill-advised to embark for the Soviet Union on a tourist visa with hopes of archival research. As an official exchange participant, the scholar is sponsored by a Soviet institution having established procedures for archival applications and an official Soviet host scholar whose personal interest and assistance may often prove the crucial element in making archival arrangements. In most cases, archival requests must be specified in the initial exchange application; through the possibility of vetoing exchange nominees for a variety of political or personal factors, the Soviet Union may effectively restrict archival access before the application even reaches the archival administration. Furthermore, because of the key role of the sponsoring Soviet institution in obtaining archival access for the visiting scholar, many aspects of such access are not matters of archival policy per se. Since the foreign department of the Main Archival Administration only controls access to archives under GAU administration, conditions of access vary considerably from institution to institution.

The question regarding specific categories of documents to which access may reasonably be expected is exceedingly complicated and not amenable to ready generalization, even in the state archives. In most countries the date of a given file is the determining factor in its accessibility to researchers; the British can boast of the recent reduction of the long-standard 50-year rule to a 30-year rule. The Soviets claim, on the other hand, that "there are no limits of date restricting

²³ *Tematika issledovaniĭ po dokumental'nyĭ materialam v tsentral'nykh gosudarstvennykh arkhivakh SSSR. Spravochnik za 1962–1966 gg.* [Subjects of Research in Documentary Materials in the Central State Archives of the U.S.S.R.: Handbook for 1962–1966] (5 vols.; Moscow, GAU, 1964–68).

²⁴ For United States citizens, arrangements for participation in scholarly exchange programs with the Soviet Union are handled by, and information is available from, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 110 East 59th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

the issue of documents to searchers in the Soviet Union.” The qualification of that statement leaves ample room for interpretive difficulties: “although naturally as in every country there is limited access to particular documents affecting the interests of state or of individual citizens.”²⁵ The criterion “interests of state” is rarely used in direct answer to a scholar applying to see a particular file, but it might be behind the most divergent types of refusals.

Political factors are understandably the major rationale for the continued closing of Communist Party archives to foreign, and generally non-Communist, scholars and for closing postrevolutionary military and foreign policy archives, along with many other political and economic files dating from the Soviet period. Such restrictions fall within the traditional 50-year period observed by archives in many nations; but in the Soviet Union, reason of state—with seemingly much less reason—also affects the availability of such prerevolutionary materials as those pertaining to nationality questions and particularly to foreign policy. Difficult as it is for a scholar to understand how documents regarding Russo-Turkish relations in the 1860’s or 1880’s or those regarding Russo-French policies or Polish uprisings in the early 19th century could affect current foreign relations, such is often the rationale for the restrictions applied to such files.

Although the date of a given file is less likely to be the controlling factor governing access than is the nature or subject, the closer to the present and the more controversial the issue, the less likely the materials are to be open. Nevertheless, many documents pertaining to cultural and literary affairs from postrevolutionary years have been available. Restrictions are likely to be placed, however, on controversial authors’ papers and unpublished literary manuscripts. Access is usually easier to arrange for manuscript divisions of libraries and museums than for state archives owing primarily to the less official and generally less sensitive nature of their holdings. In many cases, however, without actually going through the complicated mechanics of trying one does not know whether a given file is available; what is closed to one scholar at a given time, might be open to another under different circumstances.

Since archival access is often decided on the basis of research topic rather than actual documents needed, it is not unusual for a graduate student to be refused for the exchange because “his topic is not studied at Soviet universities” or to be denied archival access because “Soviet scientists are preparing a definitive study of the subject.”

²⁵ Expressed by Director of the Main Archival Administration G. A. Belov in *Archives*, 6:219–220 (Oct. 1964).

In other words, it is often not just an archival matter of keeping certain files closed but rather a broader attempt to control subjects on which exhaustive research is permitted.

A more frustrating type of control is the policy practiced in state archives under GAU of reserving to archival officials the right and obligation to choose what documents individual foreign researchers should be shown for a specific topic. Hence, even after being admitted to a State archive, a scholar is not free to choose and order any documents he might want to consult unless he can convince the archivist assigned to him that the materials are "relevant" to his stated topic. Nor is he free to examine the comprehensive inventories or shelf lists (*opisi*) prepared for all *fonds*, which might enable him to make his own choice, unless there are published ones.

The restricted nature and limited quality of available finding aids is thus another type of difficulty that plagues the researcher in Soviet archives. The directories or guidebooks (*putevoditeli*) that have been prepared for many of the state archives, though exceedingly helpful as far as they go, are usually not a substitute for more comprehensive inventories, and in many instances they are out of date or not available. When card catalogs have been prepared in state archives—and many are making substantial progress in this realm—they are almost always restricted to staff use. Fortunately in library and museum manuscript divisions and in many repositories under the Academy of Sciences, that type of restriction does not apply, and scholars are even free to use the often extensive subject matter card catalogs prepared for many parts of the holdings.

Personal factors may also affect both a scholar's initial permission to work in an archives and his access to materials once he is admitted. Anti-Soviet interpretations in previous writings may bar a scholar's access as might journalistic forays into the subject of the contemporary dissident intelligentsia. Obversely, given the Soviet respect for scholarship, a distinguished foreign scholar well-versed in language and paleography might well be shown materials and catered to by his Soviet colleagues and the archival staff to a greater extent than a young graduate student doing preliminary research for a dissertation.

Other general factors may affect the availability of certain types of materials. Documents being prepared or worked over in connection with some publication project are likely to be unavailable, and it is often difficult to consult contiguous materials or those with some bearing on such an enterprise. One often encounters the time-honored tradition to reserve manuscripts for the use of a particular scholar, especially if there is a prominent individual working in the field. Archivists are also hesitant to make manuscripts available if their contents are not familiar or they have not been worked over

by Soviet scholars. Many repositories have large cataloging backlogs, and it is usually the case that documents not fully cataloged or inventoried are unavailable for public use. Further restrictions are likely if the documents requested are in poor condition and have not been microfilmed.

In some cases, the physical location of the materials may have a bearing on their accessibility as it is often difficult to arrange extensive research visits to outlying institutions; travel restrictions and local institutional arrangements for visiting foreigners sometimes complicate this problem. Recent opportunities for work in a variety of areas suggest, however, that enterprising foreign scholars may find a welcome in outlying repositories; in some cases, the archival administration has been willing to have documents brought in from regional state archives for use in Moscow or Leningrad.

To be sure, many sensitive and contemporary materials are likely to remain closed to foreign scholars; certain impediments are likely to persist in the areas of research, travel, and local arrangements; and certain limitations are likely to continue for individual scholars whose opinions or activities are deemed hostile to the Soviet state. Nevertheless, prospects for fruitful archival work in the Soviet Union appear more optimistic than they have in the past. Soviet archivists appear more ready to move in the direction of normalizing their international relations, and they are now looking forward to hosting the congress of the International Council on Archives in 1972. Fundamental changes are not going to occur overnight, but foreign scholars will continue to find the wealth of documentary materials well worth some of the difficulties in gaining access to them.