

European Archives in an Era of Change

The Russian State University for the Humanities: A New Home for Archival Scholarship in Russia

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About the author: Natalya Basovskaya is Provost of the Russian State University for the Humanities. For an expanded introduction see the Gallery of Contributors at the end of the issue. Abstracts in English, French, German, and Spanish follow the article.¹

ON 23 MARCH 1991, the government of Russia decreed the establishment of a new university, whose name would be the Russian State University for the Humanities (Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi humanitarnyi universitet). Its foundation was the already-existing Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi historiko-arkhivnyi institut), known by its acronym MGIAI.² By this decree, the institute

became one of the departments of the new university.

The idea for this new university was proposed to the Russian government of Boris Yeltsin by the president of the MGIAI, Iurii Afanas'ev. Professor in French historiography and general historical methodology as well as a popular deputy of the USSR and now of Russia too, Afanas'ev is one

¹Editors' note: The author prepared this article in August 1991, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

²Earlier articles in the *American Archivist* have made reference to the MGIAI. See for example Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Perestroika in the Archives? Further Efforts at Soviet Archival Reform," *American Archivist* 54 (1991): 70-95; Marie B. Allen and Roland M. Baumann, "Evolving Appraisal and Accessioning Policies of Soviet Archives," *American*

Archivist 54 (1991): 96-111; Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Glasnost' in the Archives? Recent Developments on the Soviet Archival Scene," *American Archivist* 52 (1989): 214-238; Fyodor Mikhailovich Vaganov, "Archival Affairs in the USSR," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 481-486; Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute and Archival Education in the USSR," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 501-511; and Edwin C. Bridges, "The Soviet Union's Archival Research Center: Observations of an American Visitor," *American Archivist* 51 (1988): 486-500.

of the leaders of the young Soviet democracy. I believe that he and Andrey Sakarov were the first to speak words of truth at the first Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR in 1989. Afanas'ev expressed his own opinion that the new Supreme Council of the USSR was like the Councils of the Stalin and Brezhnev eras. He was also the first to criticize Lenin at the popular deputies' Congress in 1990. For these and other reasons, Afanas'ev is well known in our country.

Afanas'ev believes that the reform of the educational system is one of Russia's main problems now. Yeltsin's first steps as the first president of Russia show that he agrees with Afanas'ev and is trying to improve the situation. The organization of the Russian State University for the Humanities is in keeping with their point of view.

A new type of administration will govern this university. This administration will consist of an association of several state, non-governmental, and international institutions and organizations. We have decided to call this association the "Russian Humanitarian University" (without the word "state") because it will be independent of any government.³ The association's council will control and direct the budget of the association, which will be funded by monies received by our university and other associated institutions and organizations.⁴

Limitations of the Past

The study of humanities in Russia was held in high regard throughout the world before 1917. There were several famous schools for the advancement of history,

philology, philosophy, and other disciplines. The Russian Revolution destroyed many things, as all revolutions do, but in my opinion, the Russian humanities were among the most tragic victims of any revolution of any epoch anywhere.

Two overwhelming circumstances ruled the fate of the humanities in Russia after 1917. First, the Bolshevik's policy pushed the educated classes out of teaching and their children away from attending high school. The result was that the high standards of Russian humanities plummeted. The second circumstance, which also had a profound affect on the humanities, was that revolutionary reasoning and Stalin's political system compelled history, philosophy, and sociology to serve political aims above all. To serve policy rather than truth is a natural tragedy and may be the death of any scholarship.

Seventy years after the Revolution, our society is feeling the results. We are not satisfied with the current knowledge about our own history. Some important fields in the social sciences and humanities were practically prohibited because of their so-called "bourgeois character."

We do not assume that our new university will be able to transform this difficult situation single-handedly. Such an ambition would not be realistic. However, we do hope to take part in a revival of the best traditions of the Russian humanities.

MGIAI's Unique Contributions to the Initial Innovations of the University

An explanation is warranted for the decision to build the new Russian State University for the Humanities upon the foundations of the MGIAI. The decision is not on account of Afanas'ev's personality alone, even though his inspiration has no doubt been a contributing factor. Despite the fact that the MGIAI had been organized in 1934 under the control of the security system, it has some reputable scholarly tra-

³This is in contrast to the formal name of the university, which does include the word "state."

⁴These institutions and organizations include the Lyceum of Humanities near Moscow; the International Non-Governmental Council's "The Ecology of Man;" and the Russian Department of the International Open University (whose center is in The Hague).

ditions of its own. By the time of Krushchev, the institute was already popular, and even prestigious. The main positive feature of the institute's commitment to education in history was its serious attention to archives and other historical sources, the early Russian language, paleography, and some other rather rare disciplines including historical geography and heraldry. When *perestroika* began, the institute had several groups of faculty and departments working in the fields of history, archives, museology, business and management, and computer technology for the humanities.

The institute had achieved an important role, which has been all the more evident during the years of *perestroika*. Its status will now be a benefit to the new Humanitarian University. From 1987 to 1990, the institute was one of the first centers in Moscow where free thoughts were heard. We organized a research club known as "The Social Memory of Humanity," where the first public lecture about Stalin was given.⁵ The first lectures by American scholars of Soviet history took place there too. It is not surprising that several serious Soviet scholars who had been persecuted during Brezhnev's regime were at work in our institute by the end of the 1980s.⁶ Professors, lecturers, and administrators of the institute were ready to listen to other, unofficial opinions and to reform the traditional education system. Even today, such initiative is not typical for Soviet institutes.

Reforms through the New University's Curriculum

Our reforms include the return to the best in Russia's earlier traditions in education. University students must fulfill the requirements of a compulsory curriculum in the

first two years of their study. This applies to history students, who must show a fundamental knowledge of world history before they can proceed to specialized courses. Once they have mastered these general fields, we offer them a much freer system with the possibility of electing and changing courses. With these latter options we are following, in part, the American tradition of an elective system of courses.

We know that this new educational system must not become ideological. To insure its objectivity, our curriculum must include a new approach to research methodology. As part of our aim to expose the students to a variety of methodologies, we have begun to invite foreign lecturers and professors to our university to give lectures to our classes. We hope that our university will continue to be open to foreign colleagues in the future, at least as open as it is now if not even more so.

Reforms through Research Programs

Along with guest lectures by foreigners, we have also arranged for two international research programs. For the first of these, we have signed an agreement with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Yivo Institute for Jewish Research to teach a group of Soviet students in the field of Jewish history, culture, and archives. As a second collaborative effort with American scholars, we are going to compile a catalog of Jewish documents in Soviet archives.

We have also begun a study program in economics with the University of François Rable in Tours, France. Our professors are taking part in an international research program entitled "The Intellect of Europe." The administrative office for this is in Paris.

Innovative Market Relations for the New University

The possibility of preparing specialists at the request of institutions, organizations, and firms is one of the new features of the

⁵The lecture was given by Professor Jury Borisov and was entitled "Stalin, the Man and the Symbol."

⁶Their names include Konstantin Tarovsky and Agdas Burganov.

educational system in the Soviet Union today. Our university has already begun to initiate such an arrangement for the USSR. The administration of our university has reached special agreements with certain institutions and firms. This type of arrangement supplements the budget of the university and helps graduates to find employment. It is especially important in the Soviet Union now as our economic and social system is beginning to develop market relations.

However, the problem of private payment for an education is a serious one for our society. We realize that individuals' payments for a university education could solve most of our financial difficulties, but the Soviet constitution guarantees everybody the right to receive an education at no cost. We prefer to safeguard the best qualities of this tradition. A preferred solution for us, as we deliberate the problem of costly education, is to receive contributions from institutions and firms rather than tuition from individuals.

There are already direct agreements in place with foreign firms, including two in South Korea. We shall teach groups of South Korean students the Russian language, history, and culture in preparation for the bachelor's degree. Other students may receive other types of degrees, according to our new curricular specializations.

The Continuing Leadership of MGIAI in Its New Setting

The MGIAI was the first research center in the USSR to pursue new directions in historical methodology. We began to work in the field of oral history, which has been an unfamiliar endeavor for Soviet scholars. Today the Russian State University for the Humanities has a laboratory for oral history, and our students and scholars are conducting oral history interviews in various regions of the country. Some of our scholars and postgraduates organized an inter-

national conference for specialists in oral history. The conference was held at our university and gained us further recognition by its successful outcome.

We realize that oral history is especially important for studying Soviet history today. There were many lies and secret dealings of the state from the 1920s through the 1950s, which may be challenged by interviews with the generation of Soviet people who were that era's witnesses and victims. We hope it is not too late to reach these people who can tell us the truth about our past. We understand, of course, that this type of historical source must be compared with documentary information.

New Archives for a New Era

Approximately three years ago, another new archive was organized with the support of our institute. It was named the "People's Archives."⁷ It is now an independent organization which has close contacts with our university. The Soviet-American fund known as the "Cultural Initiative" gave money for this archive.⁸ The main source of its holdings contrasts greatly with the official state archives. The state archives receive official state documents but they contain very few sources originating from common people. The state archives will not accept private papers from an individual unless he or she is a famous author or member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

By contrast, we at the new university feel that it is impossible to study history, especially Soviet history, without private documents. The years of Soviet power, in particular, require that other types of sources be used in order to challenge misleading state documents. The sources themselves

⁷The *SAA Newsletter*, May 1991, makes brief mention of this new archive.

⁸This fund supports new ideas and projects connected with the cultural progress of our country, especially in the field of history.

can become the reason for historians' mistakes. Our state archival system, known as Glavarkhiv, did not recognize the People's Archives. Nevertheless, the scholars at our institute within the new university are sure that its documents are very important for discovering the truth about Soviet history.

All of the new features of our young

Russian State University for the Humanities are deeply connected with the general reforms of the education system in Russia. We hope that these reforms will help us to improve Russian humanities and develop our international contacts in education.

The Russian State University for the Humanities: A New Home for Archival Scholarship in Russia

Abstract: The Russian State University for the Humanities was founded on March 23, 1991. The Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (MGIAI), the major archival training school for the Soviet Union, has been incorporated as the founding department of the new university. Iurii Afanas'ev, head of the MGIAI, is president of the new university, which is dedicated to the reform of the educational system in Russia. The university will be governed by an association of state, non-governmental, and international institutions. The author traces the erosion of standards for the study of the humanities after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and explains the leadership role of MGIAI in the reform or counter-revolution which began under *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. New cooperative research projects and funding through fee-for-service educational programs for institutions, organizations, and firms are the first innovations of the new university.

L'Université d'État de Russie pour les humanités: une nouvelle avenue pour le savoir archivistique en Russie

Résumé: L'Université d'État de Russie pour les humanités a été fondée le 23 mars 1991. Le Moscow State Historico-Archival Institute (MGIAI), la plus importante école pour la formation en archivistique de l'Union soviétique, a été reconnu comme étant le département fondateur de la nouvelle université. Iurii Afanas'ev, directeur du MGIAI, est recteur de cette nouvelle université dont la priorité majeure est la réforme du système éducatif en Russie. L'université sera dirigée par une association d'État, non gouvernementale, et par des institutions internationales. L'auteur fait état de l'érosion des normes pour l'étude des humanités depuis la révolution bolchévique de 1917 et explique le rôle de leadership du MGIAI depuis la réforme ou la contre-révolution qui débuta à l'aube du *glasnost'* et de la *perestroika*. Les nouveaux projets coopératifs de recherche, les subventions reçues des frais-de-service des programmes de services éducatifs pour les institutions, les organisations et les firmes sont les premières innovations de cette nouvelle université.

Die Russische Staatsuniversität für die Geisteswissenschaften: Eine neue Heimat für das Studium der Archivausbildung

Abstrakt: Die Russische Staatsuniversität für die Geisteswissenschaften wurde am 23. März 1991 gegründet. Die bedeutendste Schule der Archivausbildung in der Sowjet Union, das Moskauer Staatsinstitut für Geschichte und Archive (MGIAI), wurde als Grundabteilung der neuen Universität einverleibt. Der Präsident der Universität ist Iurii Afanas'ev, Direktor der MGIAI. Die Universität ist der Reform des Bildungssystems in Russland gewidmet und wird von einer Gruppe von staatlichen, privaten und internationalen Instituten geleitet werden. Der Autor verfolgt den Schwund der Normen für das Studium der Geisteswissenschaften nach der 1917 bolschewistischen Revolution und erläutert die Führungsrolle der MGIAI in der Reform oder Gegenrevolution, welche unter *Glasnost'* und *Perestroika* begann. Neue Kollektivforschungsprojekt und Fonds von Gebühr-für-Dienstleistung zur Unterstützung pädagogischer Programme für Anstalten, Gesellschaften und Firmen waren die ersten Neuerungen der neuen Universität.

La Universidad Estatal Rusa para las humanidades: Un nuevo hogar para becas archivológicas en Rusia

Resumen: La Universidad Estatal Rusa para las Humanidades fue fundada en marzo 23 de 1991. El Instituto Estatal Moscovita de Archivos Históricos (MGIAI), la mayor escuela para el entrenamiento de archiveros de la Unión Soviética, fue incorporada como departamento fundador de la nueva universidad. Iurii Afanas'ev, director del MGIAI, es presidente de la universidad que está dedicada a reformar el sistema educacional en Rusia. La universidad será administrada por una asociación del estado no gubernamental, y por instituciones internacionales. El autor delinea la erosión de las normas para el estudio de las humanidades después de la revolución bolchevique de 1917 y explica el papel de liderazgo del MGIAI en la reforma o contra-revolución, que comenzó bajo el *glasnost'* y la *perestroika*. Entre las primeras innovaciones de la nueva universidad se encuentran los nuevos proyectos de investigación cooperativa y de recaudación de fondos a través de cuotas por servicios de programas educacionales para instituciones, organizaciones y corporaciones.