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Feature

The Development of Post-Soviet Central Asia: A Civil Society View

By Charles Buxton

This article is based on my experience of working on civil society programmes in the FSU and Central Asia – first with VSO, then with INTRAC (International NGO Training & Research Centre), a non-profit organisation based in Oxford (www.intrac.org).

Civil Society Development

‘Civil society’ has become an important term in international development programmes over the past thirty years. In general, it refers to formal or informal organisations set up by people to pursue collective aims – independently of the state or market. Indeed, civil society is sometimes called the ‘third’ sector. It became one of the slogans of Soviet dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s

as they called for the rolling back of the state. This position was supported eagerly by Western leaders during the *perestroika* years and civil society became one of the key tenets of the post-1991 neo-liberal consensus.



Kyrgyzstan women's forum in 2005 discussing women's demands after the revolution
(Photo: Charles Buxton)

The so-called ‘transition’ in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU) posed different issues for Western agencies wanting to help in some way: the countries were all at a higher level of socio-economic development than the poorest countries where most aid money is spent. So the task was seen as a shorter-term adaptation to political pluralism and the market economy.

This was the assumption when I started work at VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) in 1996 as manager of volunteer programmes in the region. And by 2001, when I left VSO, many of the programmes in Eastern Europe had already been completed, and it was recognised that the Russian Federation had fewer needs than the poorest countries and this programme soon closed too.

The Collapse of the USSR and its Impact on Central Asia

The five ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) all became independent countries in 1991. Unlike the Baltic States and Caucasus, there had not been an active independence movement in the region, which was quite conservative in character. However, in Tajikistan independence came at the cost of a bloody civil war that pitted secular, nationalist elements against an alliance of Muslim and democracy forces. Luckily there was little violence in the other four republics, in which senior Communist Party officials retained power under renamed parties. All the ruling parties now proclaimed their democratic credentials, but in all five countries there were significant restrictions on other political parties and movements (for example Islamic forces).

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan took the lead in pro-market economic reforms (as described in my book *The Struggle for Civil Society in Central Asia*, Kumarian Press, 2011). However, their fortunes divided thereafter, Kazakhstan being oil and gas rich, Kyrgyzstan not. Here we need to mention the economic crash that robbed all five countries of approximately 40 per cent of their GDP. Suddenly it became clear how important Soviet subsidies to the region had been! As in Russia, ordinary people lost all their savings in various currency debacles. As in Russia, a process of criminal privatisation began.

Since the early 1990s the main FSU regional association has been the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev has played a key role in setting up and sustaining its vision, which can be roughly equated to the British Commonwealth. Beside this, a number of economic and security bodies have brought together the countries of the region. However, civil society organisations (CSOs) have rarely taken an interest in these bodies, which have been 99 per cent funded by Western

agencies and – in the 1990s to early 2000s – were mostly interested in political, cultural and intellectual 'imports' from the USA and Europe. Instead, in Central Asia there has been a natural interest in the Islamic world and nearby cultural centres such as Iran or Turkey.

Central Asia has suffered from the failure since 1991 to generate any influential regional bodies of its own. Thus, Uzbekistan's President Karimov leads the largest country in the region with the biggest cultural heritage (as visitors to the ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara will know), but he enters and exits political alliances in a confusing way, for example hosting and then kicking out US military bases during 2000–10. Kyrgyzstan earned the name 'island of democracy' in the 1990s because of President Akayev's more liberal approach, with a 'multi-vector' foreign policy that includes friendship with the USA, Russia and China. Meanwhile, the regime in Turkmenistan has gone its own way, formally adopting neutrality in international relations, but also opting out of collaboration with Central Asian partners.

Civil Society Development in Central Asia

When I started work with VSO Kazakhstan in 1998, the similarities between NGO leaders and activists in Central Asia were more striking than their differences. Not being an international development expert per se, I found that my experience in having set up and managed voluntary organisations in the UK was my main professional value to them, as well as my background in Russian studies and language. In this I was quite different from the majority of consultants in the FSU, who had no knowledge at all of the USSR or Russian.

At the time, international development programmes felt that they were setting up civil society in Central Asia from scratch. It gradually became clear that this was far from the truth: there were hugely important roots in traditional voluntary and collective activity, as well as Soviet-era organisations

such as trade unions, youth, women's and ecological associations. Nonetheless, the external conditions were certainly new with socio-economic collapse and a struggle for survival for individuals and families across the region. Civil society leaders bravely brought people together for collective aims, including savings groups, parents groups, repairing the school roof or village canal system.



Kazakhstan initiative group who occupied an abandoned kindergarten (Photo: Charles Buxton)

INTRAC's task was to support these new groups, training them in the basics of organisation management and passing on our experience of how best NGOs can liaise with government and the market. As most of these new NGOs began to play a role in the various humanitarian, social and economic programmes funded by the United Nations Development Programme, the Department for International Development (UK), USAID and the European Union, INTRAC training also helped them to fulfil these projects effectively.

Civil society programmes have typically involved the secular intelligentsia (teachers, doctors and government officials, rural as well as urban) across the whole region. However, INTRAC's local experts in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan warned us in the early 2000s that Western-style civil society faced huge obstacles in their countries. In those two countries and Turkmenistan the old system stayed largely in place, including elements of the Soviet welfare system. In Kyrgyzstan it was different.

Double Revolution in Kyrgyzstan

President Akayev took Kyrgyzstan down the path of democracy, opening up the country to aid and investment from any quarter.

The country has a nomadic past and is open in its attitude to many things. I can speak from first-hand experience about how ready civil society activists in Kyrgyzstan have been to take on and work with new ideas. In general, new facilitation skills and participatory methods have been one of the main benefits brought by development agencies to the FSU region.

In March 2005 President Akayev fell from power after parliamentary elections that many in the country considered corrupt and an attempt to institute a family dynasty. Unusually, Akayev chose not to exercise force to defend his regime and fled to Moscow. The next two years were a period of people's power or at least an attempt to roll back some of the injustice and social differentiation of the previous period. The fact is that moving to political pluralism and market economy had led to huge new divisions in society. Among more radical NGOs, there was a conscious reaction against neo-liberal international development policies. In general, it had become clear that the political set-up was favouring a new elite and that civil society could not solve the multiple problems of the transition period.

President Akayev was succeeded by Bakiyev who tried to turn the country along a more national path and also stimulate economic activity. However, in doing so his coalition fell apart. Kyrgyzstan's April 2010 revolution was an attempt to reinstate the democratic agenda of March 2005. The insurgents were successful in seizing power, although Bakiyev used force against them and almost 100 people were shot dead in Bishkek's main square, and Roza Otunbayeva was elected president after Bakiyev fled the country. However, serious ethnic violence in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad in June 2010 shocked the country and soured the political atmosphere.

Civil society still works openly but there is increasing pressure from nationalist and traditionalist forces.

Russia and Central Asia

Russia's *perestroika* leaders had almost no interest in Central Asia; indeed, at the beginning of the 1990s they looked on the leaders of the five Central Asian republics as political opponents. The leaders of the Left in Russia have taken a national patriotic line that similarly views Central Asia as a moral or security threat (with stereotypes about drugs, terrorism and male-female relations as prevalent as they are in Western Europe).

Nonetheless, the facts of history, geography and economy mean that the future of Central Asia and the Russian Federation are bound closely together. This is seen most clearly in the mass migration of young people from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Russia's cities in search of work. Tajikistan has the highest percentage of migrants among its working-age population of any country in the world – up to 50 per cent – with the majority working in Russia. Russian is the lingua franca of Central Asia, although the regimes in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan do not support this to the same extent as the other three countries.

These connections are not so clearly visible in civil society which tends to reflect new influences from the West and the Islamic world. But the development of the Eurasian Economic Community, often referred to as the Customs Union, which unites the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan (and now Kyrgyzstan and Armenia), is opening up opportunities for local NGOs to make regional contacts and influence government policies.

Can Putin's Eurasian Economic Community work? Can it help boost economic and social development in Central Asia? These questions lay behind my book *Russia and Development: Capitalism, Civil Society and the State* (Zed Press, 2014, reviewed in the

SCRSS Digest, No 2, 2015). On the one hand, there is so much in the economic, educational and cultural sphere that still unites the peoples of the FSU. On the other hand, the conservative nature of the Putin project and its alliance with forces harking back to Tsarist times (for example, glorifying the Russian Empire) go against the interests of the Central Asian republics. While we mainly think of Putin as a nationalist, analysts such as Roy Medvedev identify him as a Westerniser whose main concern is his argument with the West, or how to catch up with or rival the West. So what real attention will Central Asia get? This is a big question for Kyrgyzstan as it joins the Eurasia club this summer.

Links with UK Partners

The break-up of the USSR poses many challenges for those interested in Central Asia. For a start, Central Asia tends to be separated from Russia in the programmes of both development agencies and academic institutions. Even in Soviet times the cultural links between the UK and Central Asia were much weaker than with European Russia. Yet the FSU's experience of development in Central Asia, as well as the Russian East, is a hugely interesting topic.

Here in Bishkek we are grateful to British universities such as SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), St Andrews and Exeter that show a real interest in Central Asia by including the region in courses for UK students and welcoming 'our' students to the UK at MA and PhD level. There is a significant Central Asian diaspora in the UK and there have been efforts to develop new 'friendship' societies. It is important that societies such as the SCRSS, with a big history of interest and contacts in the FSU, find a way to continue partnership with the region.

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SCRSS News

From the Honorary Secretary

As you will see in the pages of this *Digest*, despite the many challenges the SCRSS faces, it continues its vital work in promoting knowledge about Russia and the former USSR in a variety of ways. As anyone reading current media coverage related to Russia knows, more facts and background information would be useful.

I am delighted that regular Russian language classes return to the centre in October with our new post-beginners evening course, run by Christine Barnard. Christine is a highly experienced teacher of Russian who taught at the University of Westminster for many years; she has generously offered her services to support the Society. And in more good news, our highly regarded weekend Russian language seminar, taught by senior university lecturers from St Petersburg, returns in April 2016. See *Next Events* below, and the SCRSS website, for further information.

There are a variety of events already in the calendar, including what promises to be a fascinating talk by Doug Millard, Senior Curator of the Science Museum's *Cosmonauts* exhibition (see also his article on page 8). If you want to keep up to date with events between issues of the *SCRSS Digest*, then do please let us have your current email address. The SCRSS website provides all the latest information and updates, as well as a wealth of background on the Society and its collections.

Members on our email list will already have received information about our new fees, terms and conditions for research in the SCRSS Soviet Collections (see further details below). Please help spread the word to friends and colleagues that the SCRSS is a very important resource for anyone researching any aspect of the Soviet era.

The wonderful exhibition of reproductions of sketches and drawings by Soviet war artists

1941–45, which has attracted much attention since its launch at our Summer Open Day in July, remains on show until December's party and fundraiser. It is a vivid example of the kind of material held by the Society, which has been accumulating books, posters, music and other artefacts on and from the Soviet Union since its foundation in 1924. Our ground-floor exhibition space is available for hire and also provides an excellent meeting venue (contact the SCRSS for information on hire rates). Members can play a very useful role in drawing attention to the availability of these facilities, which are an important source of income for the Society.

It is important to remember that the Society is a self-funding membership organisation that relies on member subscriptions and donations to continue to function. I appeal to all of you that have a membership renewal notice enclosed with your *SCRSS Digest* to respond promptly. To save on postage, we use the *Digest* mailing to dispatch these and, as the next issue will not appear until February 2016, anyone whose membership is due to expire before the end of 2015 should have received a renewal notice.

For those reading the *SCRSS Digest* who are not already members, I urge you to join and help promote our valuable mission. The Society's Council, staff and volunteers continue to look at new ways of securing our long-term future; any members also wishing to contribute ideas or their own time are welcome to contact me.

Ralph Gibson, Honorary Secretary, SCRSS

New Research Rates

The SCRSS Soviet Collections are a library and archive of the arts, humanities and social sciences of the Soviet Union (1917–91). Established in 1924, the collections include publications in Russian and English, images, music scores, audio recordings and other artefacts from predominantly Soviet publishers. The research collections cover Soviet art and architecture, music, theatre, cinema and children's literature, with rare

materials from the 1920s–40s. They also include the Society's archive records and a number of personal collections. The research collections are available for research only and are of interest to students, academics and professional researchers.

From 1 September 2015 we are reducing our research rates in the Research Collections and Photo Library:

Half-Day Rate: £15 per half-day (2 hours, either 11.00–13.00 or 14.00–16.00)

Daily Rate: £30 per day (max 5 hours, 11.00–13.00 and 14.00–17.00)

Weekly Rate: £75 per week (max 3 days, total 15 hours based on 5 hours per day from 11.00–13.00 and 14.00–17.00)

Long Term Research (4 or more consecutive weeks): Subject to SCRSS Council approval

Research in the Loan and General Reference Collections remains free of charge to SCRSS members. For non-members, the standard research fees above apply. For full details of the new research fees, terms and conditions; a copy of our new SCRSS Soviet Collections researcher leaflet; and updated information on all our library collections, visit the website at www.scrss.org.uk/library.htm.

Next Events

Until December 2015

Exhibition: Soviet War Artists 1941-45: Reproductions of Drawings, Sketches and Linocuts from the SCRSS Art Library

Open during normal office hours and at SCRSS autumn events. Please call the SCRSS in advance to let us know you are planning to visit. See the article on page 10.

Thursday 8 October – Thursday 10 December 2015, 6–8pm

Evening Course: Russian Language for Post-Beginners (Term 1)

A weekly course for post-beginners / lower intermediate level (assumes circa 60 hours of previous study). The course focuses on topic-based oral practice with grammar

revision. It is led by Christine Barnard, an experienced teacher of Russian who taught at the University of Westminster for many years. Each term last 10 weeks: Term 1 starts on 8 October. The course is open to SCRSS members only and takes place at the SCRSS premises. Book early as numbers are limited to maximum 12 students. Fee: £25.00 per term payable in advance (no concessions). We accept payment by cash, cheque (payable to SCRSS) or bank transfer.

Friday 25 September, 7pm

Film: *Alexander Nevsky*

Directed by Sergei M Eisenstein with Dmitri Vasilyev, and starring Nikolai Cherkasov, Nikolai Okhlopkov, Andrei Abrikosov, Dmitri Orlov and Vasili Novikov. Made just before the start of World War II, Eisenstein's first sound film tells the story of the Russian hero Alexander Nevsky (1220–63) who thwarted an attempted invasion of Novgorod by the Teutonic Knights of the Holy Roman Empire in the 13th century. USSR, 1938, 108 mins, English sub-titles. *Note: Admission to this event is free (SCRSS members and non-members), but we welcome donations on the night.*

Friday 9 October, 7pm

Lecture: Doug Millard on *Cosmonauts – Birth of the Space Age*

Doug Millard is Senior Curator on the Science Museum's major new exhibition on the history of the Soviet space programme, opening in September 2015. The exhibition shows how Russia turned the dream of space travel into a reality and became the first nation to explore space. See also Doug Millard's article on page 8. *Note: Normal admission fees apply to this event.*

Friday 6 November, 7pm

Film: *October 1917 – Ten Days That Shook the World*

Directed by Sergei M Eisenstein and Grigori Aleksandrov, and starring Nikolai Popov, Boris Livanov, Vasili Nikandrov (as Lenin) and Layaschenko. This silent film was commissioned by the Soviet Government to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Eisenstein used montage and documentary-style

techniques to represent the events of the Bolshevik uprising, and it has often been mistaken for real newsreel footage. USSR, 1928, 104 mins, English sub-titles. *Note: Admission to this event is free (SCRSS members and non-members), but we welcome donations on the night.*

Friday 27 November, 7pm

Lecture: Christine Lindey on *Representations of Women in the Art of the Cold War c.1945–c.1962*

The USSR, a nation born of recent revolution, encouraged a conservative, conformist art, whereas the USA preached traditional values but promoted art that spoke of dissent. In her lecture, art historian Christine Lindey explores this apparent Cold War polarisation through representations of women on both sides of the conflict. *Note: Normal admission fees apply to this event.*

Saturday 5 December

Event: SCRSS Winter Party and Fundraiser

Full details to be confirmed.

Saturday 16 April – Sunday 17 April 2016, 10am–4.30pm daily

Event: 8th SCRSS Russian Language Seminar

Our popular seminar is back – put the date in your diary now! The two-day seminar offers an intensive lecture programme in Russian, aimed at teachers of Russian, translators, final-year undergraduates, graduates of Russian and all those with an advanced-level comprehension of spoken Russian and an interest in contemporary Russia. The seminar programme has two streams: Russian language and linguistics, and humanities and social sciences. There are four lectures per day: choose from one of two options per session. Lectures last 45 minutes and are followed by 30 minutes of discussion.

The seminar is taught by two senior lecturers – direct from Russia. The Russian language and linguistics stream is taught by Tatiana Piotrovskaya, Senior Lecturer, Department of English Philology and Language Culture Studies, Faculty of Philology, St Petersburg State University.

The humanities and social sciences stream is taught by Dr Vadim Golubev, Head of the Department of English for the Faculty of Journalism, St Petersburg State University.

Full details of course fees and how to apply will appear on the SCRSS website from November 2015. Booking opens December 2015. To register your interest now, email ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk with 'Language Seminar' in the subject field or, if you don't have Internet access, telephone the SCRSS to request programme and booking information be sent to you by post from November.

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Up-to-date details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm.

Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Next Events

Sunday 8 November, 12.30pm

Event: Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor of Southwark will join diplomats, veterans, and representatives from local and national organisations in laying wreaths at this Act of Remembrance. Everyone is welcome to attend, but if you intend to lay a wreath on behalf of an organisation, please contact the Honorary Secretary of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) in advance (email smtf@hotmail.co.uk or write c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB).

Further details will appear in due course on the SCRSS website at www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm, while those on the SMTF mailing list will receive a formal invitation in October.

The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men and women who lost their lives during the fight against fascism in 1941–45, is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road, Southwark, London SE1 (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum). The SCRSS is a founder member of the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund.

Feature

From Russia with Love: The Making of a Space Exhibition

By Doug Millard

Valentina Tereshkova's spacecraft, Vostok 6, touched down in the Science Museum on 20 May 2015. It was the first arrival from Russia for the Museum's new exhibition on that nation's space programme. Tereshkova became the first woman in space when Vostok 6 was launched into a three-day orbital mission on 16 June 1963. Her spacecraft is one of the most historic in existence and for it to have travelled all the way from Moscow to South Kensington is part of a remarkable story in itself: the making of *Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age*.

Strangely, the project started life because of Apollo 10. The Museum is fortunate to have had the actual Apollo 10 command module on display for almost forty years, courtesy of a loan from the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. I was thinking about Apollo in May 2008 when I was asked how the Museum was planning to mark the 50th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's pioneering space mission on 12 April 1961, when he became the first man in space. I answered that it would be wonderful if we could bring Gagarin's Vostok 1 descent module to the Museum, just as we had Apollo 10!

A little over a year later I was standing in front of Gagarin's Vostok 1 spacecraft in the

Energia company's closed museum in Moscow. Over the next few days I also visited the newly re-opened Moscow Museum of Cosmonautics, the Zvezda company, where all of the Russian spacesuits are made, and the Konstantin Tsiolkovsky State Museum of the History of Cosmonautics in Kaluga. I was in Russia as a consequence of that Gagarin anniversary conversation and as part of a collaborative venture with British enterprise to put together a major exhibition of Soviet and Russian spacecraft and equipment for 2011, including Vostok 1.



The Block E engine stage of the LK-3 Lunar Lander being lifted into the Science Museum's *Cosmonauts* exhibition (Photo: Visitlondon.com and London & Partners)

Unfortunately, the attempt ran out of time. But by now I had been bitten by a cosmonautical bug and it was proving difficult to let go – perhaps due to the experience I had at Kaluga in Tsiolkovsky's workshop.¹ It had been a glorious, still early autumn day and I was gazing out of the workshop's open door – visiting cosmonauts called it Tsiolkovsky's 'door to the stars'. Suddenly a gust of wind came from nowhere, leaves swirled from the trees and birds scattered from the branches. The moment was brief but powerful, almost

spiritual. When I mentioned this to Romanticist historian Richard Holmes, he urged me to read Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Beginning of Spring*, which I duly did... Things slowly started to make sense: this exhibition would be as much a story of Russia through the ages as its space programme.

In July 2011 the Science Museum marked the anniversary of Gagarin's visit to London in 1961 with a brace of events co-organised with the Science and Innovation section of the British Embassy in Moscow and the British Council. Natalia Koroleva, daughter of the Soviet Union's chief designer of the space programme, Sergei Korolev, spoke to a fascinated audience of her father's life and work. The record-breaking cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev also gave a talk in the Museum's Imax theatre about his experiences in orbit. These and other events around the country, and, in particular, the British Council's unveiling of a statue to Gagarin in London, were creating a stir of interest abroad. Russia was intrigued by and delighted with this British interest in the first spaceman and his country's pioneering cosmonautical programme. The exhibition proposal was dusted down and re-written. Two months later I was back in Moscow with Science Museum director Ian Blatchford, starting what would become almost four years of negotiation with museums, space enterprises and private individuals for the borrowing of 149 objects to bring to London as the greatest space exhibition ever put together.² We knew it would not be easy! But when we sat in the office of Elena Gagarina, Director of the Kremlin Museums and daughter of Yuri, and she offered her warm support for the project, I think we knew we were moving in the right direction.

The planning of the exhibition coincided with the appearance of a fresh school of Russian and Soviet space studies. These were adding to the historical perspectives with which Russia's interest and fascination with space (bridging the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries) had traditionally been examined. Received histories that emphasised the political or the technological

in relative isolation were now being complemented by broader views incorporating social and cultural histories of Russia. A year later, with curatorial colleague and art historian Natalia Sidlina now on the Science Museum team, we were able to explore these cultural overtures to the space age, and how both Imperial and Soviet Russia's fascination with the cosmos had manifested itself also in art and design. The result was another first for the Science Museum: works of art loaned for the exhibition from the prestigious Tretyakov Gallery in Russia.

But the big loans – physically and metaphorically – required the greatest efforts to bring over to London. Vostok 6 and Voskhod 1 are some of Russia's space crown jewels. They are kept in the Energia company's private museum, closed to the public except by occasional appointment. Energia is in the business of building rockets and spacecraft, not loaning to foreign museums. It is overseen by the Ministry of Defence with all the security implications that entails. And the company, along with the rest of the Russian space sector, was just beginning a fundamental restructuring to bring it back up to a strength worthy of its impressive heritage. So both sides – in Moscow and in London – were feeling their way along. We had to establish new procedures and practices for the international loaning / borrowing of Russian space artefacts. It was a near miracle that we had the small but remarkable team of the Russian Ministry of Culture's State Museum and Exhibition Centre 'Rosizo', under the direction of first Zelfira Tregulova and then Tatiana Volosatova, to negotiate and co-ordinate all of these loans, in close liaison with our colleagues in London.

Indeed, this project has been achieved through the work of hundreds in Britain and in Russia. As the cosmonauts and astronauts will always acknowledge, it is the behind-the-scenes managers, technicians, scientists and designers that allow them to make their extraordinary flights into space. So too has it been with those many curators, managers, conservators, technicians, registrars, couriers and

government officials who have been working quietly but so effectively to help bring this project to fruition. Great Britain and Russia have a long and distinguished history of cultural exchanges, so *Cosmonauts* is only the latest in a long tradition. But Vostok 6 in SW7... that will take some beating!

Doug Millard is Deputy Keeper of Technologies & Engineering at the Science Museum and Senior Curator of the 'Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age' exhibition.

Footnotes

¹ Konstantin Tsiolkovsky was a Russian visionary who, at the turn of the twentieth century, calculated the velocity required to orbit a satellite around Earth.

² The 150th object was already owned by the Museum: the Sokol emergency space suit of the first Briton in space, Helen Sharman.

Please note:

Doug Millard gives a talk on *Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age* at the SCRSS on Friday 9 October (see page 6).

Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age opens at the Science Museum, London, on 18 September and runs until 13 March 2016. Tickets: £14 (concessions available). Opening times: Monday–Sunday 10.00–18.00 (exhibition open until 22.00 every Friday).

Feature

SCRSS Exhibition: Soviet War Artists 1941–45

By Diana Turner

The Society's current exhibition marks the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory over Fascism in World War II. *Soviet War Artists 1941–45: Reproductions of Drawings, Sketches and Linocuts from the SCRSS Art Library* includes reproductions of thirty-one works by thirteen artists, selected from seven albums. The SCRSS Art Library

includes a strong collection of Soviet publications on the art and artists of the Great Patriotic War (as World War II is known in Russia).



'Partisan – Comrade B' (1942). Drawing by Aleksei Laptev in *Великая Отечественная Война: Художественный альбом. Выпуск 1. Героическая оборона Москва* – The Great Patriotic War: Art Album, Issue 1: The Heroic Defence of Moscow (SCRSS Library)

The graphic arts are a particularly effective medium in times of war, given their economy and directness of expression, the affordability and portability of materials, and their suitability for mass production. This was also the case in the Soviet Union during 1941–45, with a mass of posters, satirical cartoons, engravings, drawings, postcards and leaflets created in support of the war effort. The striking Soviet war posters and cartoons produced by the *Боевой карандаш* (*Fighting Pencil*) collective¹, the Kukryniksy trio² and others, are probably most familiar in this country. Our exhibition, however, focuses on drawings and sketches – captured from life by Soviet war artists who were often working at the frontline.

These works have an extraordinary immediacy and truthfulness.

Christine Lindey, SCRSS Visual Arts Officer and art historian, explains: "Many of the drawings in the exhibition were made in the Western tradition of 'reportage drawing'. This technique was widely practised from the late nineteenth century onwards as a means of illustrating newspapers and magazines before cheap mass photographic reproduction processes were developed. It stemmed from the rigorous teaching methods of the art academies, which continued during the Soviet era, whereby students were taught to draw very quickly from observation of life so that they could record events accurately. This gave artists a means of earning a living, apart from painting and sculpture." She adds: "In addition, Soviet cultural policy during the Great Patriotic War was to integrate all the arts into the war effort, therefore artists were integrated into daily life, and were highly respected for expressing and recording the experiences of civilians and the fighting forces."



'December 1941: The Vakhtangov Theatre [Moscow].' Drawing by Vladimir Bogatkin in *Годы войны* – The War Years (SCRSS Library)

Most Soviet artists served with the troops. Some enlisted as soldiers or joined the partisans, in particular in Belorussia and Ukraine, and were only able to draw in brief moments of respite from fighting. Many were embedded with the troops on the staff of frontline and army newspapers, and as members of collectives such as the famous MB Grekov War Artists' Studio. "Artists left

for the front where they became both witnesses to and direct participants in the fighting. They visited the building of fortification lines, Red Army units at the front and partisan brigades. They followed the tracks of the retreating Germans together with Red Army soldiers. They saw the sites of villages burned down by the Fascists, the remains of routed German columns, mangled tanks, motor vehicles and carts. They reflected all this in their drawings and paintings."³



'The charred remains of their home' (1941?). Drawing by Pavel V. Mal'kov from *Великая Отечественная Война: Художественный альбом. Выпуск 1. Героическая оборона Москва* – The Great Patriotic War: Art Album, Issue 1: The Heroic Defence of Moscow (SCRSS Library)

The MB Grekov War Artists' Studio was named after the founder of the new Soviet school of war painting and brought together Moscow-based artists, both established and up-and-coming young artists. A number of the *Grekovtsy*, as they were known, are featured in the exhibition, including Vladimir Bogatkin, Anatoly Kokorin, Peter Krivonogov and Nikolai Zhukov. Set up in 1934–35 as a workshop for amateur Red Army art, the studio accepted professionally trained artists from 1940. "The aims of the studio [were] to promote the cultural and political education of the forces, and to reflect the role of the army and its everyday life. During the Second World War the studio had a permanent staff of more than fifty, and was constantly sending members to the front both to witness and participate in the battles and victories of the Soviet Army. A vast amount of documentary material was acquired, and this was used in the

production of a multitude of posters, sketches, paintings, sculptures and large thematic canvases.”⁴



'Sergeant Tsvetkova, military traffic warden' (1944).
Drawing by Lipa Royter in *Великая
Отечественная Война в советской графике* –
The Great Patriotic War in Soviet Graphic Art
(SCRSS Library)

War artists, including many *Grekovtsy*, also worked for Soviet army and frontline newspapers. Army newspapers were published daily in two pages; frontline newspapers were published weekly in four pages. A vast staff of correspondents, writers, editors, printers and artists was needed to produce these newspapers, intended for agitprop purposes among the soldiers. Newspaper editorial teams and print units were located close to Army HQ and were under the direct command of the Army's Political Management. Print units for the frontline newspapers were usually accommodated in special vehicles, allowing them to move forward quickly.

The artist A. Bazhenov, who worked on the army newspaper *За Отечество!* (For the Fatherland!) described the dangers: “Every day I went to the advance line to sketch the battle heroes. I sketched right there in the trenches... Every time we came up close to

the advance line, we moved together with the whole army, often through minefields. Quite a few of our editorial staff were killed, especially in the fighting outside Orel.”⁵

Solomon Telingater, featured in the exhibition, worked for the army newspaper *За Советскую Родину!* (For the Soviet Motherland!): “The work was hard... In addition, the material we obtained had to be published very quickly and efficiently. But this task was complicated further by the artist himself having to transform this material into a printing plate without delay. Fine, if the army printers had a team handling zinc plates. But this was not always the case. More often than not, the artist had to transfer his drawing directly onto lino or zinc and prepare the printing plate himself.”⁶

For various reasons, some Soviet artists could not join the troops and stayed at home, though many managed to take short trips to the front to gather material. Solomon Yudovin was trapped in Leningrad during the Blockade and recorded his experiences in a poignant linocut series *Leningrad in the Days of the Great Patriotic War*. Like many Soviet artists, Evgeny Kibrik was evacuated to Samarkand from 1942–43, but sent to Stalingrad in 1943 by the Committee of Arts to create his *Stalingrad* series. Works by both artists appear in the exhibition.

In the SCRSS exhibition, Soviet war artists depict battle scenes, destroyed villages, bombed cities, partisans on the move, troops massing for assaults on the enemy, wounded soldiers and German prisoners, and the liberation of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as the Red Army moved on to Berlin. However, the exhibition also includes intimate portraits of Soviet combatants (men and women) and civilians.

Two of the albums from which the works are reproduced were published in the 1940s, the rest between 1968 and 1972. My two favourites come from each period. Vladimir Bogatkin's *Годы войны* (The War Years, *Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo*, Moscow, 1970) is a wonderful album of wartime sketches and notes by the artist, one of the *Grekovtsy*,

tracing his steps with the Red Army from Moscow to Voronezh, Orel, Sevastopol and on to Berlin (1941–45). *Великая Отечественная Война: Художественный альбом. Выпуск 1. Героическая оборона Москва* (The Great Patriotic War: Art Album, Issue 1: The Heroic Defence of Moscow – see footnote 3 for details) is remarkable for having been published in 1942, shortly after the events depicted. The high-quality album includes mainly drawings and watercolours created by Moscow artists between October 1941 and January 1942, during the defence of Moscow.



'Summer 1944. Our entry into Lithuania. Resting after the battle.' Drawing by Anatoly Kokorin in *Великая Отечественная Война в советской графике* – The Great Patriotic War in Soviet Graphic Art (SCRSS Library)

It is fitting to close with a quotation from pages 6–8 of this album, when the outcome of the war was uncertain: "The events surrounding the defence of Moscow... will be the subject of many, many works of art [in the future]... At present, while the war against the Fascist invaders continues with its former ferocity..., we are not yet fully able to reflect the great events of the war in monumental art forms. But Soviet art is

participating in the fight against the Fascist armies using all the art forms available to it..., depicting the most important events of the war through drawings, watercolours, pictures and sculptures... And when this difficult war recedes into history... interest in the events of the Great Patriotic War will not wane... Every drawing, every brushstroke truthfully made by an artist today will acquire a special value."

Diana Turner is a member of the SCRSS Council and Editor of the SCRSS Digest.

Footnotes

¹ *Fighting Pencil (Боевой карандаш)* was a collective of Leningrad artists who created popular posters and satirical cartoons in support of the war effort. Its first posters appeared during the war with Finland in the winter of 1939–40; production resumed from 1941 with Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.

² The 'Kukryniksy' were three Soviet artists – Mikhail Kupriyanov, Porfiri Krylov and Nikolai Sokolov. They became famous in the 1930s for their anti-fascist cartoons in the Moscow satirical magazine *Krokodil*; during the Great Patriotic War they produced 'TASS Windows' – large posters used to communicate current events to the Moscow public and boost morale.

³ *Великая Отечественная Война: Художественный альбом. Выпуск 1. Героическая оборона Москва* [The Great Patriotic War: Art Album, Issue 1: The Heroic Defence of Moscow] (Ed. V.A. Shkvarikov, Gos. Izd. Iskusstvo, Moscow-Leningrad, 1942, p. 6). Reproductions from this album are included in the SCRSS exhibition.

⁴ *Frontline Images: Drawings, Paintings and Posters from World War Two by Soviet War Artists* (exhibition brochure, Brentford Watermans Art Centre, 1985)

⁵ *На огневых рубежах: Московские художники фронтовой печати 1941–1945* [On the Firing Lines: Moscow Artists of the Frontline Press 1941–1945] (E.V.

Mozhukhovskaya, Khudozhnik RSFSR, Leningrad, 1972, p. 19). Reproductions from this album are included in the SCRSS exhibition.

⁶ *Ibid*

Please note: The exhibition is on display at the SCRSS until early December.

Book Reviews

Human Rights in Russia: Citizens and the State from Perestroika to Putin

By Mary McAuley (IB Tauris, March 2015, ISBN: 9781784531256, Hbk only, £68.00)

This new book is an essential read for anyone interested in the development (since 1991) and current situation of non-state activism in Russia. It is not a work of reference, indeed there are few references to the text, although there is a useful guide to further reading. Instead, Mary McAuley has provided a fascinating account of her own engagement with Russia since 1991, based on encounters with a wide range of activists.

I first met McAuley when, from 1995 to 2002, she was the head of the US Ford Foundation's new Russian office in Moscow, with responsibility for a large funding programme in the field of human rights and legal reforms. She was responsible for deciding whether or not a wide range of applicants should receive money. For them, she was in many ways the Queen of Moscow.

McAuley was not new to Russia. She first visited Russia in 1959, as a student, and in 1961–63 was a research student at the Department of Labour Law at Leningrad University. With a British Academy grant she spent 1991–94 travelling all over Russia to research the changing political scene, leading to a significant book. A further grant

enabled her to return to Russia in 2010–11, when she interviewed some fifty activists in several cities, attended their events, and watched them at work. Everywhere, she taped her interviews.

Indeed, that is McAuley's unique contribution, and the book contains her many interviews, together with her own insights. There is a very helpful dramatis personae, and I can confirm that she has met almost everyone who matters in the Russian human rights movement. She brings them all to life, and this is surely one of the best accounts of what it has really been like in Russia's opposition.

A strength of the book is that McAuley is well aware of the controversy surrounding the fact that a swarm of foreign funders arrived in Russia from 1991. She notes that "it was important and difficult for the different donors to keep track of each others' activities, and there could be duplication and dismay at some of the projects funded by others". Her book concludes with the controversial Foreign Agents Law. She acknowledges that many Russians, and not only the Government, were suspicious of this apparent generosity, and of the motives of the donors. And the 'third sector' in Russia became dependant on foreign funding.

I agree with McAuley that the real problem of foreign funding has not been espionage or subversion, but the diversion of the energy of talented Russians away from organised collective struggle and political organisation. She writes: "I was not aware of any Western unions or professional associations anxious to participate in projects in Russia to... organise collective action." I am proud to report that European Lawyers for Democracy and Human Rights (ELDH), of which I am President, now has as its Russian member the Centre for Social and Labour Rights in Moscow, working with the 3 million strong Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR).

Bill Bowring, Professor of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London, and President of the SCRSS

Force Benedict

By Eric Carter with Antony Loveless (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014, ISBN: 978 1 444 78513 5, Hbk, 306pp, £20.00)

Eye-catchingly (but a trifle misleadingly) sub-titled 'Churchill's Secret Mission to save Stalin', *Force Benedict* details the short, small-scale, but undeniably significant Royal Air Force mission to Russia in 1941.

The book – first published last year – centres on recollections of Eric Carter, one of forty pilots sent to operate two squadrons of Hurricane fighters in the defence of Murmansk. The aircraft and pilots, plus some 500 ground crew – engineers, technicians, drivers, cooks, clerks, etc – travelled out, formed up as the RAF's No 151 Wing, via the first Arctic Convoy of the war. Code-named *Operation Dervish*, the main convoy arrived in Archangel on 1 September. In itself this was worthy of note, given that the decision to start assembling men and machines for the expedition was only taken in the last week of July.

As Hitler's *Operation Barbarossa* decimated the first Soviet echelons on 22 June, Stalin called for Churchill's help. Any enemy of Hitler is my ally, said Churchill (setting aside his well-rooted distrust of and distaste for Communism). Despite Britain's uneasy circumstances at that time, he promised early dispatch of immediate air support – with more to come. Hence the Wing's secondary mission: to introduce Soviet airmen to the Hurricane and train them in its use ready for the receipt of 3,000 or so more via subsequent convoys.

Earlier books have told the Wing's story. Indeed, after an apparent failure of the Ministry of Defence to tell Downing Street that there should be RAF men invited to an Arctic Emblem presentation in 2005, a DVD-format film has been made, giving surviving veterans a chance to tell their stories to camera.*

But *Force Benedict* takes another look: it is richly detailed, incorporating material from many other sources. Eric Carter's basic

recollections are amplified by his co-author, Antony Loveless, an aviation author and journalist with experience in recent conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, as well as Eric's reflections, the reader gets a full flavour of what the expedition was like for its young participants. Highs and lows; heat and cold; deaths and injury – although mercifully little of either; combat excitement and routine tedium.

There is a full and helpful bibliography, together with exemplary footnotes throughout. The book is well illustrated from personal collections and from customary reference sources (Imperial War Museum, RIA Novosti).

I have to declare an interest: I've known Eric Carter and his 151 Wing veteran colleagues since I first met them in Moscow in 1993. As Defence and Air Attaché at the British Embassy, I facilitated a first return visit to Russia for five veterans. There were more visits in 1994 and 1995, and as recently as 2006, which allowed them back to their operational base at Vaenga (Severomorsk). I have been involved with their affairs throughout, maintaining an RAF Russia Association to keep them in contact with each other and – most importantly – to pay tribute to their fallen comrades in ceremonies at the Soviet War Memorial.

The book covers all this; I'm delighted to have this chance to point up its strengths. A fascinating story, well told and highly recommended.

* This DVD is *Hurricanes to Murmansk*, available from www.atollproductions.co.uk.

Philip Wilkinson, Trustee, Soviet Memorial Trust Fund

Land of Forty Tribes

By Farideh Heyat (Hertfordshire Press, July 2015, ISBN: 978-0993044441, 392pp, £14.95)

Dr Heyat presented her new book *Land of Forty Tribes* to a meeting at the SCRSS in July 2015, organised in co-operation with

the publisher. Dr Heyat, an anthropologist and writer, was born in Iran to Azeri parents, and studied in Turkey and then London. At the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, she studied anthropology, specialising in the Republic of Azerbaijan and, specifically, the position of women and gender relations. After the break-up of the Soviet Union she carried out anthropological research in Baku, while also volunteering as an aid worker.

Land of Forty Tribes is a semi-autobiographical novel based on Dr Heyat's experiences as a teacher at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. She travelled widely in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, researching the situation of women in the region.

The book centres on a British-Iranian anthropologist's search for her Turkic roots, when she takes up a teaching job in Kyrgyzstan. It also includes the search for romance in a climate where expat men pursue younger local women. Alan Murphy, an American politics professor, is married to a Ukrainian politics teacher, almost thirty years younger than himself. Otherwise, the local men live in a 'male haven' with conservative and traditional views of women.

One prominent chapter covers bride kidnapping, telling of a young student kidnapped for marriage and killed during an escape. This is based on a real event from the time of Dr Heyat's teaching in Kyrgyzstan, when a young woman was either murdered or died from drowning while trying to escape.

This topic attracted some discussion at the SCRSS event. I first heard of bride kidnapping as a Cossack tradition in the Northern Caucasus. In Kabardino-Balkaria it remains an active tradition, but one where the bride often agrees with the groom when and where to be kidnapped. However, in Kabardino-Balkaria I also heard about a real kidnapping from a young woman who explained that she could not be forced to marry without her own and parents' consent

and simply waited until she was collected by her father.

Dr Heyat also gave an example of a more liberated young woman, who refused to co-operate when kidnapped and taken to the groom's home. In the end the groom's parents sent her home as she was more trouble than she was worth! Yet other kidnapped brides were quietly submissive and accepted their fate.

This semi-autobiographical novel was the right choice for Dr Heyat's work. It gives her flexibility in presenting her experiences, the ability to incorporate topical trends and the opportunity to re-cast her reminiscences in the form of a very readable novel.

Charles Stewart, SCRSS Vice-Chair

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