The rise of the Stalin personality cult

The task of the construction of images of Lenin and Stalin, the geniuses who created Socialism, and their closest comrades, is one of the most responsible creative and ideological tasks that art has ever faced.

Aleksandr Gerasimov1

‘Tell me,’ Sklyansky asked, ‘what is Stalin?’
‘Stalin,’ I said, ‘is the outstanding mediocrity in the party.’

Lev Davidovich Trotsky2

The personality cult of Stalin draws from a long tradition in which leaders in precarious positions of power sought to strengthen legitimacy and unite their citizens into an entity that identified as a collective whole. This chapter is devoted to examining how a persona was created for Stalin via the mechanism of the cult. The question will be approached from two angles: first, by an overview of artistic production under Stalin; and, second, by outlining some of the devices that were used to construct the symbolic persona encompassed by the name ‘Stalin’. The cult of Stalin was built on the foundations of the Lenin cult, allowing Stalin to gain legitimacy as Lenin’s most appropriate successor, and Stalin was subsequently positioned as

1 Quoted in Igor Golomshtok, Totalitarian art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, fascist Italy and the People’s Republic of China, New York, Icon Editions, 1990, p. 226.
a great Marxist theoretician and revolutionary thinker, alongside Marx, Engels and Lenin. The propaganda apparatus created a formulaic Stalin biography that was to be used to educate the ‘simple people’, and demonised ‘the enemy’ as a backdrop against which Stalin could appear as a wise man and saviour. In order to generate effective and consistent propaganda for the purpose of educating the masses, all artistic and cultural production was brought under state control with all artists employed by the state to create products that elucidated the Bolshevik vision and promoted socialist and communist goals.

Art under Stalin

In order to most effectively market the Stalin image to the Soviet public, a line of consistent praise of Stalin had to be established and all competing points of view to be eliminated. It is self-evident that the only certain way in which this could be achieved was if all cultural production was centralised under the control of the state. While the first years of the Bolshevik regime had seen the flourishing of a plethora of artistic styles and forms of expression, with artists and writers embracing novel and revolutionary forms to express the reality of a new and revolutionary society, as the 1920s drew to a close the state began to exercise ever-increasing control over the production of propaganda materials, and to reject avant-garde and formalist approaches as being incomprehensible and meaningless to the masses. This was a somewhat peculiar assertion because the Soviet public had longstanding traditions with regard to visual and sacred art and were, in fact, visually literate, accustomed to abstraction, stylisation, caricature and the grotesque. In addition, as the years under Soviet rule passed, the population was becoming increasingly educated, particularly with regard to science and culture, and thus comprised an increasingly sophisticated audience. The tendency to move away from avant-gardism and towards realism under Stalin had, like most other aspects of Stalinist society, its roots in Lenin’s period of leadership. Lenin is known to have had conventional artistic tastes and to have disliked avant-garde art, particularly futurism.3 Within Lenin’s lifetime, the leader portrait and the propaganda poster had already emerged as significant genres in cultural production. For example,

the *All-Union agricultural and domestic–industrial exhibition* in Moscow in August 1923 featured a giant portrait of Lenin assembled out of thousands of living plants and a Lenin corner, a derivative of the Red corner in which icons were traditionally hung in Russian homes. Matthew Cullerne Bown suggests that Lenin may have been fundamentally opposed to these displays but unable to prevent them due to his advancing illness.4

After Lenin’s death in 1924, state control of art began gradually to tighten. Communist professors were appointed to art schools as a matter of policy, and the commissioning of works of art became more widespread.5 From 1926 to 1929, several decrees were passed by the government to inhibit contact with foreigners, travel abroad, the admission of foreign artists to the Soviet Union, and which required that Soviet citizens who wished to return home after studying abroad pass exams on Soviet society. A decree issued in December 1928 stated that the sole function of literature was now to be communist education. Graeme Gill notes, however, that right up until the early 1930s, an artistic world that was only loosely connected to the regime persisted such that there continued to be significant variation in the projection of symbols and meaning in art and considerable freedom of expression.6

After 1929, most Stalin portraits, including copies, were commissioned under *kontraktatsiia*.7 Artists were contracted by branches of the central state commissioning agency, VseKoKhudozhnik,8 to produce a given number of works in a particular timeframe. These could be works on a given theme, or based on a field trip to construction projects9 or collectivised farms although, by the late 1930s,10 artists would usually be given a specific title to illustrate.11 VseKoKhudozhnik

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5  Bown, *Art under Stalin*, p. 40.
7  Contract system.
8  The All-Russian Cooperative Union of Fine Arts.
9  One of the most notorious of these was the book edited by Maksim Gor’kii on prison labourers’ work on the Belomor Canal. An edition called *The White Sea Canal* was published by Bodley Head in London in 1935 and a US edition, *Belomor*, was published in New York by H. Smith and R. Haas in the same year.
10  Khudfond (Khudozhestvenny Fond, Art Fund) took over *kontraktatsiia* in the late 1930s.
would then sell the works to other institutions with artists guaranteed a buyer and payment for their work. In March 1930 a resolution was issued ‘On measures for creating favourable working conditions for artists’, which set down minimum budgets for acquiring works by Soviet artists for the union republics, regional departments of education, social insurance funds, and trade unions, with allocated funding increasing over time.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, in April 1932, all artists’ organisations were abolished and all artists had to work under the aegis of a single union in their town or region. As members of the artists’ union, most artists received salaries comparable to an engineer with average qualifications, which they attempted to supplement through \textit{kontraktatsiia}.\textsuperscript{13} In his August 1934 speech on Soviet literature to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, Maksim Gor’kii justified the centralisation of cultural production as enabling creative professionals to comprehend their corporate strength and as harmoniously merging all aims towards a unity to guide all the creative work in the country.\textsuperscript{14}

Centralisation under VseKoKhudozhnik saw an increase in collective and brigade work, particularly in media, such as public sculpture, the design of public spaces and major events like the All-Union agricultural exhibition. Artist contracts were not easy to come by and Galina Yankovskaya and Rebecca Mitchell have documented that: ‘From 1931 to 1935, only 397 people received contracts, which is incommensurate with the number of cooperative artists. Eight out of ten painters in Moscow and twenty-four out of fifty in the provinces did not participate in this system.’\textsuperscript{15} Despite centralisation of control of artistic production there was a dizzying array of organisations, institutions and bureaucratic agencies to be negotiated in order to gain access to commissions. Knowledge of how to navigate this bureaucracy was highly prized and heavily guarded.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} See Plamper, \textit{The Stalin cult}, p. 172.
State control of art increased throughout the 1930s. On accessing material only recently made available in the Soviet archives, Katerina Clark remarked on the extent to which, during the 1930s, members of the Politburo were engaged in legislating cultural matters:

What is truly extraordinary is that the heads of state of a country that boasted being the largest in area (‘one sixth of the world’) and was for much of this period undergoing draconian modernization and the build-up of its military, coupled with a protracted socio-political–economic revolution, spent so much of their time on cultural matters, even in the most critical moments of inner-party struggle, the terror, or of war. Among the members of the Politburo, Stalin was the most actively involved.\(^{17}\)

Stalin took for himself the portfolio of commissar of cultural enlightenment from 4 June 1934 till 27 November 1938 when it was passed to the notorious Andrei Zhdanov. The timing of Stalin’s assumption of this portfolio is interesting. It came just four months after the Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934, at which opposition to Stalin had surfaced, and when the possibility of a challenge to his leadership was in the air — 300 votes were cast against Stalin.\(^{18}\) It also occurred just before the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, at which the future direction of Soviet art was formalised and institutionalised. By picking up the culture portfolio at this time, Stalin was ensuring that he would have a controlling influence over cultural production in the regime, demonstrating yet again how pivotal mass culture was to the Soviet leadership.

Significantly, it was in 1934 that the image of Stalin became ubiquitous in the media and propaganda. Soviet cultural production from this point on became increasingly self-referential or, what Malte Rolf has referred to as a ‘hall of mirrors’ in which ‘[c]ultural items constantly reflected other bits of the rhetoric, symbols, or ritual of the Soviet cultural canon’ and there was little reference to anything outside the officially endorsed canon.\(^{19}\) The repetition of canonic themes and

\(^{17}\) Katerina Clark, ‘The cult of literature and Nikolai Ostrovskii’s “How the steel was tempered”’, in Klaus Heller & Jan Plamper (eds), Personality cults in Stalinism, Göttingen, V&R Unipress, 2004, p. 415.


images also manifested in the peculiarly socialist practice of copying artworks. As there was no ‘art for art’s sake’ and no marketplace geared around the procurement of ‘unique’ pieces, works were produced for didactic and propagandistic purposes. Paintings, sculptures and posters were copied, chopped up and reassembled and translated into other media with the aim of filling public space with approved images. Sculptures were based on standardised models and institutions and organisations could only buy pictures that were stamped with the seal of the representative of the Main Repertory Committee.\(^{20}\) Stalin was much more than the sole authoritative voice on all art-related matters in the Soviet Union, he became art’s principle subject matter and, by the mid-1930s, Soviet public space was saturated with all manner of images of the leader.

Despite the centralised governmental control of artistic production, it would be incorrect to assume that it was only the government that gave such a pre-eminent place to art and literature in society. Cultural matters were important to the public as well. Alongside the professional art organisations, a myriad of amateur and workers’ artist societies flourished. Factories and workplaces set up artists’ clubs for their workers. The Union of Soviet Artists set up Commissions for the Creativity of the People, which visited workplaces and organised evening schools and artists’ circles for amateur artists and craftspeople. Instruction was given on how to paint and sculpt portraits of the leader, and in the techniques of socialist realism.

In 1931–32, German photomonteur John Heartfield visited the USSR to experience first-hand the developments in poster and propaganda art. Archival photographs show Heartfield surrounded by Red Army soldiers gathered at worktables, all cutting and assembling photographs and text into photomontage posters. In his lecture to the Moscow Polygraphics Institute on 24 July 1931, Heartfield expressed his conviction that photomontage was not only a medium for dissemination to the masses through mechanical reproduction, but also a participatory medium, to be practised by the masses themselves.\(^{21}\) The public was not only interested in participation in the creation of art, but in viewing it as well. At the height of the siege of Leningrad,

in the terrible winter of 1941–42, a major exhibition, *Leningrad in the days of the Patriotic War*, was opened in the Leningrad Union of Artists. In January 1942 this exhibition was airlifted over the blockade and shown in Moscow.

**Socialist realism**

Socialist realism was announced as the officially endorsed method for works of art and literature at the first Soviet Writers’ Congress in 1934. The term seems to have first appeared in print in May 1932, and was attributed to Stalin, who told writers and leaders at a meeting at Gor’kii’s house: ‘The artist ought to show life truthfully. And if he shows our life truthfully, he cannot fail to show it moving to socialism. This is and will be socialist realism.’ The enthusiasm for a return to Russian realism was not merely a top-down initiative. The majority of the members of the painting section of MOSSKh were former members of AKhR/R and thus stylistically conservative. The Party line was in sympathy with the preferences of the majority of artists, and was perceived by many politically engaged artists as a means of establishing a more equitable access to commissions. Socialist realism was regarded by the Party as the most progressive form of art that had ever existed, as was still being claimed in the *Encyclopædic dictionary of literature*, published in the USSR in 1987, which proclaimed it ‘the leading artistic method of the modern era’.

In her article on Aleksandr Deineka, Christina Kiaer examines the question of whether socialist realism was forced labour, and argues that, in Deineka’s case, the turn to greater realism was the result of

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22 Although socialist realism is often discussed as if it were a ‘style’ of art, it was in fact declared to be a ‘method’ in 1934, defining itself in opposition to formalism as ‘freedom from the dogma of style’. See Ekaterina Degot, ‘Socialist realism from the viewpoint of critical art’, in *Rosa Ferré, Red cavalry: creation and power in Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1945: 07.10.2011 – 15.01.2012*, Madrid, La Casa Encendida, 2011, p. 489.
23 *Bown, Art under Stalin*, p. 89.
25 Moscow Section of the Union of Soviet Artists.
26 AKhR/R is Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, 1922–28; AKhR is Association of Artists of the Revolution, 1928–32.
27 *Bown, Art under Stalin*, p. 94.
28 Kiaer, ‘Was socialist realism forced labour?’, p. 322.
29 *Bown, Art under Stalin*, p. 13.
an evolution in the artist’s vision of what constituted appropriate revolutionary art, a process that was responsive to changing historical circumstances. Susan Reid makes the case that Soviet artists were ‘far from either the unified body wishfully imagined by Soviet mythology or the browbeaten bunch implied by received Western narratives of the “imposition” of Socialist Realism’. Artists like Deineka were allowed some latitude in the work they produced and Deineka at least seems to have felt that he was able to speak his mind openly. Indeed, at least in these early days before the purges of 1937–38, intense discussion about art occurred and dissenting views were put forward, as is evidenced in a diary entry by Valentina Kulagina, graphic artist and wife of artist Gustav Klutsis, dated 6 April 1936:

Yesterday attended a discussion on socialist realism. The formalists spoke — Denisovisky, Shterenberg, Tyshler — and all unanimously refused to apologize for their form[alist] ‘mistakes’, attacking the talentless ‘mediocrities’ who have ‘neither formalism nor naturalism’, who never rock the boat and therefore feel like ‘real’ artists.

Socialist realism is neither conventional realism, nor is it ‘naturalism’. The 6 May 1934 edition of Pravda carried a definition of socialist realism that was taken from the statutes of the new union:

Socialist realism, the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands truthfulness from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Under these conditions, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of working people in the spirit of socialism.

The qualifying phrase ‘in its revolutionary development’ hints at the real kernel of socialist realism. Reality was to be reflected through the prism of the Bolshevik Revolution and to be shaped to the aim of educating the workers. Put another way, socialist realism takes for its subject, not life as it is, but life as it ought to (or will) be, the end

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34 Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin!, p. 108.
result and satisfaction of processes already underway. Socialist realism extracts a basic human truth from myth and folklore, marrying it with socialist ideals, to create a reality for consumption by the viewer/reader. For the god-builder Gor’kii, socialist realism is only possible within the socialist society. Its aims are transcendent and spiritual, and stop at nothing short of the transformation of the earth and the birth of the new man.\textsuperscript{35}

In his insightful analysis of socialist realism and the nature of Soviet truth, Petre Petrov argues against interpreting socialist realism as merely a tissue of lies and deception. Beginning with the proposition that the general consensus on socialist realism is that it represents a ‘bogus reality’ and ‘rape of the real’ deliberately designed to hide the truth, he approaches Soviet society through the lens of historical dialectics, ‘the mode of inquiry that sees reality, not as an immediate \textit{datum}, but as the concrete process of defining and redefining what is real’.\textsuperscript{36} Petrov argues that these deceptions pervaded the fabric of Soviet life so thoroughly that there was hardly anything left over and thus were also part of objective experience and empirical reality: ‘If people thought of themselves as builders of a brighter future, as many did, there is much argumentative work to be done before one could conclude that such people inhabited a pseudoreality, while cynics and dissidents had their feet firmly planted in life-as-it-is.’\textsuperscript{37} Petrov proposes that a more appropriate line of enquiry is to examine how Stalinist ideology itself refashioned the notion of truth and the real.

\textsuperscript{35} ‘Life, as asserted by socialist realism, is deeds, creativeness, the aim of which is the uninterrupted development of the priceless individual faculties of man, with a view to his victory over the forces of nature, for the sake of his health and longevity, for the supreme joy of living on an earth which, in conformity with the steady growth of his requirements, he wishes to mould throughout into a beautiful dwelling place for mankind, united into a single family’ (Gorky, ‘Soviet literature’).


\textsuperscript{37} Petrov, ‘The industry of truing’, p. 878.
The Soviet propaganda poster

The Soviet propaganda poster is but one facet of the ‘hall of mirrors’ that constituted Soviet cultural production. It was one of the several comparatively new art forms that came to prominence after the October Revolution. Over the decades of the Soviet regime, extensive poster campaigns were launched in support of a vast array of initiatives: to educate the people about the drive for collectivisation, to promote the five-year plans, to rally people for the war effort, to convey the utopian society at the end of the socialist rainbow, and to promote the personality cults of Lenin and Stalin. Their purpose was not only to educate and inform, but also to enlist the population to transform the world through the use of a new language, the formulation of new goals, and the creation of a new form of civilisation. In the service of these aims, a large number of posters featured the images and words of the leader as guidance, exhortation, encouragement and inspiration to create the new society. While this process was begun in Lenin’s time, it was during the decades of Stalin’s rule that the image of the leader in posters became omnipresent.

Robert Bird et al. date the earliest predecessors of the wall poster to Ancient Roman times and note that wall paintings advertising everything from circuses, elections and goods for sale were present in Pompeii in the 1st century BC. Similar sorts of advertisements printed on broadsheets by woodcut appeared in Muscovy in the Middle Ages.38 The rise of the poster in its current form occurred in part due to material circumstances. Lithography was invented in 1796 and chromolithography in 1837, with paper-making machines arriving in 1825 and faster drying inks in the 1870s.39 The modern-day poster was born around the 1870s with the addition of text to lithographic images and there were poster exhibitions in Europe as early as the mid-1880s.39 These technical innovations meant that, suddenly, huge runs of printed colour works on paper could be made available for distribution. Improvements in transport networks over large distances meant that this printed material could be distributed over wide territories and reach audiences that were formerly too

remote to exchange communications with the large centres. In the words of El Lissitskii: ‘the poster is the traditional book ... flung in all directions’.

These technical innovations do not wholly account for the emergence of the political poster. As Jeffrey Schnapp argues, perhaps the primary reason for the sudden prominence of the political poster in Europe is the expansion of suffrage to increasing numbers of people, and the socio-political need to influence the new voters: ‘The state, political movements, labor unions, not to mention sellers of goods and providers of services, all required a fast and efficient conduit to the multitudes, multitudes that could not always be counted on to read newspapers.’

Because public opinion now counted, there was a need to find techniques of mass persuasion with the aim of providing information, but also ‘in the sense of being provided with rituals, symbols, and narratives, with mobilizing signs, slogans, beliefs, and myths that insure social cohesion and promote participation in the life of the nation’. Posters were an ideal medium to meet these goals, largely because they occupied public space and were potentially visible to large numbers of people as they went about their daily business. Indeed, Engels argued in 1894 that posters were the ‘main means of influencing the proletariat’ making every street a ‘large newspaper’.

Posters had to be simple, bold, eye-catching and legible at a distance. They competed for space and attention in the public arena and were often encountered only briefly, so had to communicate their message quickly, unambiguously and with impact. This was particularly true of posters designed for the urban environment. It is interesting to note that, in 1931, as the Central Committee called for scientific analysis of how posters were received by the viewer, they began with the hypothesis that peasants could be engaged with more complex designs than city dwellers. The theory went that peasants had more time than workers to stop and contemplate the design ‘devotionally’.

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40 El Lissitskii, quoted in Bird et al., Vision and communism, p. 13.
42 Schnapp, Revolutionary tides, p. 20.
44 Bird et al., Vision and communism, p. 15.
truth of this may be in part attested to by the fact that poster reviews often highlighted the lack of authenticity in the depiction of rural scenes, including gross inaccuracies in regard to ‘machinery, terrain, people, clothing, labor activities, and animals’. Several absurdities committed by apparently urban-based artists resulted in laughter and dismissal of the poster by a peasant audience. The poster was also a suitable medium for populations in which literacy was low but that had a tradition of visual imagery. Russian peasant language was full of symbolism, deriving not only from religion, but also from the supernatural and an elaborate demonology of spirits and devils which could influence all aspects of human life. As Nina Tumarkin observes: ‘in the Russian popular mentality, the vocabulary of real power drew upon images of the supernatural. In traditional peasant culture the miraculous and phantasmagorical were a regular part of daily life.’

There was a brief but significant historical precedent in pre-revolutionary Russia for the use of posters and poster-like materials. In 1897, St Petersburg hosted the First International Poster Exhibition, despite the fact that the Russian industry was not yet highly developed — of the 727 posters displayed from 13 countries, including France, Germany, the United States and Great Britain, only 28 were from Russia. This exhibition signalled the end of the small industry of poster production as a purely commercial affair in Russia, and the beginning of the poster as an artform and, from 1897 onward, a large number of artists and designers from outside the commercial sphere became involved in poster production. Artists like Mikhail Vrubel, Leon Bakst, Evgenii Lansere, and Viktor and Apollinari Vasnetsov were all involved in pre-revolutionary poster production in Russia.

Russian posters of the early 20th century existed mainly to advertise consumer goods and movies, and featured beautiful women, sometimes dressed in folk costume; strong men at work; and Russian architecture. From the earliest days of the Bolshevik regime, however, it was the political poster that quickly assumed a central place in the graphic

The graphic arts were experiencing rough times during the Civil War, as journals closed down, putting illustrators out of work; and businesses were unable to function, cutting down on advertising work, thus closing off the traditional avenues of employment for graphic artists. From August 1918, political posters suddenly flourished and what Vyacheslav Polonskii refers to as ‘poster mania’ occurred.  

Beginning with the publishing section of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, each Soviet agency responsible for some sort of propaganda began to commission posters, with the Red Army becoming a major patron of graphic artists. Poster artists could work for either side in the Civil War and Peter Kenez notes that most of the well-known artists worked for the Whites, leaving the way open for emerging artists to work for the Revolutionary Army. Dmitrii Moor was one of the few graphic artists working for the Red Army at this time who signed his work, the eventual outcome of the Civil War still being too uncertain to confidently predict. Polonskii observed that if the Whites had won Moscow, Moor would likely have been hanged.

Poster art was seen as a major contributor to the success of the Red Army in the Civil War, as a means of bringing art to the masses, and as a medium for the transformation of society. In the propagandistic publication of 1935, *Art in the USSR*, C.G. Holme claims ‘The poster artists of the U.S.S.R. may justly be called the historic vanguard of our pictorial art. For this group of artists was really the first to take up militant front positions, in the true sense of these words, during the civil war period of 1918–20’. Trotskii wanted posters to be put up ‘in every workshop, every department, every office’, and lauded Moor in a special decree in 1922 as a ‘hero of the pencil and the paintbrush’.

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50 Kenez, *The birth of the propaganda state*, p. 112.


52 Vyacheslav Polonskii, ‘Russkii revolyutsionnyi plakat’, Moscow, Gospolizdat, 1925, p. 66.


54 Bird et al., *Vision and communism*, p. 21.

By the end of 1920, 3,100 posters had hit the streets\(^{56}\) and there were 453 agencies producing posters, the largest of these being Litzdat,\(^{57}\) which was established in October 1919 with Polonskii at its head.\(^{58}\) Litzdat was given the task of producing propaganda and educational materials in a wide variety of formats including posters, periodicals, pictures, drawings, proclamations, brochures and books. White notes that:

> almost 70 per cent of the 29.8 million copies of publications in all categories between June 1919 and January 1921, for instance, were proclamations, appeals, posters or open letters to the troops, and posters and lubok [illustrated broadside] pictures alone accounted for some 20 per cent of total production over the same period.\(^{59}\)

Both Moor and Viktor Deni\(^{60}\) designed posters for Litzdat. Posters had reached such prominence as a means of cultural expression that, in February 1924 in Moscow, a poster exhibition, *The poster in the last six years*, became the first retrospective to be held in Soviet Russia.\(^{61}\)

The political poster of the early Soviet period was influenced to some extent by the lubok\(^{62}\) and the icon. The lubok, which had wide circulation among the peasantry, typically combined illustrations with text, and its subject matter included religion and folklore as well as political developments and social issues of the day. Several of the Russian avant-garde artists became interested in the lubki as part of a wider exploration of folk art in the 1910s. Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Maiakovskii became the designer and caption writers

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57 The Literature and Publishing Department of the Political Administration of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic.
60 Stephen White provides evidence that Lenin appreciated Deni’s work (*The Bolshevik poster*, p. 60).
61 Elena Barkhatova, “‘Modern icon’”, or “tool for mass propaganda”? Russian debate on the poster’, in Rosenfeld, *Defining Russian graphic arts*, p. 133.
respectively for a new First World War publication, *Today’s Lubok*, which produced a series of more than 50 patriotic posters. Moor was also involved in the production of *Today’s Lubok*.63

After the Revolution, the satirical *lubok* form was used as a news bulletin by the Bolsheviks, and also to lampoon and ridicule the enemy — the White generals, capitalists, *oblomovs*,64 and priests, among others. In 1918 *Pravda* proclaimed the poster a ‘powerful weapon of socialist propaganda, influencing the broadest possible public. Attracting to itself the attention of the masses, it makes the first impression on their consciousness, which lectures and books can subsequently deepen’65 and, in 1925, theoretician N. Tarabukin proclaimed the poster a ‘weapon of mass influence’.66 In 1918 ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency) was established with three main areas of responsibility — collecting and disseminating information, agitation, and supervision of the Soviet press. With chronic paper and ink shortages making publication of books and newspapers difficult, the first ROSTA Window posters appeared in Moscow in 1919 with the object of combining ‘the functions of poster, newspaper, magazine and information bulletin’.67 In the tradition of the *lubok*, they featured colourful graphics and often satirical text, but were also enhanced by the experimentation in style, form and colour that was brought to the artform by the artists of the avant-garde. Maiakovskii, who worked on the ROSTA windows, enthused: ‘ROSTA Windows are something fantastic. It is a handful of artists serving, by hand, a huge nation of a hundred and fifty million. It’s instantaneous news wires remade into a poster; it’s decrees instantly published as ditties. It is a new form introduced directly by life.’68 Holme enthused retrospectively in 1935:

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63 White, *The Bolshevik poster*, p. 3.
64 The terms ‘oblomov’ and ‘oblomovism’ derive from Ivan Goncharov’s popular novel, *Oblomov* (1859). The central character, Oblomov, is indecisive and apathetic, and takes the first 50 pages of the novel to get from his bed to his chair. ‘Oblomovshchina’ (oblomovism) refers to a condition of fatalistic apathy and sloth. Chonghoon Lee notes that the condition was a central concern of Soviet psychiatric and neurological research and was viewed as a ‘national disease’ which was denounced in the drive for industrialisation and the search for heroes of labour (‘Visual Stalinism from the perspective of heroisation: posters, paintings and illustrations in the 1930s’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:3–4, 2007, pp. 503–21, p. 503).
66 N. Tarabukin quoted in Barkhatova in Rosenfeld, *Defining Russian graphic arts*, p. 147.
It is difficult to imagine the Moscow or Petrograd of 1919–20 without those ‘satire [Rosta] windows’, brightly illuminated till the early hours of the morning and attracting large throngs of spectators. The ‘Rosta Windows’ constituted a remarkable supplement to the exhortations of the leaders, which were, posted on the walls near-by, to the appeals of the Party, and to the telegraphic news bulletins from the battlefronts of the civil war.69

Russian Orthodox icons were also a significant influence on the development of Soviet poster art, a fact that was (somewhat surprisingly) noted in a Soviet publication in 1922 in which Aleksei Sidorov described the poster as a ‘contemporary icon’.70 James Aulich and Marta Sylvestrová see in both the Soviet political poster and the orthodox icon ‘a lack of distinction between the represented and that which is represented, a blurring between what is pictured and what is real which occurs through a process of magical identification’.71 Both icons and political posters are neither decorative nor pictorial, but instructive and symbolic. A wealth of visual information is encoded in the images for the initiated believer, for whom the image functions at a pre-rational level to facilitate the link between man and god in the case of the icon, and citizen and the regime (often as embodied through the Stalin leader symbol) in the case of the poster.

One of the most famous early Bolshevik poster artists, Aleksandr Apsit, trained as an icon painter,72 while the atheist Moor spent his early years studying icons, concentrating on composition, form, colour, and the use of narrative and illustrative techniques.73 Moor later put his knowledge of icons to use in satirical drawings for anti-religious publications. The engraver Ivan Pavlov stated that Moor’s renditions of the saints were so successful that peasants often hung them in their icon corners, unaware of the satirical intent.74 In an unpublished essay, Moor acknowledged that the poster form derived from both peasant woodcuts and ‘the religious paintings of the vestibules of churches

[and] in a certain number of icons, particularly of the 15th century’. Deni also directly borrowed religious motifs in early satirical work for the Bolshevik regime. As Robert Philippe has observed in a more general sense in his study on art as a weapon, political prints depicting the personalities and events of political, social, military and religious life have always served to decorate the walls of people’s houses: ‘In this sense they are the heirs of the sacred picture. They testify to convictions, and provide reassurance of ways of being.’ While the appropriation of the icon tradition gave many political posters a sacred and devotional aura, the satirical and parodic traditions that grew out of the _lubok_ and satirical magazines undercut this to some extent by priming the possibility of subversive interpretations.

In the early 1930s, control of poster design became centralised, with all commissions proceeding from state departments, and the materials needed to engage in art practice only available through the state. On 11 March 1931 the Central Committee issued a ‘Resolution on poster agitation and propaganda’ that centralised control over allocating and ratifying Soviet poster commissions into the exclusive hands of Izogiz, which came under the direct oversight of the Central Committee. The resolution named visual art as a ‘powerful tool in the reconstruction of the individual, his ideology, his way of life, his economic activity’ and as a means of ‘entering the consciousness and hearts of millions of people’, and also called for specific measures to gather more accurate information on viewer reception and response to posters. At the same time, the Union of Russian Revolutionary Poster Artists (ORPP) was established, headed by Moor.

The centralisation of poster production was not unwelcome to some artists and critics, who had expressed concerns in the press that the standard of poster design was in decline and that valuable and scarce materials were being wasted on hack work. Centralisation was a means of ensuring that commissions and materials were directed to the best artists. Gill points out that, while some degree of diversity and artistic

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77 Art Department of the State Publishing House.
80 For an elaboration of this viewpoint see White, The Bolshevik poster, p. 120.
freedom remained in the other visual arts, posters were always more carefully regulated and thus a more rigid expression of the regime’s priorities due to the fact that the regime generated commissions and monopolised the means of printing and reproduction. By the beginning of the 1930s, posters made by enthusiastic amateur demonstrators to carry in parades were quickly confiscated and destroyed. Themes, texts and images for official posters were dictated to commissioned artists, who then had to submit their work to the censors for approval. The rigour and uncertainty of censorship is attested to in a 1935 diary entry by Kulagina:

Yesterday, Gustav handed in his poster Stalin and Voroshilov ... to the Glavlit for the 3rd time — and Irinova (now it’s Irinoval) didn’t want to sign off on it and he had to take it to central Glavlit ... and then this morning he went to the central Glavlit — Gurinov signed it and then immediately after that Irinova signed it too. I find such things outrageous — one moment it’s this and that is bad, and Stalin doesn’t look like himself — and then all of a sudden all is well.

Despite the fact that all posters were commissioned under strict guidelines, many posters submitted were either rejected, or sent back for major revision. In July 1930 a decree of the Council of People’s Commissars resulted in 200 artists being sent to construction sites and collective farms for two months each to create propaganda about the first Five-Year Plan and the progress of the collectivisation drive. Thirty per cent of the work they produced was rejected by the purchasing committees of VseKoKhudozhnik and Izogiz. In April 1931 a meeting of the review board under Izogiz occurred in which 22 posters that Izogiz intended to publish were to be discussed. Most of them were

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81 Gill, Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics, p. 11.
83 A diary entry by Kulagina dated 11 January 1933 provides a good example of how this process worked: ‘Was at Izogiz today, got an assignment for a poster on the theme of Stalin’s report [In January 1933, Stalin announced the completion of the first Five-Year Plan ahead of schedule, in four years]. It has to be ready in three days’ (Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 206).
86 For an interesting insight into how this occurred from the artists’ point of view, see Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina.
87 Bown, Art under Stalin, p. 41.
severely criticised, with half of them rejected outright. A 1933 entry in Kulagina’s diary reads: ‘Yakovlev made a report on the state of the poster sector. He didn’t have anything good to say. Criticized all the May Day posters. Gustav was praised, Elkin was harshly criticized; of Pinus’s poster he said that it was published by mistake (too sugary and philistine).’

By 1933 propaganda posters had become such an established artform that a large retrospective exhibition celebrating 15 years of the creative work of poster artists and cartoonists opened in Moscow, including albums of work by Deni, Moor, the Kukryniksy, and Boris Efimov. Holme wrote of the exhibition: ‘We saw before us a gallery of works testifying to the creation of an entirely new art in posters and cartoons. This new art could also be seen in numerous art editions and albums containing the best posters and cartoons of the Soviet masters.’ It may have been this exhibition to which Kulagina referred when she wrote in her diary on 16 December 1933: ‘But there is no inventiveness, no creativity. Or formalism is what destroys someone like me? But it seems to me that one always has to look for something pointed — and at Izogiz, they like posters that are barely distinguishable from one another.’

In the mid-1930s the range of expression in political posters declined still further, with an increased focus on a narrower pool of symbols and motifs. While in 1934 more than 240 posters were produced in print runs averaging about 30,000, by 1937 the total number of posters produced was only 70, but the print runs increased for some posters to the hundreds of thousands. Public space was frequently saturated with posters and visual repetition occurred not only because the pool of images from which poster artists drew was confined, but also because posters could be displayed in multiples of the same image. There is evidence that Klutsis designed some of his posters with the intention that they be displayed in serial repetition. By 1935, the emphasis

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88 Bonnell, ‘The peasant woman in Stalinist political art of the 1930s’, p. 68.
89 Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 206.
90 Artists collective of Mikhail Kuprianov, Porfiri Krylov and Nikolai Sokolov.
91 Holme, Art in the USSR, p. 70.
94 See Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 54.
in posters was moving away from a focus on the everyman hero of labour and towards a focus on Stalin as a leader–hero. Stalin’s image took central place in a number of posters, and artists like Klutsis, who had worked predominantly in photomontage to create cut-and-paste images combining his own staged worker–hero photos with large crowd scenes, now turned their attention to retouching images of Stalin to remove facial scars and creases in clothing. Ekaterina Haskins and James Zappen argue that the Stalin posters are the most blatantly monologic of all of the propaganda posters:

In contrast to the industrialization and collectivization posters, which exhibit some tension between the authoritative and the internally persuasive word and even, in the case of the collectivization posters, explicitly invite a response, the Stalin posters seek to neutralize any possible internal ideological struggle and to silence any possible dissent by representing the authoritative word of the beloved leader as the only word.96

The poster text, which always directs the reader to the correct interpretation of the image by narrowing down the choice of possible meanings, now consisted almost exclusively of the pronouncements of Stalin, with an occasional word of praise about Stalin by Molotov or Voroshilov. Even posters that appear to be about Lenin’s legacy now present Lenin as interpreted by Stalin — the pronouncement of Stalin lends legitimacy to the doctrine of Lenin. Other people in the posters exist only in relation to Stalin — they gaze up at him with awe, carry his portrait in parades, study his texts, salute him, sing songs about him and follow him into the utopian future. In the words of Haskins and Zappen, ‘The visual composition thus certifies Stalin’s symbolic role in the Soviet pantheon and casts the Soviet people as an approving chorus’.97

In the late 1930s, formalism and any kind of experimental work were increasingly decried and socialist realism became the predominant artistic method. A number of even the most celebrated poster artists were publicly criticised in the 1930s and 1940s, including Klutsis,98

95 Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina*, p. 34.
Moor,99 Deni,100 Viktor Koretskii,101 Deineka,102 Vasilii Elkin,103 Natalia Pinus104 and Vladimir Lebedev.105 The Congress of Victors of 1934 declared that socialism had been achieved, with this formalised by the Soviet Constitution of 1936, and poster images increasingly depicted the fulfilment of socialism, and the happiness of the Soviet citizen. Stalin was depicted not only as the father of all Soviet children, but as the father of the nation and its heroes, including the Stakhanovites, polar explorers and record-breaking aviators.106 By 1939 a rigid canon of Stalin images was fixed: ‘[Stalin’s] appearances in Pravda adhered to a certain rhythm, which more or less followed the calendar of Soviet holidays. Year after year Stalin appeared on the same occasions and the same holidays — often with the same pictures.’107

The Great Patriotic War saw a marked revival in the production of war posters, with many of the surviving Civil War artists returning to serve their country. With the fortunes of war so dismal in 1941 and 1942, there was an initial decrease in posters of Stalin, however, once fortunes turned and as victory seemed assured, Stalin’s image again resumed its place as a central rallying symbol for the regime. After the resurgence of the poster during the war, with its dramatic scope for heroic warriors and loyal, hardworking citizens contrasting with a satirised or demonised enemy, poster artists faced the challenge of finding images to depict peace. The family took centre stage amid scenes coloured in subtle, pastel hues and images of the imminent utopia as the nation moved from socialism to communism. Images of victory celebrations moved on to a renewed call for reconstruction and hence, further sacrifice, sometimes using the slogans of prewar construction, but with new images that suggested springtime and white collar workers replacing the miners and builders of earlier times. Stalin was depicted again as a father of the people, but this time his brood had expanded to include the conquered nationalities and,

100 See White, The Bolshevik poster, p. 138.
103 See Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 206.
106 To be examined in greater detail in Chapter Three.
ultimately, the people of the whole world, to whom Stalin was portrayed as a saviour and bringer of peace. Stalin was also sometimes depicted in a manner that was strongly suggestive of the Orthodox icon.

In 1948 the campaign against cosmopolitanism was launched, with renewed attacks on formalism and an anti-Semitic bias. In the same year the Central Committee issued a decree ‘On shortcomings and Measures for Improvement of the Publication of Political Posters’, calling for improvements in poster production on all levels — artistic method, ideological content, and printing process. This culminated in a meeting in 1951 to assess the progress made with regard to the Central Committee’s resolution of 1948. Formalism was attacked and Koretskii, despite having been celebrated as a Stalin Prize winner, came under particular attack, with specific reference made to the extensive use of photography in his graphic art practice. From 1952 Koretskii virtually discontinued his use of photographs and employed a more painterly technique. Koretskii survived these attacks and continued as a leading poster artist until perestroika in the late 1980s, at which time he devoted himself to painting.

A point that is often ignored or underestimated in studies of Stalinist propaganda posters is the extent of the impact of purely practical factors on poster design. While it is often difficult to piece together today all of the situational factors that existed at any given time during poster production, a careful reading of a variety of sources provides clues. Wherever possible, these factors must be taken into account in an iconographical reading as they impact on the numbers of posters produced, printing methods, and elements of design and colour. Until well into the 1930s the Soviet regime experienced continual paper shortages. In fact, paper shortages at the time of the October Revolution were a contributing factor to the rise of the poster at this time. The Revolution and Civil War had substantially disrupted the printing industry. The loss of the Baltic regions, which supplied about half of the nation’s paper needs, was one factor, as was the loss of qualified printers, lack of spare parts and fuel, and the pro-Menshevik

108 For an insight into how this affected Jewish artists like Koretskii see Wolf, Koretsky, pp. 8–9.
109 The Stalin Prize was a state prize awarded across a number of cultural and scientific fields between 1941 and 1954 — thereafter, the USSR State Prize.
110 See Wolf, Koretsky, pp. 10–11.
2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

sympathies of the printers’ union. The Bolshevik regime needed to reach mass audiences with its propaganda material and displaying large posters in public venues proved to be a more efficient use of paper than printing millions of copies of smaller bulletins, newspapers and books for individual consumption. Paper shortages continued to plague the new regime into the next decade, with Kulagina recording in her diary on 31 July 1932 that paper shortages in that year had resulted in a cutback on poster commissions to artists.

Poster design was influenced by factors such as the availability of ink, the timeframe in which the poster was to be produced, the printing method used, and the availability of portraits of the leader. Polonskii pointed out in relation to Civil War posters that not only was the paper of very poor quality, but inks were in limited supply and a further limitation on the use of inks was due to the quick turnaround time required. Posters had to be current, sometimes being released within hours or days of new events, and each additional colour added to the production time. Stephen White observes: ‘As a result, only one or two colours were used in most cases; only in exceptional circumstance, when a week or two was in hand, could three or four colours be employed. Posters produced in this more leisurely manner tended to be on fairly general themes … ’

Sometimes a number of factors conspired to make poster production difficult. White notes that, by the late 1920s, the political poster could not react ‘promptly and with adequate resources’ to current events due to ‘a combination of centralization and financial stringency, together with some insensitive personnel appointments’.

113 This chronic paper shortage in the early days of Bolshevik power contributed to the rise of another revolutionary medium for propaganda — propagandistic porcelain. The state Porcelain Factory, maker of official porcelain for the tsar, was full of undecorated porcelain blanks at the biscuit stage. These were decorated with the symbols, slogans and images of Red propaganda, then fired and put into circulation (Nina Lobanov-Rostovskiy, ‘Soviet propaganda porcelain’, The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, 11:2, 1989, pp. 126–41, pp. 128–29).
115 Polonskii cited in White, The Bolshevik poster, p. 64.
116 White, The Bolshevik poster, p. 64.
117 White, The Bolshevik poster, p. 126.
in use to display consumer goods and that organisations had to show both financial accountability and to pay for posters that had hitherto been provided by the State for free.

The inability to get access to the leadership is a further factor that influenced the content of posters and provides one reason for poster images being so highly repetitive. In a 1935 letter to Kulagina, Klutsis complains of not being allowed close enough to the leadership in Red Square to get good close-up photos without a telephoto lens. Jan Plamper notes that while Stalin may have posed for portraits on rare occasions in the 1920s, it is unclear whether he ever posed for portraits thereafter.¹¹⁸ What remained as source material for artists was only the official photos published in the media, and these were all vetted, as had been the case with images of Lenin.¹¹⁹ Artists had access to a comparatively small pool of images of the leaders, and these images were cut and pasted into a variety of situations and backgrounds. The Russian State Library in Moscow still holds folios which contain copies of the officially sanctioned portrait images of Stalin, separated into two categories marked ‘Fond’ and ‘Rekomend’.¹²⁰ Many of the portrait images in these folders form the basis of Stalin portraits on posters.

Commercial concerns affecting the artist are yet another factor that influenced the form and content of Stalinist posters. Many artists who normally worked in other media undertook graphic propaganda work in order to make a living and commissions were competitive. From 1931, Izogiz assigned particular slogans to artists who then submitted a draft to their editor for approval.¹²¹ From this time, posters were usually printed with detailed publishing information in small typescript at the bottom of the page. This detail included not only the name of the artist, but also the name of the editor responsible for approving the poster.¹²² Practical considerations relating to the rates

¹¹⁹ Plamper describes the process by which photographs of Stalin were submitted to Comrade Poskryobyshev of Stalin’s secretariat for approval, and discusses evidence that Stalin looked at photos himself and participated in the decision-making on whether or not to publish them (*The Stalin cult*, p. 34).
¹²⁰ No one at the library is able to explain precisely how these categories were used.
¹²¹ Erika Wolf discusses this process in relation to the career of Viktor Koretskii (*Koretsky*, pp. 3–4).
¹²² The degree of detail is inconsistent and many posters do not contain complete information, with some even lacking the name of the artist or the year of publication.
of pay of the artist could also come into consideration. In his 1932 essay ‘A worldwide achievement’, Klutsis noted that RABIS\textsuperscript{123} ‘directed a 25 per cent reduction in pay to artists and poster makers using the method of photomontage’.\textsuperscript{124} Yankovskaya and Mitchell observe that, after the Great Patriotic War, standard norms for pricing works of art were introduced. According to these rules, the larger an artistic canvas was in square metres, the higher the fee earned by the artist; topical compositions were paid higher than landscapes and still lifes; works with crowds of people paid higher than those with a single figure; a full-length portrait paid higher than smaller upper torsos; and a portrait of someone in uniform paid higher than the same person in civilian clothing.\textsuperscript{125} These incentives may understandably have led to a tendency towards gigantism. There was also considerable incentive to create works that would win prizes. The Stalin Prize First Class carried with it a bonus of 100,000 rubles and impacted on salaries and pensions,\textsuperscript{126} while exemplary work for the regime was acknowledged with access to improved non-communal living quarters.\textsuperscript{127}

### Stalin’s charisma

With the entire apparatus of cultural and artistic practice under centralised control, and production across all media generated by one officially endorsed methodology, the Soviet leadership was in an ideal position to saturate the marketplace with their product. The nature of this product was complex and all-encompassing, and was marketed as a new form of civilisation. In order for fundamental changes in behaviour and massive transformation of the landscape to occur, the population had to be engaged and mobilised to adopt the ideology (and goals and vision) of the leadership as their own. One of the primary strategies adopted by the Bolsheviks in order to achieve this was to endow the leader with a persona that symbolised abstracts,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} Rabouchee iskusstvo, or Worker’s Art, an organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Yankovskaya & Mitchell, ‘The economic dimensions of art in the Stalinist era’, p. 789.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 201.
\end{itemize}
such as Bolshevik values and ideology, as well as concrete entities such as the Party and the state. The leader had to appear charismatic, and this charisma had to endure in the long term, overcoming the perils inherent in the inevitable routinisation of charisma.

Despite Trotsky's (not entirely disinterested) description of Stalin as a provincial ‘mediocrity’, and socialist revolutionary Nikolai Sukhanov’s description of him as a ‘grey blur’, in the early years of the Bolshevik regime, there is ample evidence that many people found Stalin personally charming. Simon Sebag Montefiore has conducted extensive research in the newly opened archives and concludes that the foundation of Stalin's power in the Party was not fear but charm, with his close associates addressing him affectionately and informally, and able to disagree with him. Marshal Georgii Zhukov saw Stalin as thoughtful and attentive, Lavrenti Beria commented that ‘he dominated his entourage with his intelligence’, and Voroshilov wrote to Avel Enukidze in June 1933, describing Stalin as ‘remarkable’ and as possessing a ‘great mind’. The painter Evgeni Katsman was delighted by Stalin's hospitality, and Stalin's adopted son Artiom said he made ‘we children feel like adults and feel important’.

In his memoirs written in 1964, Ilia Ehrenburg recounts how Stalin

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128 Sukhanov was shot on Stalin's orders on 27 August 1939.
130 'Stalin possessed the dominant will among his magnates, but they also found his policies generally congenial. He was older than them all except President Kalinin, but the magnates used the informal “you” with him. Voroshilov, Molotov and Sergo [Ordzhonikidze] called him “Koba” … Mikoyan … called him Soso … in 1930, all these magnates, especially the charismatic and fiery Sergo Orzhonikidze, were allies, not protégés, all capable of independent action’ (S. Sebag Montefiore, Stalin: the court of the Red Tsar, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003, p. 49).
131 'The appearance of JV Stalin, his quiet voice, the concreteness and depth of his judgments, the attention with which he heard the report, made a great impression on me' (Zhukov, quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 42).
132 Beria, quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 42.
133 'A remarkable man, our Koba. It is simply incomprehensible how he can combine the great mind of the proletarian strategist, the will of a statesman and revolutionary activist, and the soul of a completely ordinary kind comrade … It is good that we have Koba' (RGASPI, f.667, op.1, d.17, ll.5–6, quoted in Kevin McDermott, ‘Archives, power and the ‘cultural turn’: reflections on Stalin and Stalinism’, Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, 2004, 5:1, pp. 5–24, p. 10). McDermott notes the possibility that Voroshilov may have been ‘subconsciously’ writing for a wider audience.
135 S Montefiore, Stalin, p. 42.
had a way of charming those to whom he talked, including influential writers Henri Barbusse, Rolland Romain and Lion Feuchtwanger. Writing in 1966, without the benefit of the archival material available today, Isaac Deutscher, a subscriber to Trotsky’s view of Stalin as a mediocrity, begrudgingly acknowledged some of the foundations of Stalin’s personal appeal as laying in his self-effacing modesty, his approachability and his ability to listen. Stalin’s personal charm, his apparent modesty, his high intelligence, and an ability to appear as an ‘everyman’, approachable and chameleon-like, provided a foundation upon which his charismatic persona could be built. However, these qualities alone are not enough to mobilise a population to undergo great sacrifices in the service of a grand vision. The charismatic leader must ultimately appear to have ‘superhuman’ qualities and none of the foibles and weaknesses that are the mark of the ordinary man.

From the days of Lenin and Trotsky, the Party leadership upheld the firm conviction that the ultimate goal of the communist utopia was worth any sacrifice. The Party had to be kept in power to guide this process at any cost. It was with this intent that Stalin and his intimates set about the deliberate task of manufacturing charisma around the person of the leader — a charismatic persona encompassed by

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136 ‘Barbusse wrote: “It can be said that in no one have Lenin’s thoughts and words been embodied better than Stalin.” After meeting him Romain Rolland said: “He is amazingly human.” Feuchtwanger thought himself a sceptic, an old stager. Stalin must have been laughing up his sleeve when he told Feuchtwanger how much he disliked having his portrait everywhere, but the old stager believed him’ (Ilya Ehrenburg, Men, years — life, vol. 5, The war, 1941–45, Tatiana Shebunina & Yvonne Kapp (trans.), London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1964, p. 305).

137 ‘What was striking in the General Secretary was that there was nothing striking about him. His almost impersonal personality seemed to be the ideal vehicle for the anonymous forces of class and party. His bearing seemed of the utmost modesty. He was more accessible to the average official or party man than the other leaders. He studiously cultivated his contacts with the people who in one way or another made and unmade reputations, provincial secretaries, popular satirical writers, and foreign visitors. Himself taciturn, he was unsurpassed at the art of patiently listening to others … His private life, too, was beyond reproach or suspicion’ (Isaac Deutscher, Stalin; a political biography, 2nd edn, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 275–76). In a similar vein, and with the benefit of archival material, J. Arch Getty observes that, from the earliest days of Party life, one of Stalin’s greatest strengths was his ability to work in a committee: ‘to listen, to moderate, to referee, to steer the discussion toward a consensus. This had earned him the respect, co-operation, and loyalty of senior Bolsheviks’ (‘Stalin as prime minister: power and the Politburo’, in Sarah Davies & James Harris (eds), Stalin: a new history, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 100).

the pseudonym ‘Stalin’. Stalin explicitly spoke out against the cult developing around himself\textsuperscript{139} and, as Sarah Davies documents, significantly edited the *Kratkii Kurs*\textsuperscript{140} so that it was less focused on Stalin and the other *vozhdi*.\textsuperscript{141} In a 1930 letter to an Old Bolshevik, Ia. M. Shatunovskii, Stalin stated:

> You speak of your ‘devotion’ to me. Perhaps that phrase slipped out accidentally. Perhaps. But if it isn’t an accidental phrase, I’d advise you to thrust aside the ‘principle’ of devotion to persons. It isn’t the Bolshevik way. Have devotion to the working class, its party, its state. That’s needed and good. But don’t mix it with devotion to persons, that empty and needless bauble of intellectuals.\textsuperscript{142}

On the basis of the archival information available, Davies concludes that, while Stalin was generally critical of his cult,\textsuperscript{143} he was not against the promotion of the leader as an embodiment of the cause and could see the advantages of the cult for the mobilisation of the ‘backward masses’.\textsuperscript{144} Davies summarises Stalin’s attitude to his cult as follows: “To close relatives he maintained that it was a necessary, if temporary, evil, to be tolerated for the sake of the “masses” who were accustomed to worshipping the tsar.”\textsuperscript{145}

Paradoxically, a major component of the cultic persona of Stalin was his personal modesty. Plamper observes that, unlike the contemporaneous cults of Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, which did not fabricate images of modesty, the Stalin cult was presented as ‘an oxymoron, a cult *malgré soi*’.\textsuperscript{146} Modesty was the primary personality trait listed in a 1939 publication for Pioneers, *Vozhatyi*,\textsuperscript{147} which described Stalin in the following manner:

\textsuperscript{140} *Istoriia Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi parti (bolshevikov) Kratkii kurs*, Moscow, Gospolitizdat, 1938. [History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik). Short Course.]
\textsuperscript{141} Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{142} I.V. Stalin, *Sochinenia*, 13, 1946–52, Moscow, Gospolitizdat, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{143} Davies cites numerous examples of Stalin’s detachment from his own cult, and of his apparent modesty (in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, pp. 29–30).
\textsuperscript{144} Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{145} Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{146} Plamper, *The Stalin cult*, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{147} Pioneer Leader, organ of the Komsomol Central Committee and the Central Council of the Pioneer Organisation.
Modesty and simplicity. Crystalline honesty and principled behavior in everything and always. Clarity of goals and toughness of character, overcoming all and every obstacle. Persistence and personal courage. These are the traits of character of great Stalin. These are the Bolshevik traits with which we should inoculate the Pioneers.\footnote{Vozhatyi 14, 1939, p. 5, cited in Catriona Kelly, ‘Riding the magic carpet: children and leader cult in the Stalin era’, The Slavic and East European Journal, 49:2, 2005, pp. 199–224, p. 201.}

Largely due to the Marxist distaste for glorification of the individual, Lenin’s abhorrence of any kind of cultish behaviour, and to general Bolshevik asceticism, Stalin had to appear as if he was actively discouraging the excesses of the adulation directed at him, which was always to seem as if coming from below.\footnote{Plamper contends that Stalin placed documents that demonstrated his personal modesty at the ‘easy-to-reach upper levels’ of the archives and that, on digging deeper into the archives, documents can be found suggesting Stalin’s ‘jealous control and expansion’ of his cult (Plamper, The Stalin cult, p. 124).} One useful mechanism for producing just such an effect was the Stalin Prize. The Stalin Prize was conceived in 1939 to coincide with Stalin’s 60th birthday celebrations and was first presented in 1941. The prizes were conceived as a Soviet equivalent to the Nobel Prize and, in addition to substantial financial and material rewards, also carried some (although ambivalent) symbolic capital. Artistic works that contributed to the genre of the leader cult enjoyed a ‘privileged’ status in the competition, with roughly half of the prizes in the field of painting awarded to works on the leader cult over the 13-year history of the prize.\footnote{Johnson, 'The Stalin Prize and the Soviet artist', p. 833.} Oliver Johnson argues that the Stalin Prizes were part of the modesty formula ‘whereby the vainglorious mechanisms of cult management were attributed to an independent panel of specialists, casting the leader himself as a passive or even reluctant beneficiary of spontaneous artistic celebration’.\footnote{Johnson, ‘The Stalin Prize and the Soviet artist’, p. 834.}

Although Stalin’s modesty was best conveyed through the medium of words, his visual image was also contrived to depict traits of humility that may appear at odds with the effusive aggrandisement occurring in posters. Until 1943, when he accepted military rank, Stalin appeared in posters and in public in a plain military-style tunic or unadorned greatcoat, usually wearing workman’s boots. This contrasted with portrayals of Lenin, who always appeared in suit and tie, and clearly as a member of the intelligentsia. Stalin was also frequently depicted with his hand in his jacket, in what the English-speaking world refers
to as the ‘Napoleonic pose’. Stalin sometimes adopted this pose in media photographs, which suggests that perhaps this was habitual or comfortable for him. While portrait painters and poster artists may have been copying nature when presenting Stalin in this manner, the prevalence and deliberateness of this gesture in media in which the original image is easily altered and manipulated, suggest that it conveyed a specific meaning. Of the 389 posters in the research sample, 21 depict Stalin with the hand-in-pose, spanning the years of his leadership from 1931 to 1951. Unlike in the English-speaking world, the gesture is not interpreted as ‘Napoleonic’ in Russia, and it makes little intuitive sense for Stalin to copy a gesture associated with Napoleon. In fact, as Arline Meyer notes, the ‘hand-in-waistcoat’ pose is encountered with relentless frequency in 18th-century English portraiture, possibly both because it was a habitual stance of men of breeding and because of the influence of classical statuary. Meyer traces classical references to the ‘hand withdrawn’ back to the actor, orator, and founder of a school of rhetoric, Aeschines of Macedon (390–331 BC), who claimed that speaking with the arm outside the cloak was considered ill-mannered. The gesture is discussed as a classical rhetorical gesture by John Bulwer in 1644 and by François Nivelon in 1737. Nivelon states that the ‘hand-in-waistcoat’ pose signifies ‘boldness tempered with modesty’, and Bulwer notes that ‘the hand restrained and kept in is an argument of modesty, and frugal pronunciation, a still and quiet action suitable to a mild and remiss declamation’. Five of Stalin’s appearances in posters in this pose involve Stalin depicted as a statue, and Stalin took pride in his mild, anti-oratorical mode of speech. A reading of this gesture that suggests ‘boldness tempered with modesty’ is in keeping with the persona created for Stalin in Soviet propaganda.

152 Several conversations that I had with Russians in 2013 revealed that none of them associated this pose with Napoleon. No one was able to assign it any clear meaning other than to suggest that it may be associated with military leadership. As Stalin was depicted in this pose long before he accepted military rank, and while the Warrior archetype was primarily associated with Kliment Voroshilov, it is unlikely that the gesture was meant to be interpreted in this way.


154 See John Bulwer’s double essay ‘Chirologia, the natural language of the hand’, and ‘Chironomia, the art of manual rhetoric’, in Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand. Composed of the speaking motions, and discoursing gestures thereof. Whereunto is added Chironomia: or, the art of manuall rhetoricke. Consisting of the naturall expressions, digested by art in the hand, as the chiefest instrument of eloquence, London, Thomas Harper, 1644.

155 François Nivelon, The rudiments of genteel behaviour, 1737.

156 Meyer, ‘Re-dressing classical statuary’.
Stalin’s biography

The personality cult of Stalin is often seen as beginning in earnest with Stalin’s 50th birthday celebrations on 21 December 1929. This date is interesting because neither the date nor the year correspond with Stalin’s real birthdate, which was 18 December 1878. Thus, Stalin, for reasons of his own, chose to falsify his birthday, although all of his early records, such as those from the seminary, clearly show the 1878 date. By 1929 Stalin had a much firmer grip on the reins of power than he did in 1928. Perhaps 50th birthday celebrations and the cultic phenomena surrounding them were simply more politically expedient in 1929 than the previous year. Such creative and expedient use of biographical data came to be a prominent feature of the Stalin era, although it should also be noted that many monarchs today have their birthdays publicly celebrated on a different date to their actual date of birth.

During Stalin’s rule, universal education programs initiated by the Bolsheviks paid off with major improvements in literacy and cultural exposure of the general population. In literature, the genres of the novel and biography became immensely popular, with biography (or the biopic) forming a major genre of film. Novels showed an everyman following the path of enlightenment. Biographies presented in microcosm through the titular figure the life and history of the Party. The popular 1934 film *Chapaev* was made about a real man, Vasilii Chapaev, and lay claim to historical truth. When Chapaev’s family saw the film they protested that it bore little resemblance to actuality. Stalin was aware of this when he saw the film and made a

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159 Jeffrey Brooks speculates that Stalin may have wanted to match the age of his ‘arch-rival’ Trotsky, or may have wished to ‘elevate[d] himself in a way that would have been difficult a year earlier’ (*Thank you, Comrade Stalin!*, p. 60).
now famous comment afterwards: ‘They’re lying like eyewitnesses’. The directors of the film explained the higher notion of truth that was being served in their portrayal of Chapaev: ‘having rejected narrow biography [biografichnost’], we were brought to a more complete realization of the true features of Chapaev through an entire artistic process. His son and daughter, having watched the film, recognized their father in it — only after several viewings!’

A major motivating force for the creation of biographies of the leaders, especially Stalin, was the lack of knowledge of Party members about the identities and roles of their own leadership. This was regarded as a failing in propaganda work and even in the mid-1930s members were expelled from the Party on these grounds. In 1939 a 16-page publication titled *In commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of J.V. Stalin: what to write about the life and activities of Comrade Stalin* was published to assist writers of birthday greetings to Stalin. The chapter headings provide an outline of the events considered important in the life of the *vokhd’: ‘The revolutionary decades of Comrade Stalin in the Caucasus’, ‘Comrade Stalin in the period of preparation and construction of the October Revolution’, ‘The heroic struggle of Comrade Stalin on the front of the Civil War’, ‘Stalin — the great organizer of the victory of socialism in our country’, and ‘Stalin — the great continuer of the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin’. A similar guide for the writers of children’s letters was published in a pedagogical journal. These publications highlight the focus on a standardised and formulaic biography for didactic purposes.

Soviet writers attempted to produce a satisfactory biography of Stalin for several years. In the 1940s, Stalin believed that biography had a defined role to play in the education of the Soviet public. While cadres should now be educated in the scientific laws of Marxism–Leninism through a study of theory and ideology in the collected works of Lenin and Stalin, these were still too sophisticated for ‘the masses’, who were best served through the exemplary lives outlined

2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

in biography. In 1946 Stalin asked that a new biography of Lenin be prepared: ‘this is a proven way of helping the simple people begin their study of Marxism.’

The official version of Stalin’s biography was published in 1947. It was largely myth. Once again, this approach to biography has historical precedents, most notably in the hagiographies of medieval saints in the Russian Orthodox Church. As Clark points out: ‘The 1917 Revolution, the Civil War, and certain crucial moments in Stalin’s life became a kind of canonized Great Time that conferred an exalted status on all who played a major part in them (World War II has since been added to the list).’ Indeed, as early as 1926, in a speech delivered at a welcoming committee in Tbilisi, Stalin described his life thus far as structured around *skitanii* (wandering) and a series of three baptisms: the first was amongst the Tbilisi workers where he learned about practical work; the second was as a fighter amongst the workers of Baku between 1905 and 1907; and the third was in Leningrad amongst the Russian revolutionaries and involved the guidance of Lenin.

Catriona Kelly’s research into the Stalin cult for children shows that the version of the cult aimed at children was not quintessentially different to that for adults and functioned through a ‘trickle-down effect’ through the Komsomol and Pioneers. Children were encouraged to treat Stalin as a role model and his biography was essentially a condensed form of the hagiography for adults. Key points included Stalin’s exemplary childhood, his study at the seminary, his work in the underground, his arrests and exiles, the first meeting with Lenin, his role in the Revolution and the Civil War, and his achievements as *vozhd’* — the

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165 RGASPI, 558/11/1122/3-4, cited in Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 36; RGASPI, 629/1/54/23-26, cited in Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 37.
166 RGASPI, 629/1/54/23-26, cited in Davies, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 37.
170 The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (or VLKSM) for youth aged 14 to 28 years. It was originally formed in 1918 as the Russian Young Communist League, or RKSM.
171 The Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organisation for children aged 10 to 14, founded in 1922 and dissolved in 1991. Pioneers wore red scarves and undertook activities similar to the scouts. Children under nine years old could join the Little Octobrists.
victory of socialism, the achievements of the Red Army and Soviet aviation, the 1936 constitution and the Stakhanovite movement. In the Short biography, Stalin is even credited with saving Lenin’s life, making him a true hero:

It was Stalin who saved the precious life of Lenin for the Party, for the Soviet people and for humanity at large, by vigorously resisting the proposal of the traitors Kamenev, Rykov and Trotsky that Lenin should appear for trial before the courts of the counter-revolutionary Provisional Government.

The biography crafted for Stalin in propaganda posters (and indeed in all other artforms) relates to Stalin’s Bolshevik leader persona. The man Dzhugashvili disappeared from view many years prior to Stalin’s assumption of the leadership. As a member of the Bolshevik underground he adopted, among others, the pseudonym ‘Koba’, from a heroic and avenging character in the 1883 novel The patricide by Alexander Kazbegi. Some time later, possibly around 1910, he adopted the pseudonym ‘Stalin’, which derives from the Russian word сталь — steel. This latter persona was preserved throughout his leadership until his death in 1953.

In Young Stalin, Montefiore suggests that Stalin needed to create a falsified public persona because of his early involvement in ‘the dirty business’ of politics, including criminal activity in his underground work for the Bolshevik Party. The often clumsy transparency of the fabrication of an alternate past has led to a common reactive tendency to dismiss as falsehood all claims that Stalin had achieved anything in his early Party days, which is as erroneous in one direction as the cultic claims are in the other. While the desire to muddy the waters of his Georgian past may have been one motivating factor behind the creation of Stalin’s mythic biography, it can be argued that the formulaic structure of the created biography and the tenets of the

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172 See Kelly, ‘Riding the magic carpet’, p. 201.
174 A 2003 exhibition curated by Tatiana Kurmanovkaya at the Museum of Russian Contemporary History in Moscow bore the title Stalin: man and symbol.
175 Montefiore argues that Stalin’s personal history had to remain hidden ‘either because it was too gangsterish for a great, paternalistic statesman or because it was too Georgian for a Russian leader’ (Young Stalin, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2007, p. xxvii).
socialist–realist method suggest that its primary purpose was didactic. It mattered little whether or not Stalin’s image in propaganda had any but the scantest basis in reality. What did matter was that the persona of the leader could inspire, exhort, and provide security for the populace and, perhaps most important of all, that the huge unwieldy masses from a variety of ethnicities, classes, backgrounds, and levels of education, all harnessed their energies in the direction of unanimous, uniform goals.

Stalin and the enemy

The *raison d’être* of the vanguard socialist government is to fight and win class war, prior to the eventual withering away of the state apparatus. By its very nature the legitimacy of the socialist government is predicated on the existence of an enemy. If the enemy disappears and one wishes to maintain power, an enemy must be invented. The Soviet Union was indeed born out of real conflict and struggle; was surrounded by hostile forces before, during and after the Great Patriotic War; and was under varying degrees of threat from the enemy within, the demonisation of which served its own propaganda purposes. As anthropologist Philip Smith has observed, the symbolic coding of charismatic leadership hinges on binary codings and salvation narratives:

images of ‘evil’ must be present in the forest of symbols surrounding each charismatic leader. There must be something for them to fight against, something from which their followers can be saved … . As a general rule of thumb, charismatic authority will attain its greatest force when images of evil are at their most threatening.

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177 Gill lists the following enemies of the people at the end of the 1920s: the Industrial Party, Right Opportunists, Trotskyists, skeptics about the first Five-Year Plan, spies, kulaks, priests, drunkards, bureaucrats, shirkers, wreckers, capitalists, former White Guardists and international capital (Gill, *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, p. 96).

The demonisation of opposition into the hated enemy — ‘saboteurs, Swastika-bearing Russian Orthodox priests and even Leon Trotsky himself became the vilified demons of the Soviet cosmology, to be cast out and destroyed mercilessly’179 — works on several levels. As historian David Hoffmann has noted, it may have arisen from the intrinsic mentality of Stalin and the other Party leaders, which had been shaped by the Revolution and Civil War and in which vanquishing opponents was literally a matter of life and death.180 Stalin once said to Lev Kamenev: ‘The greatest delight is to mark one’s enemy, prepare everything, avenge oneself thoroughly and then go to sleep.’181 Stalin was also quite pragmatic about the killing of large numbers of innocent people in order to make sure that the enemy was destroyed.182 In a propaganda sense, at the most basic level, demonisation served to divide the population into ‘us’ and ‘them’, encouraging citizens to identify with people and values that belong to ‘us’, and reject alien values as belonging to ‘them’. Abbott Gleason,183 Victoria Bonnell,184 and Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii185 all observe that polarisation is a particular and longstanding feature of Russian culture, both in the upper classes, and among the peasantry. In Soviet

181 Quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 235.
182 ‘If our cadres are weakly trained, this means that the state is at risk. Take the case of the followers of Bukharin. Their leaders, losing their roots among the people, began to cooperate with foreign intelligence. But besides their leaders, there was a mass following, and they were not all spies and intelligence agents. We could assume that ten–fifteen–twenty thousand and maybe more were Bukharin’s people. We could consider that the same number or more were Trotsky’s people. But were all these spies? Of course not. But what happened to them? They were people who could not accept the sharp turn to the collective farm; they could not fathom this change, because they were not politically trained, they did not know the laws of socialist and economic development … For that reason we lost a part of our cadres, but we gained a huge cadre of workers, and we received new cadres and we won over the people to the collective farms and we won over the peasantry’ (Stalin, quoted in Oleg Khlevniuk, Alexander Vatlin & Paul Gregory (eds), Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo TsK KP(b) 1923–1938, vol. 3, Moscow, Rosspen, 2007, p. 686).
184 Victoria Bonnell has an excellent chapter on Soviet demonology in propaganda under Lenin and Stalin in Iconography of Power, p. 187.
times, argues Gleason, under a dialectical Marxist ideology, binary oppositions between what was deemed ‘ours’ and ‘not ours’ were only intensified.\(^1\)\(^8\)\(^6\)

Silke Satjukov and Rainer Gries note that a clear conception of both the hero and the demon is necessary to assist the individual in adopting the correct ideological stance under the various forms of class struggle.\(^1\)\(^8\)\(^7\) From the beginning of the battle for succession after Lenin’s death, Stalin presented his policies as being those of the Party, and those of his rivals as belonging to the ‘factional opposition’.\(^1\)\(^8\)\(^8\) First Trotskii was demonised. Even whilst under attack at the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924, Trotskii upheld the notion of Party unity, identifying himself as one of ‘us’.\(^1\)\(^8\)\(^9\) Later, Kamenev and Grigorii Zinoviev were portrayed as belonging to the Left opposition and, after this, Nikolai Bukharin and his followers were vilified as the Right opposition. Erik van Ree argues that Stalin saw the Party as an organic entity and had a ‘mystical’ view of Party unity that aimed at: ‘the complete, psychological submersion of the individual party member in the larger collective.’\(^1\)\(^9\)\(^0\) In 1928 Iurii Piatikov stated: ‘We are a party of people who make the impossible possible … and if the party demands it … we will be able by an act of will to expel from our brains in twenty-four hours ideas that we have held for years. Yes, I will see black where I thought I saw white, because for me there is no life outside the party.’\(^1\)\(^9\)\(^1\) Stalin shared with other Old Bolsheviks a view of the Party as being the central guiding ideological force in the journey towards communism, making factionalism, by definition,

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\(^1\)\(^8\) Gleason, ‘Views and re-views’.
\(^1\)\(^8\)\(^9\) ‘Comrades, none of us wants to be or can be right against the party. In the last analysis, the party is always right, because the party is the sole historical instrument that the working class possesses for the solution of its fundamental tasks … . It is only possible to be right with the party and through it since history has not created any other way to determine the correct position’ (L.D. Trotskii, \textit{Thirteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): stenographic report}, Moscow, State Press for Political Literature, 1936, pp. 158–59).
\(^1\)\(^9\)\(^0\) Erik van Ree, ‘Stalin’s organic theory of the party’, \textit{Russian Review}, 52:1, 1993, pp. 43–57, p. 43.
\(^1\)\(^9\)\(^1\) Quoted in Mikhail Heller & Aleksandr M. Nekrich, \textit{Utopia in power, the history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the present}, New York, Summit Books, 1986, p. 289. Piatikov, a former secretary of the Central Committee, was expelled by the Party for Trotskyist–Zinovievite leanings, but was reinstated in 1928 after renouncing Trotskyism. He was executed in 1937.
intolerable. Once discussion was over and a decision had been taken, all Party members must fall into line behind that decision and present a unified front to the world. Any dissent was seen as treacherous and the dissenter publicly labelled an ‘enemy of the people’. In 1937, 200,000 people braved temperatures of –27°C in Red Square to hear the court’s verdict in the show trials denouncing the opposition as followers of ‘Judas–Trotsky’.

Stalin was able to go further than merely situating himself on the side of morality and the correct path. Stalin’s propaganda set him up as indispensable, because only he could identify the numerous enemies of the regime. Political scientist Jeremy Paltiel argues that this apparent ability became the mechanism by which all power came to reside in the person of Stalin. Where, prior to the purges, the Stalin image had symbolised the Party and the state, the destruction of the Party apparatus during the purges left only one authoritative certainty — Stalin himself. One of the primary effects of the purges of the late 1930s was to strengthen the identification of citizens with the leader, and to increase hostility towards enemies. This occurred most overtly through publicity and propaganda that identified ‘enemies of the people’, put them on trial, found them guilty, and then punished or executed them. Not everyone, however, believed in the guilt of all of those put on trial, particularly as more and more of the population were devoured by the machinery of the purge, and people were asked to accept that a high proportion of the upper echelons of the Soviet hierarchy, including most of the Old Bolsheviks who had been responsible for the success of the Revolution, were traitors who had been actively working against the regime all along. Kulagina rejected outright the notion that her husband and her father could possibly be guilty:

192 Montefiore, Stalin, p. 214.
194 The memoirs of an Old Bolshevik, ‘V.K.’, are quoted by Roy Medvedev to illustrate the point that, although many did not believe in the guilt of all those accused during the show trials, some still supported the Terror on principle: ‘Of course I never imagined that Bukharin and Trotsky were Gestapo agents or that they wanted to kill Lenin; moreover, it was clear to me Stalin never believed it either. But I considered the trials of 1937–38 to be a far-sighted political tactic, and thought that Stalin had done the right thing in resolving to discredit all forms of opposition once and for all in such grim fashion. After all, we were a besieged fortress; we had to close ranks; there was no room for doubts or uncertainty. Did all those theoretical controversies have any meaning for the “broad masses”? Most “ordinary people” could not even
the more time goes on, the stronger I believe that he [Klutsis] got caught up in an absurd moment when multitudes of other innocent people got caught up as well, if you think about it logically — surely it can’t be that every third person in the Soviet Union is guilty — I know my father, I know my husband — I know them to be men of great honor, I know that Gustav would not stand even the least critical talk about our country, always tried to argue the opposite, I know how he worked, how he labored, how proud he was of all our achievements, I know how self-sacrificing he is, how truly honest — not just in word like many people who are now thriving.195

Recent work in the field of terror management theory196 in psychology offers a potential explanation for the strengthening of support for the leadership despite the evident absurdity of many of the charges laid against purge victims. The extensive reach of the purges, like other acts of terror, is likely to have induced mortality salience in the Soviet population. That is, seeing so many people arrested, fearing footsteps in the night and the knock on the door, knowing that the penalty for being found guilty of treason was often execution, is likely to have reminded people of their own mortality. Experimental research by Florette Cohen and Sheldon Solomon, published in 2011, examines how political preferences are altered when existential concerns are aroused.197 By priming subjects to become aware of their own mortality, sometimes subliminally, Cohen and Solomon established that mortality salience promotes support for charismatic leaders who are seen to share the subject’s cultural world views and increases aggression against those who hold rival beliefs.198

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196 A field of research in psychology, founded by Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg and Sheldon Solomon in 1991, based on the writings of Ernest Becker in the 1970s, which suggests that ‘existential concerns have a unique and potent effect on support for political candidates, voting intentions, and attitudes about domestic and foreign policy’ (Florette Cohen & Sheldon Solomon, ‘The politics of mortal terror’, Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2011, 20:316, pp. 316–20, p. 316).
An important component of the formula outlined by Cohen and Sheldon is that the charismatic leader shares the cultural world views of the citizens. Cultural world views are unlikely to be literally true, but are ‘shared fictions’ sustained by social consensus which ‘minimize death anxiety by imbuing the world with order, meaning, and permanence and by providing a set of standards of behavior that, if satisfied, confer self-esteem and the promise of symbolic and/or literal immortality’. The generation of shared cultural world views is very much the work of propaganda, which, as Nicholas O’Shaughnessy points out, ‘does not necessarily ask for belief. It is an invitation to share a fantasy’. The method of socialist realism was particularly conducive to creating a fantasised reality, while the saturation of Soviet public space with propaganda images illustrating the new communist reality provided an all-encompassing world view that was intricately entwined with the persona of Stalin. Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer provide evidence that the general mores and values of the Soviet leadership were shared by the general populace, with opposition arising only when these were not implemented in practice. ‘The simultaneous juxtaposition through news media and propaganda of Stalin’s role in delivering all the benefits of outstanding Soviet achievements and a newly joyous life with the presence of pervasive threatening hostile forces all around, played on both overt and subconscious mechanisms to cement the identification of the people with their leader.

There is another way in which mortality salience was constantly invoked in Stalinist propaganda — the almost constant presence of Lenin. Throughout the years of his leadership, Stalin was consistently depicted alongside Lenin. Lenin’s image held the potential for bolstering support for Stalin’s leadership at the level of the unconscious mind because Lenin was dead, and was frequently depicted as ‘dead’; that is, in apothesised form. Posters such as those that urged ‘Be as

201 ‘Popular values do not clash with most of the values implied in the Soviet system itself. On the contrary, there is a general marked congruence between popular values and the goals the system purports to pursue’ (Alex Inkeles & Raymond Augustine Bauer, The Soviet citizen: daily life in a totalitarian regime, Harvard University Press, 1959, cited in Davies, Popular opinion in Stalin’s Russia, p. 185).
the great Lenin was’ or depicted Stalin delivering his elegiac oath made it impossible to ignore human mortality, while at the same time promising salvation and redemption through following Lenin’s teachings (as interpreted by Stalin), a powerful pairing of emotions with a long tradition in the church.

After the murder of Sergei Kirov in 1934, Stalin’s image also served as a reminder of human mortality. Michael Smith argues that one of the many ‘mantles’ worn by Stalin, one which is often overlooked, is the mantle of ‘martyr survivor’ — ‘the one who mourned, who suffered with the sadness of loss … he was the one who literally carried the remains of his fallen comrades to their premature graves’. Stalin was not only depicted in propaganda posters alongside the spirit of Lenin, but was also pictured in the press standing guard over Lenin’s body and carrying Lenin’s coffin to the crypt. Stalin as a mourner was to become a frequent theme in the newspapers. He appeared in Pravda as a pallbearer 14 times helping to bury Mikhail Frunze, Feliks Dzerzhinskii, Kirov, Gor’kii, Zhdanov and, indeed, his own wife, Nadia. Kirov’s murder led to the unravelling of a vast conspiracy that was to dominate the media for the next four years. The narrative to emerge from this act was that a wave of assassinations had been planned, with Kirov, Gor’kii and Valerian Kuibyshev successfully executed, while Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov and Kaganovich were all assassins’ targets. This imminent threat of death, which gave impetus to the purges, meant that Stalin’s image continually invoked mortality salience, while his propaganda presented him as the means to salvation that would literally manifest in the deliverance of the communist utopia. Even without the overt use of Christian symbolism, Stalin’s persona became increasingly Christlike, encapsulating in the one person both the potential for martyrdom and the promise of salvation.

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202 Vasilii Elkin, ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, 1938 (Fig. 2.10); A.I. Madorskii, ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, 1938 (Fig. 2.11); A.I. Madorskii, ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, 1939 (Fig. 2.12). Discussed in greater detail below.

203 Vladimir Kaidalov, ‘Departing from us, comrade. Lenin urged us to strengthen and extend the union republics. We swear to you, comrade. Lenin, that we will fulfil with honour your behest’, 1940; Vladimir Kaidalov, ‘Departing from us, comrade. Lenin urged us to strengthen and extend the union republics. We swear to you, comrade. Lenin, that we will fulfil with honour your behest’, 1951.


205 Plamper, The Stalin cult, p. 42.

Plamper conducted extensive research into the portrayal of Stalin in *Pravda* during his leadership and has noted that, in 1936, in preparation for the show trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev, a number of articles appeared on the theme of ‘Stalin in danger’, with titles like ‘Take care of and guard Comrade Stalin’, and ‘Take care of your leaders like a military banner’. In 1937 and 1938 there was a ‘precipitous drop’ in Stalin pictures and Plamper posits that this was most likely to avoid linking him with the purges although, whenever violence in politics increased, there was an increase in ‘love and tenderness’ towards Stalin. Stalin was also kept out of pictorial representations of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact. In fact, even in *samokritika* rituals, Stalin was never the focus of attention. He sat off to one side, rather than in the centre, and there were no portraits of him on display.

Stalin was only occasionally depicted in posters alongside images of ‘the enemy’, with most of these occurring during the Great Patriotic War. He was frequently depicted with heroes in the form of other celebrated leaders, Stakhanovites, Arctic explorers and record-breaking pilots, and workers and peasants leading everyday heroic lives. By separating Stalin’s image from pictures of violence or the enemy, and reinforcing Stalin’s heroic status through news articles and the attribution of great Soviet feats in aviation, exploration and construction to Stalin’s inspiration and intervention, the propaganda mechanism was able to clearly delineate ‘us’ from ‘them’, to outline the correct ideological stance for the citizen, to boost approval ratings of the leader through the subconscious mechanism of mortality salience, and to depict Stalin as indispensable to the nation as the only person capable of identifying the numerous enemies trying to destroy the socialist experiment.

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210 See Chapter Four for a further exploration of this subject.
211 Jay Bergman argues that Stalin ensured that the timing of the first Moscow show trial was fixed to coincide with Valerii Pavlovich Chkalov’s record-breaking flight in order that the two events could be juxtaposed in the media (‘Valerii Chkalov: Soviet pilot as new Soviet man’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33:1, 1998, pp. 135–52, p. 138).
The cult of Lenin

The cult of Lenin, which flourished after his death in 1924, served as a model for that of Stalin, while also coexisting with it.\textsuperscript{212} By linking himself to Lenin, Stalin promoted his candidacy for leadership, and provided legitimacy for his leadership after he consolidated power in his own hands. The development of the Lenin cult was supremely important to Stalin, because the cult of Lenin could be used as a means by which what Andrew Spira calls the ‘religious energy of the people’ could be directed at the Party ‘without appearing to direct it towards himself’.\textsuperscript{213} Indeed, the primary initial \textit{raison d’être} for the creation of the Lenin cult, as Lenin was increasingly forced out of political life due to his illness, was the transfer of charisma to the Party. When a few years later Stalin consolidated his leadership, the focus of the cult remained on the Party, however the Party itself came to be increasingly symbolised by the persona of Stalin. In many ways too, as Alice Mocanescu points out in her article on the cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Lenin’s cult, attached as it was to someone who was already dead, provided an opportunity to test out the response of the population and their level of acceptance of certain solutions.\textsuperscript{214} Eventually the propaganda saw Lenin and Stalin become merged into one hyphenated identity of Lenin–Stalin (somewhat reminiscent of the entity Marx–Engels), although Stalin also came to be celebrated as an extraordinary individual in his own right.

The process of deification of Lenin was a result of motivating factors from both ‘above’ and ‘below’ — that is, the adulation of Lenin derived from both the genuine feelings of grief experienced by the public at the loss of their charismatic leader, and the overt actions of the leadership to portray Lenin as immortal, and to place his persona outside the confines of time and space. The cult of Lenin had quasi-religious overtones. A personality cult began to grow around Lenin after he survived an assassination attempt by Fania Kaplan on 30 August 1918. Zinoviev used religious concepts in a speech he made about Lenin to the Petrograd Soviet on 6 September 1918, which was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{212} Indeed, Lenin’s cult persisted long after Stalin’s cult was denounced and suppressed.
  \item \textsuperscript{213} Andrew Spira, \textit{The avant-garde icon: Russian avant-garde art and the icon painting tradition}, Aldershot, Lund Humphries/Ashgate, 2008, p. 200.
\end{itemize}
then published in an edition of 200,000: ‘He is really the chosen one of millions. He is leader by the grace of God. He is the authentic figure of a leader such as is born once in 500 years …’. Editor of Bednota and director of Agitprop, Lev Sosnovskii, described Lenin as ‘Christlike’ in Petrogradskaia Pravda on 1 September 1918 and endowed Lenin with a Christlike dual nature, both man and god: ‘Ilich is the mortal man and Lenin is the immortal leader and universal symbol,’ whilst suggesting that the wounding of Lenin was akin to the voluntary sacrifice of a man who consciously made himself vulnerable. The Central Committee issued a written statement on Lenin’s death that was distributed in millions of copies:

Lenin lives in the soul of every member of our party. Every member of our party is a particle of Lenin. Our entire communist family is a collective embodiment of Lenin. Lenin lives in the heart of every honest worker. Lenin lives in the heart of every poor peasant.

Writing in 1926, Malevich anticipated the full potential of the cult of Lenin:

The artists created a reality of Christ which did not exist … They will also create a portrait of Lenin in the future … In the image he has been transposed from material existence into sanctity, he has emerged from materialistic communism into spiritual religious communism, he rises above the materialistic plan of the action; like God he orders matter to take on a new order of relationships in his name.

… All production must serve the new church, for everything that is born now is born in Leninism, every step is born on the path of Leninism, Lenin is in everything, no step can be taken without Lenin, just as no goal can be reached without God.

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215 Zinoviev quoted in Bown, Art under Stalin, p. 29.
217 Quoted in Tumarkin, Lenin lives!, p. 148.
Prior to Lenin’s incapacitation and death, it was the writings of Marx and Engels that held the status of dogma for the Bolsheviks, while Lenin the revolutionary was seen primarily as a man of deed and action.\textsuperscript{219} Lenin’s teachings and writings became collectively known as ‘Leninism’, a term that appears to have been first used in January 1923,\textsuperscript{220} when Lenin was already politically sidelined due to ill health. While effusive praise of Lenin had always occurred in the public arena, both Tumarkin and Robert Tucker mark the shift in emphasis in which Lenin’s words were elevated to the status of dogma as beginning at the Twelfth Party Congress in April 1923 as part of the power struggles already occurring within the Politburo and Central Committee in Lenin’s absence.\textsuperscript{221} In Kamenev’s opening speech at the congress he stated: ‘We know only one antidote against any crisis, against any wrong decision: the teaching of Vladimir Ilyich.’\textsuperscript{222}

In 1923 the Lenin Institute was established (opening formally in 1924) to collect and protect Lenin’s writings. In his tribute to Lenin dated 22 January 1924, Trotsky articulated the question: ‘How shall we continue?’ and answered on behalf of the mourning nation, ‘With the lamp of Leninism in our hands’.\textsuperscript{223} Adherence, devotion and demonstrable loyalty to Leninism became the sole criterion for legitimacy as each of the key players in the power struggle sought to prove that he was the truest pupil and disciple of Lenin. In a 1931 interview with German biographer Emil Ludwig, Stalin described Lenin as a brave ‘mountain eagle’ who stood ‘head and shoulders’ above other socialist leaders.\textsuperscript{224} In similar fashion to the stories of

\textsuperscript{219} For example, In March/April 1924, revolutionary writer Viktor Serge was still attempting to argue that Lenin was not primarily a writer: ‘Lenin is no writer: he only writes out of necessity, exactly what is needed for daily activity, with no more regard for form or style than is absolutely necessary to attain his aim: to convince, to clarify, to refute, to dissuade, or to discredit, as the case may be. His style, bereft of any literary pretensions, has the simple straightforwardness of the spoken word … Lenin, so intransigent a Marxist, is no dogmatist. For is not dogma always the resort of cowardly or weak spirits, incapable of adapting themselves to reality? (‘Lenin in 1917’ (March/April 1924), originally published in French in \textit{Faits et Documents}, no. 2, 1925, Al Richardson (trans.), www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1924/xx/lenin.html#f22 (accessed 16 Jul. 2012)).

\textsuperscript{220} Tumarkin, \textit{Lenin lives!}, p. 120.


\textsuperscript{222} Tucker, \textit{Stalin as revolutionary}, p. 279.


\textsuperscript{224} ‘When I’ve compared him with the other leaders of our party, it’s always seemed to me that Lenin stood head and shoulders above his comrades-in-arms — Plekhanov, Martov, Aksel’rod
other child heroes, stories of Grandpa Lenin’s exemplary youth were manufactured and packaged into an instructional narrative aimed at young children, encouraging them to study diligently and act with integrity. The image of a curly-headed young Lenin became the badge and banner of the Oktiabriata and children pledged their loyalty under this banner.

Not everyone fell under Lenin’s spell. Writing in *Novaya Zhizn’*, just weeks after the October Revolution, Gor’kii was scathing about Lenin’s character and attitude to the masses, whilst also acknowledging some of his outstanding personal qualities. Though supremely confident in the righteousness and necessity of the Bolshevik line, Lenin was always publicly and vehemently opposed to manifestations of hero-worship around his person. Old Bolshevik and contemporary of Lenin, Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich claimed that Lenin was appalled by what he read about himself in the newspapers after the 1918 assassination attempt. Despite Lenin’s objections to his cult, Tumarkin sees the Lenin persona created by the cult as being wholly in line with Lenin’s and others — and that in comparison with them, Lenin was not simply one of the leaders, but a leader of the highest sort, a mountain eagle who did not know fear in battle and who bravely led the party ahead along the unknown paths of the Russian revolutionary movement’ (J.V. Stalin, ‘Talk with the German author Emil Ludwig’, 13 December 1931, Hari Kumar (trans.), in J.V. Stalin, *Works*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, vol. 13, pp. 106–25, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/dec/13.htm (accessed 12 Jul. 2012)).

225 The Oktiabriata was formed in 1923–24 for children born in 1917, and was a precursor to the Pioneers (the V.I. Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organisation). Dutiful and successful children were expected to progress through the Oktiabriata to the Pioneers and then onto the Komsomol, before becoming adult Party members.

226 ‘I, a young pioneer of the Soviet Union, in the presence of my comrades solemnly promise to love my Soviet Motherland passionately, and to live, learn and struggle as the great Lenin bade us and as the Communist Party teaches us’ (Pioneers’ Promise quoted at www.pwhce.org/doc1rus.html (accessed 18 Jul. 2012)).

227 *New Life*.

228 ‘Lenin himself, of course, is a man of exceptional strength. For twenty-five years he stood in the front rank of those who fought for the triumph of socialism. He is one of the most prominent and striking figures of international social democracy; a man of talent, he possesses all the qualities of a “leader” and also the lack of morality necessary for this role, as well as an utterly pitiless attitude, worthy of a nobleman, toward the lives of the popular masses … he considers himself justified in performing with the Russian people a cruel experiment which is doomed to failure beforehand’ (Maxim Gorky, ‘“Untimely thoughts”, Novaya Zhizn, 177, November 10, 1917’, *Untimely thoughts: essays on revolution, culture and the Bolsheviks, 1917–18*, Herman Ermolaev (trans.), New York, Paul S. Eriksson, Inc, 1968, p. 88).

229 Bonch-Bruevich quoted Lenin: ‘It is shameful to read … they exaggerate everything, call me a genius, some kind of special person … All our lives we have waged an ideological struggle against the glorification of the personality, of the individual; long ago we settled the problem of heroes. And suddenly here again is a glorification of the individual!’ (quoted in Tumarkin, *Lenin lives!*, p. 90).
view of himself: ‘The object of his cult — an immortal Lenin who personifies the Communist Party and is the author of the guiding line to socialism — is the reflection of Lenin’s conception of himself evident in his writings, in the organization of the party he founded and led, and in his style of leadership.’ 230 Lenin’s stance of public modesty and asceticism, and disavowals of the excesses of his cult, were later adopted by Stalin in relation to his own cult, and may form part of the perceived correct persona for an eminent Bolshevik leader.

Establishing lineage

The actions that were taken to immortalise Lenin after his death can be seen as a key part of the strategy employed by the leadership to legitimate the Bolshevik Party by demonstrating continuity with Lenin’s leadership. After Lenin’s death, there was no clear charismatic candidate to take his place. Trotsky appeared to many to be the most likely candidate to seize Lenin’s mantle, but he was ill and far away from Moscow when Lenin died, and was evidently tricked by Stalin’s faction into missing Lenin’s funeral.231

Within the context of the struggle for succession that occurred after Lenin’s death, the personality cult of Lenin became a vehicle to power and legitimacy for any candidate who could successfully prove his indisputable lineage to the man-god. Tucker makes the purpose of this strategy clear: ‘Stalin followed the strategy of cult building via the assertion of Lenin’s infallibility. By making the party’s previous vozhd’ an iconographic figure beyond criticism, Stalin … implicitly nominated the successor-vozhd’ for similar treatment.’ 232

Although Stalin certainly made use of the Lenin cult, both as a model for his own cultic rituals and as a means to promote his leadership, research in the Soviet archives by Benno Ennker 233 has established that, contrary to claims by historians like Pomper, Tumarkin and

230  Tumarkin, Lenin lives!, p. 25.
Tucker, Stalin was not directly involved in the creation of the cult of Lenin. The Commission for the Immortalisation of the Memory of V.I. Lenin was headed by Molotov and had Voroshilov as a member. Both were close comrades of Stalin, and Voroshilov was head of the Red Army, a patron of painting in general and of the artists Isaak Brodskii and Evgeni Katsman in particular, and was thus centrally involved in the generation of first the Lenin cult and then the cult of Stalin.234 Once Stalin had consolidated his leadership after the battle for succession, his propaganda built on the cult of Lenin and it was certainly in Stalin’s best interests to allow the cult of Lenin to flourish.

The appeal to an established lineage is a phenomenon that occurs throughout the history of charismatic leadership, and is often perpetrated through the use of a variety of artistic media. The ‘logo’ of Darius the Great, king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, in which he was depicted as an archer, was used by his successors for generations after his death, as was Alexander the Great’s portrait on coinage. Caesar Augustus linked himself firmly to the deified Julius Caesar by fostering the cult and promoting the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. Maximilian I asserted a visual and genealogical lineage from the Caesars, as well as Constantine, the Trojans, the Merovingians, and Noah, as can be seen in the monumental woodcut, The triumphal arch by Albrecht Dürer;235 and Napoleon I robed himself in the regalia of a Roman emperor in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’ painting Napoleon on his imperial throne.236 Napoleon, like Stalin and the other Kremlin contenders, could not claim direct or blood lineage to great figures from the past. Instead, Napoleon had to establish an ideological lineage. One of the ways in which Napoleon achieved this was by using a high profile venue, the Denon wing of the Louvre Museum, and the power of art to visually link his own image to St Louis, Francois I, and Louis XIV, in the museum that was renamed at this time the Musée Napoleon.237

235 1517, woodblock print, 295 cm x 357 cm.
236 1806, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Stalin, who had originally been a favourite of Lenin’s, had somewhat fallen out of favour shortly before Lenin’s death, and Lenin had expressed concerns regarding the suitability of Stalin’s personal qualities for the role of leader in what has come to be known as ‘Lenin’s testament’, but was really just one of several letters to the Central Committee by which Lenin attempted to continue to participate in political life from his sickbed. Lenin’s judgments about Stalin and, indeed, some damning testimony about Trotsky, were held back from the Party for four months after his death. Once they were disclosed at a plenary session of the Central Committee in May 1924, it was decided to suppress the documents and not disclose them publicly. Zinoviev proposed that Stalin remain in the leadership position and was quickly supported by Kamenev, while Trotsky remained silent.

It was thus known amongst the inner circle of the Party that Stalin had not been endorsed for succession by Lenin, although nor had any other candidate received full positive support. After Lenin’s death, it was to take several years of political manoeuvring before Stalin was to emerge as his successor.

238  Stalin spoke rudely to Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Krupskaia and, also, along with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, alienated some of the Caucasian Bolsheviks through his ill-mannered and rough treatment of them.
239  ‘Comrade Stalin, having become Secretary-General, has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution … Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead’ (Vladimir Ili’ich Lenin, ‘Letter to the Congress’, 1922, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/dec/testamnt/congress.htm (accessed 1 Sep. 2011)).
240  ‘Comrades, the last wish of Ilyich, every word of Ilyich, is without doubt law in our eyes. More than once we have vowed to fulfil everything which the dying Ilyich recommended us to do. You know well that we shall keep that promise … But we are happy to say that on one point Lenin’s fears have not proved well founded. I mean the point about our general secretary. You have all been witnesses of our work together in the last few months; and, like myself, you have been happy to confirm that Ilyich’s fears have not been realised’ (Zinoviev, quoted in Tony Cliff, ‘The campaign against Trotsky’, Trotsky: fighting the rising Stalinist bureaucracy 1923–1927, www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1991/trotsky3/02-campaign.html (accessed 13 Nov. 2013)).
241  Tumarkin sees Lenin’s ‘testament’ as an indication of the extent to which Lenin identified himself with the Party and the regime, so that ‘in fact the new institutions were fitted so completely to Lenin’s leadership that they seemed a direct extension of his person’. She believes that Lenin wished, whether consciously or not, to sabotage the possibility of his replacement: ‘He simply could not conceive of his regime functioning without him and was unable to envision himself incapable of continuing concentrated work’ (Lenin lives!, p. 59).
Stalin gained control of the Politburo at the Fifteenth Party Congress on 18 December 1927. Stalin, like leaders stretching back for more than 2000 years before him, demonstrated that not only had he been a close companion and confidant of Lenin, but also that he had always supported his political positions and was a devoted adherent to his dogma: ‘As for myself, I am just a pupil of Lenin’s, and the aim of my life is to be a worthy pupil of his.’

One of the ways in which Stalin sought to promote his candidacy as a successor to Lenin was to establish himself as one of the interpreters of Leninism. It was not enough merely to accumulate power through strategic associations, convenient staff appointments and Machiavellian manoeuvrings. Stalin needed to make a significant contribution to Marxist ideology and to gain credentials as a Party theoretician. In 1924 Stalin gave a series of lectures at the Sverdlov University, which were then published as the book *The foundations of Leninism*. In this ambitious book Stalin attempted to comprehensively systematise Lenin’s teachings across a broad spectrum of subject areas, supporting his assertions with large numbers of illustrative quotes from Lenin. While other members of the Party leadership delivered talks and papers on aspects of Leninism, none had attempted such comprehensive coverage, and Stalin’s book became the most influential writing on Leninism at the time.

One of the primary ways in which Stalin publicly illustrated his closeness to Lenin, was by ensuring that his image was visually linked with that of Lenin. A large number of political posters that feature the image of Stalin, juxtapose this image with the image of Lenin. This

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242 Stalin, ‘Talk with the German author Emil Ludwig’.
243 Trotsky took exception to this approach, claiming that dogmatism was contrary to Lenin’s style, which was flexible and responsive to circumstances: ‘Lenin cannot be chopped up into quotations suited for every possible case, because for Lenin the formula never stands higher than the reality; it is always the tool that makes it possible to grasp the reality and to dominate it. It would not be hard to find in Lenin dozens and hundreds of passages which, formally speaking, seem to be contradictory. But what must be seen is not the formal relationship of one passage to another, but the real relationship of each of them to the concrete reality in which the formula was introduced as a lever. The Leninist truth is always concrete!’ (Leon Trotsky, ‘Tradition and revolutionary policy’, *The new course*, December 1923, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/newcourse/ch05.htm (accessed 26 Sep. 2012)).
244 Stalin’s propaganda apparatus went as far as cutting and pasting photographs and commissioning paintings showing Stalin and Lenin together on occasions where they had not been together in order to promote this idea of Stalin’s lineage. Stalin was also depicted in fake historical scenes as standing, speaking and pointing while Lenin listens. See Brooks, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin!*, p. 61.
occurs in a number of ways throughout the years of Stalin’s leadership and subtle variations in the way in which this was done reflect the evolution of the Stalin cult over time. Of the 389 posters comprising my sample of posters with images of Stalin, he appears with an image of Lenin in 138 posters — a little over one-third of them. The first posters I have located in which Stalin appears with Lenin are both from 1930. One is a poster promoting the value of political education with the title ‘Komsomol political education system mid-Volga organisation V.L.K.S.M for 1930–31’ (Fig. 2.1). Lenin and Stalin appear as equals on either side of the poster, outlined in a sacred red Bolshevik aura although, as a full-length figure, Lenin is larger and therefore more prominent than the smaller bust of Stalin. Both men are quoted, along with Engels, and their authoritative texts are depicted around the page. A number of textboxes of various shapes and sizes outline available circles and schools for the self-education of youth.

The other poster of 1930 is a well-known poster by Klutsis in which Stalin’s head is only half visible and literally in Lenin’s shadow. The heads of the two leaders dwarf the diagonally arranged scenes of construction. The strong diagonals and vivid reds against black-and-white suggest movement and determination. ‘Under the Lenin banner for socialist construction’ (Fig. 2.2) is the first of Klutsis’s posters to include Stalin, but it is Lenin, already dead for six years, who is seen to be at the forefront of the movement towards construction and industrial expansion. Stalin appears behind, but literally merged, with Lenin and the overt message is that Stalin, the disciple of the great master, is emerging as the new ‘Lenin of today’. In her examination of mythopoetic elements in memories of Stalin, Natalia Skradol posits that the transfer of special characteristics from one great man to his successor can only be accomplished when there is a moment of physical contact between the two:

allegorised either as an act of midwifery on the part of Stalin, or as a smooth continuation of a most intimate co-existence with each man being an extension of the other, punctuated by death. Physical contact is indispensable for the sacred royal unction ritual, as a figure endowed with divine authority performs the marking of the new ruler.245

By merging Lenin and Stalin into one conjoined face, Klutsis employs mythic symbolism to denote the transfer of power and conferring of legitimacy from Lenin to Stalin.246

Klutsis had been a member of the Latvian rifle guard, which formed Lenin’s personal bodyguard during the days of the October Revolution, and thus witnessed Lenin’s leadership at close range. He had a strong personal allegiance to Lenin247 and was fully committed to employing his artistic talent in service of the goals of the regime,248 securing many commissions for posters during the early to mid-1930s. One is tempted to speculate that, by placing Stalin so deeply in Lenin’s shadow, Klutsis was asserting the unique qualities of Lenin as Bolshevik leader. Weight is given to this interpretation by Margarita Tupitsyn’s assertions that the exaggerated claims made in propaganda for Stalin’s 50th birthday celebrations249 would have ‘infringed on Klutsis’s consciousness’ due to his personal experiences with Lenin.250 It is interesting to note that, at some time between 21 September 1930 and 31 August 1931, Klutsis was expelled from the Party, accused of not paying member’s dues for five months, of distancing himself from the Party’s work, and of exhibiting ‘political illiteracy’. After repenting his mistakes, Klutsis was immediately reinstated.251

246 In Chiaureli’s 1946 movie Klyatva (The oath), Lenin’s spirit is transferred to Stalin while he sits on a park bench in Gor’kii. The movie can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIP5g_UTrY.

247 In her monogram on Klutsis and Kulagina, Margarita Tupitsyn notes that Klutsis’s experiments in applying formalist methodology to socio-political iconography always included an image of Lenin, as he was the figure that Klutsis most admired (Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 19).

248 In his autobiography, Klutsis summed up his role as an artist of the revolution: ‘My task was to make the revolutionary struggle of the working class and Soviet reality the contents of my creative output, converting it into artistic images comprehensible to the masses […] Before me was the challenge to transform the poster, the book, the illustration, the postcard into mass conductors of Party slogans’ (quoted in Christina Lodder, ‘The experiments at the Vkhutemas School’, in Ferré, Red cavalry, p. 168).

249 These included claims that Stalin was ‘the Great Leader — the organizer of the October Revolution, the creator of the Red Army, and distinguished military commander … leader of the world proletariat, and the great strategist of the Five-Year Plan’ (Mikhail Geller & Aleksandr M. Nekrich, Utopiia u vlasti: Istoriia Sovetskogo Soiuza s 1917 goda do nashikh dnei, London, Overseas Publication Interchange, 1982, p. 246).

250 See Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 61.

251 Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 188. Klutsis was arrested and executed in 1938 due to his ‘alleged participation, beginning in 1936, in the Latvian fascist-nationalist organization, operating at the time in Moscow’. Prometheus, a Latvian organisation, was established in Moscow in 1923 and shut down by government decree in 1937 (Tupitsyn, Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, p. 15). It is worth noting, however, that around the time of
Despite fully consolidating his leadership in 1929, Stalin did not yet have a high public profile. Forced collectivisation was unpopular and had disastrous consequences. Food was rationed, millions of peasants died in the famine of 1930–33 and, as Jeffrey Brooks points out, 1933 was the decade’s worst year for ‘excess deaths’ (the euphemism for murder and famine), and a year in which Moscow experienced a water shortage. Stalin’s low public profile may have been due to the lack of good news to spread to the population and an attempt to dissociate him from negative news. Until 1934, Stalin appeared with Lenin in between a quarter and a third of Stalin posters. Lenin was usually depicted in an apotheosised form, by providing inspiration on a banner, as in Deni’s 1931 ‘With the banner of Lenin we were victorious in the battle for the October revolution …’ (Fig. 2.3), or as an outlined head, this time alongside that of Marx, in A.M. Rumiantsev’s 1931 ‘Shock work at the machine is combined with the study of Marxist-Leninist theory’ (Fig. 2.4). Lenin was also sometimes shown as ‘solid’ and substantial, sometimes accompanied by his texts and, in a 1932 poster by Klutsis, ‘October to the world’, as the great teacher of Stalin, showing him the way forward.

In 1933 there was a sudden leap in the number of images of Stalin in posters, coinciding with an increase in his appearances in Pravda. On 7 November 1933, foreign correspondent Eugene Lyons walked down Gorkii Street in Moscow, counting the portrait posters of Lenin and Stalin as he went. Images of Stalin outnumbered images of Lenin 103 to 58. The posters of this year presented Stalin as a leader in his own right although, in most cases, his image was still differentiated...
from that of Lenin by grounding him in the reality of the current time, or sketching him tonally or in flesh tones. Lenin was apotheosised by being sketched in faint outline, by appearing as a statue, or by being shown in silhouette.

The idea of the banner of Lenin came to prominence, with Stalin invoking the victorious and inspirational banner of Lenin in three posters of 1933, all of which featured the concluding quotation from Stalin’s lengthy and detailed political report to the Sixteenth Congress of the VKP(b) on 27 June 1930. Two of the best known names in Soviet graphic art, Klutsis and Deni, were contracted to produce posters on this theme, while the third, Iraklii Toidze, was in the early years of a highly successful career in political poster art. Deni’s poster (Fig. 2.5) features sketches of the head of Lenin, and head and neck of Stalin, almost equal in size, on either side of a radio transmitter that broadcasts the words ‘Long live the proletariat revolution of the whole world’, set against a plain backdrop. Lenin’s head, sketched in faint tones, seems to float in the picture plane, while Stalin, anchored by his neck and collar and sketched in darker tones, casts a shadow and appears more solid. Although it is Lenin’s inspiration that is invoked in the text, Stalin invokes it through his quotation, as the truest disciple and interpreter of Leninism.

Klutsis’ poster on the same theme (Fig. 2.6) is dominated by the large curve of a red banner that hovers over the Soviet leaders. Lenin looms large and monolithic, cast in stone in front of the banner and behind Stalin, who is larger than the other figures. While Stalin is singled out as worthy of extra attention, the poster makes clear that his firm foundation is Leninism. Toidze’s poster (Fig. 2.7) juxtaposes the present and the past with Stalin adopting a static hand-in pose behind a red podium that forms a wedge in the bottom right corner of the poster. Arrayed behind him are the Soviet people, male and

257 To be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
258 ‘With the banner of Lenin we were victorious in the battle for the October Revolution./ With the banner of Lenin we were victorious in attaining decisive achievements in the struggle to build socialism. / With the same banner we will be victorious in our proletarian revolution throughout the world. / Long live Leninism!’ This text appears on propaganda posters from as early as 1931.
259 Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze, Mikhail Kalinin, Kirov, Kuibyshev, Stanislav Kossior and Mikoian.
260 The publishing details on the poster give Toidze’s family name as ‘Taidze’, however, Toidze’s signature is printed on the bottom right of the poster and it can thus be safely attributed to him.
female, of various nationalities and in the garb of various occupations, looking up and ahead and smiling. Behind them are three banners and behind these are two historical scenes — the storming of the Winter Palace with Lenin atop the turret of a tank in iconic pose, urging the revolutionaries forward; and a smaller scene with a younger Stalin, mimicking Lenin’s pose, speaking at the Sixth Party Congress of August 1917 in Petrograd. Stalin and Lenin are portrayed by Toidze as joint leaders of the Revolution, with Lenin taking precedence, while Stalin stands alone and dominates the poster as the leader of today.

Between 1934 and 1936, the general tendency to treat the images of Stalin and Lenin differently continued, using techniques such as placing Lenin on a banner, on a poster on the wall, or as a statue, while Stalin is situated on the ground, sometimes amongst people, and more corporeal in appearance. Interestingly, while in 1934 more than half of the few posters produced containing an image of Stalin also contained an image of Lenin, in 1935 there were no posters that I have located where Stalin and Lenin appear together. In this year Stalin appeared with Kaganovich in celebration of the opening of the Metro, with Voroshilov in celebration of the Red Army, aviation

261 This significant congress was held semi-legally between the February and October revolutions. Lenin was in exile and unable to attend, and Stalin delivered the Political Report on behalf of the Bolshevik Party.
262 See Viktor Deni & Nikolai Dolgorukov, un captioned poster, 1934 and Mizin ‘The Leninist Komsomol was and still is the young reserve of our revolution’, 1934.
263 See Iraklii Toidze, ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward to the victory of communism!’, 1936.
264 See I.V. Stebaev & G. Logvin, ‘XV years of the LKSMU: The Leniniskii Komsomol was and remains a young reserve for our revolution’, (Ukrainian) 1934 and K.V. Zotov, ‘We’re growing up under Lenin and Stalin’s banner!’, 1934.
265 The sole exception to this is a poster by Deni, who often employed sketched portraits rather than photographs in his work. Both Stalin and Lenin are sketched in similar style, however Lenin, on the left of the poster, is clearly associated with 1917 and an image of the past. Lenin points to the progress made under Stalin on the right of the poster, who is associated with socialist construction taking place in 1934. Viktor Deni, ‘1917–1934 raise higher the banner of Lenin — it carries us to victory!’, 1934.
266 See Viktor Deni & Nikolai Dologorukov, ‘We’ve got a Metro!’, 1935.
and the Motherland;268 with Aleksei Stakhanov;269 and with the Politburo Central Committee.270 In 1936 Stalin was also often featured with other members of the Politburo.271

Bernice Rosenthal divides the Stalin cult into three distinct periods. In the first period, until 1933, Stalin used the Lenin cult to position himself as Lenin’s heir; in the second period, between 1933 and 1936, Stalin elevated himself above the Party; and, it is only in the final stage, from 1936 to 1953, that Stalin was spoken of in superhuman terms.272 Close examination of the propaganda posters of the time lends support to much of this theory. It is argued here, however, that Stalin took pains throughout the entire period of his leadership to emphasise his role as Lenin’s heir. Before 1933, he was not consistently distinguished from his Politburo colleagues, except on the occasion of his 50th birthday. From 1933 onward, Stalin was increasingly singled out for special accolades, although he still often appeared alongside Politburo colleagues. During these years, when Stalin appeared with Lenin, they usually inhabited different realms, Stalin being earthbound, while Lenin was presented in apotheosised form. It was only in 1936 that Stalin was referred to in superhuman terms and, from 1937, posters evidence a change in the earlier tendency to treat the images of Stalin and Lenin differently. From this time, Stalin frequently appeared without Lenin, but when they did appear together, they were often (although not always) treated similarly — for example, Efim Pernikov’s ‘The Soviet Constitution is the only truly democratic constitution in the world’ in which both men’s images are carried as processional banners, although Stalin’s banner is much larger with a laudatory

270 See Gustav Klutsis, ‘Politburo CC VKP(b).’ 1935.
271 See Nikolai Dolgorukov, ‘Swell the ranks of the Stakhanovites’, 1936; G. Klutsis, ‘Long live the Stalinist Order of Heroes and Stakhanovites!’, 1936 (Fig. 4.63); and, Genrikh Futerfas, ‘Stalinists! Extend the front of the Stakhanovite movement!’, 1936 (Fig. 3.27).
caption. In their 1937 posters both Stenberg (Fig. 2.8) and Galina Shubina274 place Lenin and Stalin on a large red banner and treat the images of each in identical fashion.275

One of the most interesting pairings of Lenin and Stalin of 1937, and one which provides a partial exception to the above proposition, occurs in Toidze’s “‘I am pleased and happy to know how our people fought and how they have achieved a world-historic victory. I am pleased and happy to know that the blood freely shed by our people, was not in vain, that it has produced results!’ I. Stalin’.276 The top half of the poster deals with the present. Stalin stands at a raised podium in front of a banner with a bas-relief of Lenin’s head enclosed in a medallion. Below Stalin is a crowd of citizens, all paying tribute, including a young child — symbol of the new nation; an old man holding a bound copy of the 1936 Stalin constitution; an aviator; and, in the centre, elevated above the others but below Stalin, is the Rodina, symbol of the motherland, bearing aloft a cornucopia of harvest. Stalin reciprocates the tribute paid to him by applauding the crowd.277 1937 is depicted as a year of success and abundance, and Lenin appears as a kind of Soviet saint or deity whose presence confers approval upon the scene below.

The middle of the poster consists of a broad red text box containing the poster caption, which is a quotation from Stalin from the ‘Report on the draft constitution of the U.S.S.R.’278 The bottom of the poster depicts a scene from the Bolsheviks’ mythic past. Lenin and a younger Stalin stand side by side, towering over, but separated from, the troops rushing into action during the Civil War. While the scene at the top is static and the red banner does not move, all but Lenin and Stalin are in motion in the scene below, cavalry surging forward and the

273 No initial or first name recorded on the poster. Stenberg, ‘Long live the great party of Lenin-Stalin — leader and organiser of the victorious building of socialism!’, 1937.
274 Galina Shubina, ‘Long live the first of May!’, 1937.
275 Coinciding with this change in the way in which Lenin and Stalin were depicted together was the release of the film Lenin in October, which depicts Stalin by Lenin’s side, providing counsel on his every move. See Dawn Ades, Art and power: Europe under the dictators 1930–45, London, Thames and Hudson in association with Hayward Gallery, 1995, p. 251.
277 See Chapter Three for a discussion of gratitude, obligation and reciprocity.
banner billowing in the wind. Muscles ripple and strain, sabres are raised and pistols cocked, clouds swirl in the sky and a beam of light falls upon the head of the lead horse, making it resemble a unicorn, and endowing the scene with a sense of the mythic or supernatural. Stalin and Lenin are shown here as equals, although Lenin points the way forward to victory. Stalin and Lenin are treated differently in the part of the poster that deals with 1937, but are treated similarly as co-leaders of the Party during the Revolution and Civil War in the part dealing with the past.

In 1938 and 1939 Stalin’s appearances with Lenin remained at around 34 per cent and 24 per cent respectively of total Stalin posters. In 1938 Stalin often appears alone in the form of a photographic bust portrait, particularly in posters that promote the regional elections of the Soviet Union of that year279 but, also, in a curious poster documenting in detail Stalin’s arrests, exiles and escapes from exile between 1902 and 1917 (Fig. 2.9).280 Stalin appears with Molotov under a banner with Lenin’s head,281 and with Voroshilov to promote Soviet aviation282 and to make a show of Soviet military strength.283 Stalin appears on equal footing at the top of the page with a photographic portrait of Lenin in a poster that reproduces his speech to the electoral meeting on 11 December 1937 at the Bolshoi Theatre,284 and in posters by Moor and Sergei Sen’kin which publicise the Agricultural Act285 and celebrate the might of the Red Army.286 In her discussion of the giant photographic portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung in Red Square on Soviet holidays, Dawn Ades discusses a phenomenon that is equally applicable to the

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279 For example, I. Yang, ‘Voters of Stalin’s constituency vote in Moscow June 26, 1938 in the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR for the great leader of the people, dear and beloved Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin’, 1938; Unknown artist, ‘June 26, 1938 — the day of the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR to the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Chuvash Republic’, 1938; and, Marenkov, ‘Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin …’, 1938.
280 See unknown artist, ‘Chronicle of the arrests, exiles and escapes of Comrade Stalin’, 1938 (Fig. 2.9).
281 See Viktor Koretskii, ‘“Our government and the party does not have other interests and other concerns, other than those which the people have”’, Stalin’, 1938 (Fig. 4.64).
283 See Viktor Deni & Nikolai Dolgorukov, ‘The enemy’s fate is predetermined: we have crushed them before and we will keep on crushing’, 1938.
284 Unidentified artist, ‘Speech of Comrade Stalin at the election meeting for voters … Moscow, 11 December 1937’, 1938.
285 Dmitrii Moor & Sergei Sen’kin, ‘The USSR is the country of the largest socialist agriculture in the world’, 1938.
286 Dmitrii Moor & Sergei Sen’kin, ‘Long live our dear invincible Red Army!’, 1938 (Fig. 4.7).
smaller posters by Moor and Sen’kin of 1938. The arrangement of Lenin and Stalin on either side of a block of text is directly reminiscent of the Russian Orthodox icon, and invites comparison with Sts Peter and Paul and, particularly, Sts John Chrysostom and Basil, who are:

normally depicted facing inward towards each other and with the holy texts unfolding between them, as in a sixteenth-century Novgorod icon in the Russian Museum. The modern variant shows the two Soviet leader-saints, now both figuratively and literally in command of the Word.\(^{287}\)

Lenin is always situated on the viewer’s left. This not only associates him with ‘the past’, but also signifies sacrality. Plamper points out in his discussion of imagery in *Pravda* that the upper left quarter of the front page was always especially sacred.\(^{288}\) When Stalin is pictured with Voroshilov or Molotov, it is his image that occupies the upper left corner.

The years 1938 to 1939 were also notable for the appearance of three posters with identical captions and similar visual elements in which Stalin and Lenin are visually differentiated, with Lenin appearing in apotheosised form in the sky, on a banner and as a statue. The captions are taken from Stalin’s electoral speech of 11 December 1937,\(^{289}\) part of which is reproduced on each of the posters,\(^{290}\) in which Stalin advises elected deputies to ‘Be as the great Lenin was’. Each of the posters depicts Stalin delivering a speech. The 1938 poster by Elkin

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\(^{287}\) Ades, *Art and power*, p. 251.


\(^{289}\) See J.V. Stalin, ‘Speech delivered by Comrade J. Stalin at a meeting of voters of the Stalin Electoral Area, Moscow’, 11 December 1937, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1937/12/11.htm and www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaU_sk19YwY (accessed 30 Oct. 2013). In the speech Stalin discusses the progressive law, enshrined in the constitution, which enables voters to call deputies to account for their actions during their term of office. Stalin advises voters to hold underperforming or misbehaving deputies accountable for their actions and to expect their deputies to behave in the way that Lenin did.

\(^{290}\) ‘The electors, the people, must demand that their deputies should remain equal to their tasks, that in their work they should not sink to the level of political philistines, that in their posts they should remain political figures of the Lenin type, that as public figures they should be as clear and definite as Lenin was, that they should be as fearless in battle and as merciless towards the enemies of the people as Lenin was, that they should be free from all panic, from any semblance of panic, when things begin to get complicated and some danger or other looms on the horizon, that they should be as free from all semblance of panic as Lenin was, that they should be as wise and deliberate in deciding complex problems requiring a comprehensive orientation and a comprehensive weighing of all pros and cons as Lenin was, that they should be as upright and honest as Lenin was, that they should love their people as Lenin did.’
(Fig. 2.10), one of the artists who documented the construction of the Moscow–Volga Canal, shows Stalin behind a podium with right palm outstretched in a traditional oratorical gesture and left hand clutching a sheaf of papers. A crowd of workers stretching back to the horizon look and listen attentively. The top half of the poster is dominated by a large, pale image of Lenin’s head gazing out to the left, traditionally associated with the past. The 1938 poster by A.I. Madorskii (Fig. 2.11) shows Stalin behind a podium, while Lenin is emblazoned upon a banner. Madorskii’s 1939 poster (Fig. 2.12) depicts an indoor scene with Stalin in front of a huge stone bust of Lenin that is draped in the flag of the USSR. In each of these posters Lenin is invoked as an inspiration from the past, whose steady example is to be practised in the present and future. Despite Lenin’s visual dominance of the images, it is Stalin’s words that feature, and Stalin appears as the sole authoritative interpreter of Lenin’s legacy for the future. The importance given to this speech of Stalin’s is evidenced by the fact that two more posters of 1939 also took it as their subject. In the majority of posters from 1939, the year of Stalin’s 60th birthday celebrations, Stalin is pictured alone, sometimes assuming a position originally taken by Lenin, such as an outline silhouette on a banner or in the sky, a sole figure on a large banner, or as a statue.

292 This portrait of Stalin is taken from a photograph from his speech at the Stakhanovite conference of 1935.
293 The Stalin portrait here appears to be drawn from the actual photographs of the 11 December speech.
294 Both posters are by unidentified artists and were published by Izdaniye Obkoma VKP(b), the Regional Committee of the VKP(b) in 1939.
298 See S. Podobedov, ‘Long live the organiser and leader of the victorious Red Army great Stalin!’, 1939 (Fig. 4.9); Vartan Arakelov, ‘Stalin is the wisest of all people …’, 1939 (Fig. 3.3); Viktor Koretskii, ‘Workers of collective and Soviet cooperative farms and machine and tractor stations’ operators …’, 1939; and, K. Ryvkin, ‘The Soviets of Worker Deputies of the Capital are leading the fight to fulfil the Stalinist Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow’, 1939.

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In 1940, posters in which Stalin appears with Lenin make up only 25 per cent of total posters. In one of these posters, Lenin is only visible as a face on a tiny processional barrier in an indistinct crowd, while the profile of Stalin dominates the poster and, in another, he appears in the form of the Order of Lenin, which sits like a stamp of approval over a schematic map of the planned reconstruction for the transformation of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, into a cultured city.

A 1940 poster from Tashkent by Vladimir Kaidalov quotes from Stalin’s funerary oath to Lenin on 26 January 1924: ‘Departing from us, Comrade Lenin urged us to strengthen and extend the union republics. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will fulfil with honour your behest’ (Fig. 2.13). A giant head of Lenin sits above the Kremlin in a crimson sky. Beneath it, a crowd of people in Uzbek dress carry large red banners and look up at Stalin, who stands at the podium, arm raised to swear his oath. The portion of Stalin’s oath that is quoted on the poster refers to socialist work to be undertaken in the union republics. In 1940 Tashkent was in the early stages of a total reconstruction that would see a ‘cultured city’ rise out of the demolition of a city of single-storey mudbrick houses, the opening of the Tashkent canal, and the opening of the children’s railway. Plans to refashion the city’s inhabitants into high-rise dwellers were meeting with resistance, and this poster calls upon the apotheosised Lenin to legitimate Stalin’s plan, whilst also showing Stalin to be a man of his word.

With the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941, there was a sharp decline in the number of posters produced that contained an image of Stalin, however, appearances with Lenin jumped to 50 per cent of the total in this sample, and stayed roughly at this level until 1946, the year in which Stalin was glorified as responsible for victory in the war. It is not unexpected that, in the disastrous early years of the war, with Stalin’s decision-making ability called into question, he may have elected to keep a low public profile, both in terms of public appearances and in terms of propaganda images, and also that the figure of Lenin may have been more frequently paired with Stalin to

299 See Nikolai Zhukov, ‘Thank you Comrade Stalin for our happy life’, 1940 (Fig. 3.1).
300 See B. Zhukov, ‘We are the birthplace of the most happy, daring, all-powerful people, where grey-haired old men are cheerful, where there is the carefree laughter of children (From the welcome to the builders of BFK by Comrade Stalin’), 1940.
shore up Stalin’s legitimacy. What is surprising is that, in 1946, when Stalin’s legitimacy as leader in his own right was highest, he appeared with Lenin in 55 per cent of posters.

The posters of the war years express mixed trends, with the images of Stalin and Lenin differentiated in terms of treatment in 14 posters between 1941 and 1945 (inclusive); and Stalin and Lenin treated in similar or identical fashion in 13 posters during the same period. Lenin continued to be invoked as a protective banner, while Stalin’s leadership at the time was stressed. Typical of this treatment is future Hero of Socialist Labour Petr Golub’s poster of 1945, ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward to new victories!’ (Fig. 2.14). Lenin appears as a bas-relief enclosed in a medallion on a gold-fringed red banner, while Stalin stands to attention in his marshal’s uniform in the foreground, before a pink-tinted Kremlin that appears to rise out of the mist in the manner of an enchanted castle. Victory in the war has recently been attained and it is Stalin’s leadership that will continue the momentum to new victories of socialism.

In other instances Lenin and Stalin appear on the banner together and the banner is invoked in both their names as the banner of ‘Lenin–Stalin’, almost as if they form one entity, an entity representing the Party, the state and Soviet power. Vladimir Serov’s 1943 poster ‘1918–1943 Long live the XXV anniversary of the Leninist–Stalinist Komsomol’ (Fig. 2.15) shows determined young male and female Komsomol members, some in military uniform, others dressed as partisans, rushing forward to defend the motherland. The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) was the

301 See A.A. Babitskii, ‘Under the leadership of Comrade Stalin, forward to complete victory over our enemy!’ , 1944 (Fig. 4.31); and, M. Karpenko, ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward the complete defeat of the German invaders!’ , 1944.

302 See A.V. Vasil’ev & S.F. Yanevich, ‘Under the banner of Lenin-Stalin we were victorious in the great October Socialist Revolution. Under the banner of Lenin-Stalin we will be victorious in the Great Patriotic War. Raise the banner of Lenin-Stalin. It carries us to victory’ , 1941 (Fig. 4.15); Vladimir Serov, ‘Long live the 25th anniversary of the Leninist–Stalinist Komsomol’ , 1943; and, Nikolai Zhukov & Viktor Klimashin, ‘For the Soviet fatherland the sons of all the peoples of the Soviet Union go into battle. Long live the Red Army — the army of brotherhood and friendship of the peoples of the USSR! Under the banner of Lenin-Stalin forward to the west!’ , 1943 (Fig. 4.28).

303 As discussed in Chapter Four, it is unusual to associate females with combat in Soviet propaganda, and the women here are not overtly carrying weapons. As Komsomol members they are, however, depicted as prepared to defend the nation.

304 Vsesoyuznyy Leninskiy Kommunisticheskiy soyuz molodozhi (VLKSM).
youth division of the Communist Party and, as the name suggests, was primarily associated with Lenin. It was unusual to append Stalin’s name to the Komsomol moniker, although his name did come to be strongly associated with the war effort.

Between 1947 and 1950, Stalin’s appearances with Lenin range from about 30 to 50 per cent in posters. In a strikingly simple poster of 1949 by L. Stenberg (Fig. 2.16) Stalin’s discipleship to Lenin is emphasised in the poster caption, while his equality of status with Lenin is reinforced visually. The image is dominated by an undulating banner in rich red tones. At the top of the banner, Stalin and Lenin appear in golden bas-relief profile. At the bottom of the banner, also in gold, are a sprig of oak leaves, and one of laurel leaves, both symbols of heroism, strength and victory. The caption in large gold letters fills most of the poster: ‘The banner of Lenin, the party’s banner is raised high and carried on by Stalin — the disciple of Lenin, the best son of the Bolshevik Party, and a worthy successor and the great continuer of the work of Lenin.’

A 1950 poster by painter and graphic artist Boris Belopol’skii depicts Lenin on a banner hovering over Stalin’s right shoulder, almost in the manner of a protective spirit. Stalin’s figure dominates the poster, his white marshal’s jacket luminous against the rich red of the banner. Stalin is depicted behind a podium in oratorical pose, and the text of the poster is taken from his report to the Eighteenth Party Congress on 10 March 1939 on the work of the Central Committee; that is, before the war interrupted the progression of socialism towards communism: ‘“We move further, forward towards Communism.” I. V. Stalin’. Stalin stands in this poster as the figure who is continuing and expanding upon Lenin’s work, and as the man who will ultimately bring the dream of communism to fruition.

An intriguing poster by Mytnikov, published at Rostov-on-Don in 1950, employs the generic slogan ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward to the victory of communism!’ at its base, but has an unusual caption at the top of the poster — ‘26 years without Lenin, but still on Lenin’s path’ (Fig. 2.17). An almost white-haired Stalin stands with his face in semi-shadow, his brows pinched as if in grief. According to Clark, in socialist realist literature the furrowed brow or pinched face are signs of the revolutionary’s
dedication and sacrifice. Although his skin is generally smooth and unblemished, Stalin appears tired and aged. Behind him, a massive red banner billows in a yellow sky, resembling a wall of fire. The tiny Spassky tower is in shadow, with the sky behind it glowing yellow and the golden fringe of the banner resembling flames. The words on the banner read ‘Long live the Party of Lenin–Stalin!’

Dominating the banner, on a scale similar to Stalin’s head, is that of Lenin in grayscale. Lenin also looks out of the poster, but far further to the left (the past) than Stalin. Lenin’s hair, normally portrayed as flat and sparse, curls forward around his forehead above his ears, and his usually trim goatee is thick and lush and appears to circle his chin. This is an unusual depiction of Lenin, but bears some resemblance to depictions of St Nicholas the Wonderworker in Russian Orthodox icons. St Nicholas, whose feast day is 6 December (19 December, Old Calendar) is the ‘miracle-working’ saint and one of the most beloved figures in the iconography of the church, known for his gentleness, humility, love of all people and purity of heart. Tales of his life highlight a reputation for giving anonymous and secret gifts to aid people in need and he is reported to have divided his substantial inheritance among the poor. He is known to intercede for petitioners in response to heartfelt prayer through his icon in practical and tangible ways, particularly in matters of healing and rescue, and is also the patron saint of travellers, particularly seafarers. Nicholas is usually depicted with a high, bald forehead, his hair curling in on either side, and with a trim circular beard and moustache. By placing Lenin on the red banner over Stalin’s right shoulder, visually referencing St Nicholas, and making textual reference to his exemplary role, Mytnikov is perhaps drawing a parallel between Lenin and Nicholas’s gentle nature, humility, and fame for redistributing the wealth of the rich among the poor, whilst also suggesting that the apotheosised Lenin can intercede on behalf of both Stalin and the Soviet citizen. While Lenin is a saint in the Soviet pantheon, Stalin is the dedicated and self-sacrificial revolutionary who bears aloft the Lenin banner.

After 1950 the overall number of posters of Stalin declined, with posters with Lenin making up 57 per cent of 1951 posters. Stalin and Lenin are juxtaposed as equals in Viktor Govorkov’s ‘In the name of

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305 Clark, The Soviet novel, p. 57.
communism’ (Fig. 2.18) in which the past and the present are depicted with realistic parallel scenes involving Lenin and Stalin. Both men are planning the electrification of the nation on a map of the USSR. Lenin holds a book titled *Plan for the electrification of the RSFSR, 1920*, while Stalin is associated with a book titled *Electrification of the USSR*. As he marks out the Main Turkmen Canal, he is seen to be expanding on the work begun by Lenin — Lenin’s plan extends across the Russian republic, while Stalin’s encompasses the whole of the Soviet Union.

Stalin and Lenin are depicted as having been joint leaders during the October Revolution in a 1951 poster by Ukrainian-born Naum Karpovskii with the caption ‘Glory to the great leaders of October!’ (Fig. 2.19). A black-haired and dashing young Stalin stands beside Lenin in front of scenes of battle during the Civil War. Lenin’s right arm is extended as if showing the way, and both Stalin and Lenin gaze into the distance towards the future. Thus, while Lenin’s role as teacher is featured, the young Stalin is nevertheless depicted as an equal leader of the October Revolution. In 1952 Stalin was depicted with Lenin in posters published by Latgosizdat306 in Riga, and by Azernesr307 in Baku. The Latvian poster by V. Reshetnikov (Fig. 2.20) carries the slogan ‘Glory to Lenin, glory to Stalin, glory to great October’, while the lock over the canal has the inscription ‘Stalin is the world/Stalin is peace’.308 The distinguished and greying head of Stalin dominates the poster, while Lenin’s head forms part of the fabric of the banner billowing behind him. A 1952 poster by an unidentified artist shows Lenin and Stalin as equals with the caption ‘Long live the great, united party of Lenin–Stalin, intelligence, honour and conscience of our communist era!’ (Fig. 2.21) and both portraits are treated in similar fashion.309

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306 Latvian publishing house.
307 Publishing house in Azerbaijan.
308 Stalin eto mir! The word ‘mir’ in Russian means both ‘world’ and ‘peace’.
309 Stalin appears more ‘Asiatic’ in this poster than he does in those published in Moscow and Leningrad.
The significance of the banner

The red banner is the most frequently employed motif in the Soviet propaganda poster. Of the 389 posters in the research sample, the banner appears in 275, and several more utilise a plain red backdrop that evokes both the banner and also the red background sometimes found in Russian Orthodox icons. Scenes that do not feature banners are frequently indoor settings, or close-cropped photographic portraits, particularly black-and-white photographs of Stalin’s head.

The colour red had several connotations in the Soviet Union. The Russian word for ‘red’, krasnyi, shares a common etymology with the word for ‘beautiful’, krasivyi, and red is associated with beauty. Red is a sacred colour in the Russian Orthodox Church, and symbolises life, love, warmth and the victory of life over death as made manifest in the Resurrection. It is also the colour of blood and, as such, can signify martyrdom in general, and Christ’s sacrifice of his life for humankind in particular, with a red background on an icon symbolising eternal life or martyrdom. Orthodox priests traditionally wear cassocks of dark red or purple on feast days associated with Christ and the elevation of the cross and those associated with martyrs. Bright red cassocks are worn on the feast days of Sts Peter and Paul, and can be worn on Pascha (Easter) and at Christmas.

The association of the red flag with communism dates to the Paris Commune of 1871, where it was raised at the seized Hotel de Ville by proletarian revolutionaries. Marx wrote extensively on the Paris Commune in his book about the civil war in France, mentioning specifically the symbolic power of the red flag:

> When the Paris Commune took the management of the revolution in its own hands; when plain working men for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their ‘natural superiors’ … the old world writhed in convulsions of rage at the sight of the Red Flag, the symbol of the Republic of Labor, floating over the Hôtel de Ville.  

310 Just over 70 per cent.
The Russian communists adopted the red flag as the symbol of their movement and, when the Bolsheviks seized power, they made the red flag, with yellow hammer and sickle insignia, the flag of the nation. The political antecedents of the red flag/banner include willingness to defend oneself and engage in battle, an attitude of defiance, the revolutionary spirit, willingness to sacrifice, the blood of martyrs and, more specifically, the communist cause.

Battle banners held a particular significance during war. To capture an enemy’s banner was to take a great prize, and to lose one’s banner meant court martial and disbandment of the unit. During the victory parade after the Great Patriotic War, soldiers hurled captured German banners at Stalin’s feet and Stalin can be seen in propaganda standing atop these banners in an unmistakable sign of victory and symbol of humiliation for the defeated Germans. This gesture was a repetition of the incident after the Patriotic War of 1812 in which the Russian generals threw the captured banners of Napoleon’s troops at the feet of Emperor Aleksandr II.

The red banner is also often used protectively in a manner reminiscent of the veil of the Virgin in Russian Orthodox icons. According to Russian Orthodox belief, Mary Theotokos appeared before St Andrew in Blachernae Church in Constantinople in the 10th century, moving through the air and then praying for Christ’s intercession and protection for mankind. After praying, the Virgin spread her veil over the congregation in a gesture of protection. Icons of the Feast of Intercession show the Virgin in an aureole in the upper part of the

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312 From the 13th century, a ‘baucans’, a plain red streamer flown from the masthead of a ship, signified the intention to give battle and to fight to the death (‘Dictionary of vexillology: Baucans’, Flags of the world, www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/vxt-dvb3.html#baucens (accessed 7 Nov. 2013)).


314 During the French Revolution it was associated with the revolutionary spirit of the common people and the Marquis de Lafayette raised a red flag over the Champs-de-Mars on 17th July 1791. Red was also the colour associated with the Phrygian cap that became a symbol of the revolution. The Jacobins flew a red flag as a symbol of the blood sacrifice made by martyrs to the cause.


316 For example, Stefan Gints, ‘The triumph of victory …’, 1945.
icon holding the veil in her outstretched arms. Below, and on either side of her, are a host of saints and angels with whom most Orthodox churchgoers would be familiar.

Marxism–Leninism had all the characteristics of a political religion and the Soviet population, particularly the older generation that grew up in pre-Soviet times, was visually literate with regard to iconography and Christian symbolism. When Christian baptisms were replaced by the Soviet Oktiabrina ritual in 1920, the red banner took the place traditionally reserved for the icon. 317 During the 1940s, after the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin reversed the earlier Soviet policy of persecution of the Church, releasing surviving priests from the prison camps, and allowing some churches to open and minister to the public. In December 1941, as the Germans approached Moscow, Stalin ordered that the sacred Theotokos of Vladimir be taken up in an aeroplane and flown around Moscow, invoking the Virgin’s intercession and protection from the invading Germans.

Many Stalinist propaganda posters depict huge red banners that fill the sky and hover protectively over the crowds below them. These banners often carry images of the great communist revolutionary thinkers Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin — alone or together in combination. The text on the posters specifically invokes the banner as a protective and inspirational object, whether protecting the troops going into battle, as will be seen in Chapter Four, inspiring citizens to further sacrifice in the name of the victory of communism, or even protecting and legitimating the leadership. A 1950 poster by Pravdin serves as an illustration of this point. ‘Long live the Bolshevik Party, the Lenin–Stalin Party, the vanguard of the Soviet people forged in battle, the inspiration and organiser of our victories!’ (Fig. 2.22) features two red banners that dominate the sky. The largest of the two, which occupies almost all of the top half of the landscape-format poster, is intensely red and decorated with gold braid — it ripples as if in a gentle breeze. It is emblazoned with the head and shoulders of Lenin in fleshy tones, associating Lenin with eternal life, as in the icon, and also acknowledging his sacrifice for the sake of the people. 318

318 Despite surviving an assassination attempt by Dora Kaplan in 1918, Lenin was frequently viewed as a martyr to the cause and began to be associated with Christ. Lenin died in 1924 of natural causes but was still celebrated as a martyr. See Bergman, ‘The image of Jesus in the
Lenin looks out to his right, his eyes focused on a distant vision. Beneath him, the figure of Stalin dominates the centre foreground, his head jutting up into the red field created by the banner, with Lenin hovering over his right shoulder like a protective ‘good angel’. Stalin’s gaze mimics that of Lenin and he partakes of the implication of eternal life already bestowed upon Lenin. Behind Stalin, and also underneath Lenin’s banner, are the figures of the leadership. They are differentiated from Stalin by appearing smaller and their gazes turn in a number of directions, with Andrei Andreev and Mikoian looking directly at the viewer.

Behind the first banner and in the background is a second large banner that hovers over the anonymous faces of ‘the masses’, carrying text which reads: ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward to the victory of communism!’, making literal the well-worn slogan. If we read Pravdin’s poster as an icon replacing Orthodox iconography with Soviet iconography, it is the apotheosised Lenin who floats in the upper part of the poster, contained within an implicit aureole. His red banner spreads over the Party leaders, guiding and protecting them as they lead the people forward to victory. Stalin, the largest figure in the poster and, therefore, the most important, is the chief saint, while the other leaders flanking him fill the ranks of the minor saints. The common people follow behind Stalin and are also guided and protected by a Lenin banner. Like the icon, the poster is a primarily visual medium which relies on the impact of the image to deliver its message. Text is simple and serves to reinforce the visual message and also to provide additional clues as to how the image should be read, but it is the image that embeds in the viewer’s mind. By visually referencing the characteristics of the Russian Orthodox icon, the posters encouraged the viewer to respond in a spiritual manner to the form and content of the poster, and to draw parallels, both conscious and unconscious, between the central figure in the posters and the key spiritual figures of the Orthodox faith. This was facilitated by Russian traditions of leadership in which the tsar held both secular and spiritual powers and was viewed as the sacred protector of the people.

Stalin and the legacy of Marx–Engels–Lenin

Aside from Stalin’s frequent appearances with Lenin, he also appeared in posters with the pantheon of great communist thinkers, tracing his ideological lineage further back in history than his immediate predecessor Lenin, to Marx and Engels. Pravda marked the 50th anniversary of Marx’s death on 14 March 1933 by lauding Stalin’s contributions to Marxist ideology: ‘Stalin’s name ranks with the great names of the theoreticians and leaders of the world proletariat — Marx, Engels, and Lenin.’319 Stalin’s place in the canon is demonstrated unambiguously in a well-known poster by Klutsis as early as 1933 — ‘Raise higher the banners of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin!’ (Fig. 2.23). The image is dominated by the heads of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, each on their own red banner. Victoria Bonnell makes the following observation in reference to Klutsis’s poster:

The photographs of Marx, Engels and Lenin show them looking off to one side; Stalin, by contrast, is the only one of the four who makes direct eye contact with the viewer. The artist’s choice was deliberate, since there existed at the time well-known portraits of both Marx and Lenin gazing directly at the viewer. The direct gaze sets Stalin apart from the others and gives his image a particular magnetism.320

One can expand somewhat on Bonnell’s reading of the poster. It is Marx and Engels whose heads are turned to the viewer’s right side. They do not engage the viewer, looking perhaps to the future and their own visionary predictions, but most definitely in the direction of the heads of Lenin and Stalin — the heroes of the past looking to the future, which is occurring in the present. Lenin and Stalin are both almost full-face to the viewer, however, as Bonnell points out, Lenin’s eyes are swivelled to the viewer’s right. Lenin, too, looks to Stalin for the leadership of the present day. The baton has been passed from Marx and Engels, to Lenin, who now passes it on to Stalin. Stalin is neither focused on a mythical past, nor on a visionary future, but gazes out at the viewer from a firmly entrenched position in the present. The crowd scenes surrounding each of the giant banners further illustrate this point. Marx and Engels are surrounded by fighters from the French and German revolutions of 1789 and 1848 respectively, wielding

320 Bonnell, Iconography of power, p. 158.
swords and muskets, fighting on foot and horseback. The numbers of soldiers engaged in the battle are relatively few. Under Lenin’s banner the October revolutionaries storm the Winter Palace in October 1917, while above, the crowds rush in to join the fight.\textsuperscript{321} Stalin’s banner reveals something new in that he is flanked by dense crowds of workers — some, like the woman in the foreground, beaming happily; others looking determined, steadfast and attentive; all carrying tools rather than weapons. Gone is the classical architecture that surrounds Marx and Engels, replaced around the figure of Stalin by scenes of Soviet construction, which include the wall of the Dnieper Dam — Soviet construction constituting the new ‘battlefront’. Stalin’s ‘revolution’\textsuperscript{322} began around 1928 with forced collectivisation, the revocation of the NEP, the Shakhty Trial,\textsuperscript{323} and the introduction of the five-year plans.\textsuperscript{324} Despite the fact that Stalin’s revolution did not result from the violent overthrow of the existing order, the nature of his reforms was such that they provided a revolutionary break with the past and, from this perspective, Stalin can be viewed as the fourth great revolutionary thinker in the process of evolution that was leading to the communist utopia. Klutsis’s poster unequivocally sets Stalin alongside the other great revolutionaries and pillars of socialist thought while, at the same time, emphasising his relevance to the current time. Variations on this formula would recur often throughout the years of Stalin’s rule, with several posters visually referencing this one. Indeed, this poster was

\textsuperscript{321} The storming of the Winter Palace was a small affair involving relatively few people but became, in the mythic propaganda about the Revolution, a key event with a cast of thousands. Re-enactments of the event in the first years after the Revolution involved thousands of military personnel and civilians.


\textsuperscript{323} Trial conducted in 1928 in which a group of engineers from the Donbass was accused of sabotaging the Soviet economy. Stalin used this case as evidence of his assertion that class struggle was intensifying.

\textsuperscript{324} Sheila Fitzpatrick summarises the nature of Stalin’s revolution in the following way: ‘The term “Stalin’s revolution” has been used for this transition, and that conveys well its violent, destructive, and utopian character. But this revolution was largely the result of state initiative, not popular movements, and it did not result in a change of political leadership. The point of the revolution, in Stalin’s eyes, was to lay the economic foundations for socialism by rooting out private enterprise and using state planning to promote rapid economic development’ (\textit{Everyday Stalinism}, p. 4).
so successful that it was released in a first edition of 50,000, a second edition of 30,000, a 1936 edition of 250,000 and, in 1937, it was produced in more than 20 languages of the Soviet republics.\footnote{Bonnell, \textit{Iconography of Power}, p. 158.}

In her examination of Stalin’s attitude to his cult of personality, Davies indicates the numerous ways in which Stalin tried to curb and moderate the excesses of the cult. She points out that in 1934, for example, Stalin crossed out his name in the phrase ‘banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin’, although, she says, by 1939 he allowed it to remain.\footnote{See Davies, in Apor et al., \textit{The leader cult in communist dictatorships}, p. 39.} In fact, a poster from 1938 employs the ‘Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin’ formula in the caption,\footnote{See Vladislav Pravdin & Zoia Pravdina, ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!’ (Fig. 2.25), discussed below.} indicating that Stalin was already comfortable with this formulation by 1938. In this light, Klutsis’s poster of 1933 appears at first to be something of an anomaly. The differences between this and later posters are subtle, but important. Klutsis’s caption refers to the ‘banners of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin’ and the visual imagery places each of the great thinkers on his own banner. In later posters, where Stalin’s name is appended to those of the other three, it is in hyphenated form, and the visual image shows all four heads emblazoned on a single banner. In these latter cases it is one protective banner which is invoked, and the four merge into a unifying force that symbolises the Party, the state and communism.

Prior to 1938, the merged hyphenated identity was reserved solely for the apotheosised thinkers. A 1934 poster by graphic artist and journalist Nikolai Dolgorukov carries the slogan ‘Long live the great, invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin’ (Fig. 2.24) on a long triangulated banner that falls like a shaft of light from the heavens over Stalin’s right shoulder, although the poster does not carry an image of Marx, Engels or Lenin. Instead, the upper torso of Stalin is depicted in giant scale jutting into the sky, as if forming part of fortifications of the Kremlin wall. Stalin looks down and out of the poster, his right hand raised as if waving to the crowd or perhaps conferring a blessing. The sky is full of aircraft while, below, a huge military parade stretches across Red Square with the mounted figure of Voroshilov montaged.
into the scene. Although Stalin assumes gigantic proportions and projects into the sky, he is still firmly tied to the corporeal world of military parades and developing the might of the Red Army.

A 1937 poster by G. Mirzoev carries the same slogan as Dolgorukov’s poster, but this time attributes it as a quotation from Stalin: “Long live the great and invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin!” (I. Stalin).\(^\text{328}\) Stalin dominates the foreground, his features lit from above in golden tones. He is separated from Marx, Engels and Lenin, who are featured on a small banner that protrudes from the globe and billows over it in a premonition of world revolution. Once again, Stalin inhabits the world of the living, in contrast to the three communist gods.

Changes in the relationship between Stalin and Marx, Engels and Lenin began to appear in 1938. Stalin appears alongside the three in a poster by husband and wife team Vladislav Pravdin and Zoia Pravdina, with the new caption of ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!’ (Fig. 2.25). In front of a rich red banner the heads of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, all in three-quarter view, are lined up. Not only has Stalin’s name been added to the banner as part of the hyphenated identity but, in contrast to earlier posters on this theme, Stalin is now treated in exactly the same manner as the other communist luminaries — his portrait is identical in size and manner of execution, and his gaze is in the same direction. No longer to be viewed as a mere ‘pupil’, ‘disciple’ or mouthpiece for Lenin, he takes his place as an equal alongside the other great theoreticians.

Stalin makes an interesting appearance with Marx, Engels and Lenin in a notable 1939 poster by Pavel Sokolov-Skalia, who was a well-known painter as well as graphic artist, head of Okna TASS, theatre artist and cinema artist for Mosfilm.\(^\text{329}\) In ‘The train is going from the station of socialism to the station of communism’,\(^\text{330}\) Stalin appears with the pillars of communism on a banner that decorates the side of a train pushing up a slope, and he is also portrayed in the window of the engine room as the train driver. The poster is sub-captioned ‘Tried and tested locomotive engineer of the Revolution, Comrade Stalin’.

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\(^{329}\) At the time of this poster, Sokolov-Skalia was teaching at the Grekov Studio of War Artists (Matthew Cullerne Bown, \textit{A dictionary of 20th century Russian and Soviet painters, 1900s–1980s}, London, Izomar, 1998).  
\(^{330}\) See sovietart.me/posters/year/1939/6.
The four heads appear so that it is Marx who is at the head of the train, and Stalin bringing up the rear. Beneath the picture of the train is a graph with the title ‘implementation schedule of the movement of the Bolshevik train’ which shows the various stops on the journey to socialism, beginning with the foundation of the newspaper *Iskra* in 1900, progressing through the armed uprising of December 1905, the founding of the newspaper *Pravda* in 1912, and the October Revolution of 1917. Another graph titled ‘current schedule’ shows the one-stop journey from socialism to communism. This playful graphic depicts Stalin as both the last in the line of great communist thinkers, and as the man currently responsible for steering the nation’s journey to the final destination envisaged by Marx and Engels.

A 1940 poster by an unidentified artist begins with the formulaic caption, then adds a little more: ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin! Long live Leninism!’ (Fig. 2.26). The text dominates the panoramic format of the poster, with a smaller section on the left of the poster occupied by a banner containing the four heads of Stalin, Lenin, Engels and Marx, each depicted as if cast in stone in identical manner. Beneath the heads, the first part of the large caption is repeated: ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!’ Stalin’s image has unambiguously found its place amid the communist gods.

The Great Patriotic War saw the revolutionary thinkers theme disappear for a period of time with only one 1941 poster by Nikolai Denisov and Nina Vatolina carrying the slogan ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!’ (Fig. 2.27). Perhaps ideology took a back seat to more critical matters at this time. The poster is dominated by the busts of the four theorists, all gazing to the viewer’s left at the same distant point. Stalin is not differentiated from the other three in pose or manner of treatment, although his head is the closest and largest, ostensibly due to perspective. While the portraits are realistic, they have a chiselled, immovable quality about them, and appear as remote and incorporeal, as belonging to the realm of heroes and gods, rather than the everyday mundane.

In 1946, the first volume of Stalin’s *Collected works* appeared and, in 1947, *Stalin: a short biography* was finally published. The biography outlines at great length Stalin’s contribution to Marxist thought and makes explicit the claim that Stalin has developed communist
ideology to a further stage than Lenin. In 1949 there was a return to the theme of the four great communist figures, although Kaidalov’s poster (Fig. 2.28) is all about Stalin, whose lavish 70th birthday celebrations occurred in this year. The poster makes visual reference to Marx, Engels and Lenin, but names only Stalin in the text. Kaidalov differentiates Stalin stylistically from the other great thinkers. Marx, Engels and Lenin appear to be part of the fabric of the gold-fringed banner and are incorporeal, while Stalin, in full colour and resplendent in his marshal’s uniform, takes up a position in the foreground in three-quarter view, bathed in an intense white light. Although the caption is in the Russian language, the poster was published in Tashkent by Gosizdat and the tiny people beneath the huge banner hold aloft bouquets of the cotton crop. In gold and white tones, the people themselves resemble a crop, part of the bounty of the Soviet republics whose energies are being harvested to build communism. In the background the holy Kremlin in red merges with Soviet banners and birthday fireworks light up the sky. The simple caption is also a departure from the visually similar posters up to this date. ‘Glory to great Stalin!’ is cut into grey stone and surrounded by a wreath of cotton leaves, giving it a feel of monolithic importance, permanence, and an association with victory. Although Stalin is removed from the banner and brought back into the real world, his treatment in this poster, and its unambiguous caption, serve to mark him out as worthy of particular adulation in the present.

The next poster to deal with the Marx–Engels–Lenin-Stalin theme was again published outside of the major centres, by Tatgosizdat in Kazan, Tatarstan (Fig. 2.29), and quotes Stalin on the necessity to train all cadres, regardless of specialty, in the laws of Marxism–

331 ‘The chapter on “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” is a masterly statement of the principles of dialectical and historical materialism, expounded with the utmost conciseness and lucidity. Here Stalin gives a general account of all that has been contributed to the dialectical method and materialistic theory by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and further develops the doctrine of dialectical and historical materialism in conformity with the latest facts of science and revolutionary practice … .

Stalin’s “Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” written by an incomparable master of the Marxist dialectical method, and generalizing the vast practical and theoretical experience of Bolshevism, raises dialectical materialism to a new and higher level, and is the pinnacle of Marxist-Leninist philosophical thought … .

That which Lenin had not lived to do in development of the theory of the state, was done by Stalin’ (Alexandrov et al., Joseph Stalin, pp. 140–41, p. 145).

332 State Publishing House of the Russian republic.

333 Publishing house of Tatarstan.
Leninism. The 1951 poster by illustrator of folktales and fairytales Bainazar Al’menov shows the four pillars of communism as part of a billowing banner that fills the top half of the picture plane. The banner is rich red in colour and adorned with gold tassels. Beneath it, also in rich red with gold trim, are four slender books, one by each of the men pictured above, which outline the immutable laws of Marxism–Leninism. Stalin’s work resides unambiguously beside those of the three great thinkers.

In 1953, the year in which Stalin died, there was yet another return to the banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin with a poster released in Moscow by A. Kossov (Fig. 2.30), bearing the caption ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin’. The four profiles of equal size, treated in identical fashion, adorn a huge red banner that takes up almost the entire visual field of the poster. Beneath the banner is a scene of celebration and jubilation in which a crowd of tiny figures dressed in colourful national costumes carry banners with the slogans ‘Forward to Communism!’, ‘Glory to the Party of Lenin and Stalin!’, ‘For peaceful work!’, and ‘For the happiness of the people!’. Stalin continued to be portrayed as part of the banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin until at least 1955, when he appeared with Marx, Engels and Lenin in a poster by Belopol’skii (Fig. 2.31). By this time Stalin had been dead for two years, and the poster shows the four profiles as if they are all hewn from the one stone. The caption of the poster makes clear that the Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin banner was still viewed as a legitimating tool for the Party, with the four communist leaders being invoked to inspire the people and confer legitimacy on the Party’s continued efforts toward the achievement of full communism: ‘Under the banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin, under the guidance of the Communist party — forward, to the victory of communism!’

334  ‘But there is one branch of science which Bolsheviks in all branches of science are in duty bound to know, and that is the Marxist–Leninist science of society, of the laws of social development, of the laws of development of the proletarian revolution, of the laws of development of socialist construction, and of the victory of communism.’ I. Stalin.

335  Stalin and Lenin both appear particularly ‘Asiatic’ in their banner profiles. Stalin was often given facial features reminiscent of the general racial characteristics of the place in which the poster was published. In the Asian parts of the Soviet Union he tended to have Asiatic features, while in the European parts he looked more European. Stalin described himself to Georgi Dimitrov as a ‘Russified Georgian–Asiian’ (obruseveshii gruzin-aziat) — see Plamper, The Stalin cult, p. 46. Lenin was part Kalmyk on his father’s side.
The claim that Stalin belonged with the other great communist writers was not merely empty rhetoric. Stalin's works had outsold those of the other great thinkers since the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{336} By 1949, almost 17 million copies of \textit{Problems of Leninism} were in print in 52 languages.\textsuperscript{337} Stalin certainly wished to be taken seriously as a communist ideologue, as is evidenced by his interventions in the discourses on linguistics, science and economics. Tucker sees Stalin's 1924 \textit{Foundations of Leninism} as an effective way for Stalin to 'prove himself a Bolshevik leader of large theoretical horizons'.\textsuperscript{338} In an informative article on Stalin as the 'coryphaeus of science', Ethan Pollock analyses Stalin's interventions in the field of science and argues that Stalin's interest should not be viewed as deriving from excessive vanity or even political expediency. Instead, he sees the time Stalin devoted to these matters as being indicative of their significance in Soviet society.\textsuperscript{339}

Stalin did not claim to have particular expertise in a variety of specialist fields. When he publicly intervened in the debate on Marrist linguistics by writing an article for \textit{Pravda}, he began by pointing out that he had been approached by a group of young comrades to contribute to the discussion, and that he did so on the basis of his knowledge of the laws of Marxism.\textsuperscript{340} Stalin was well and widely read in a number of areas, and had spent a lifetime studying and developing further the ideology of Marxism–Leninism. He spent 16 years trying to get Soviet political economists to produce an appropriate textbook on Marxist–Leninist economics.\textsuperscript{341} Stalin was intimately involved in the discussions about the book, editing the manuscript and producing copious notes that were then distributed to the authors. He evidently felt he was

\textsuperscript{336} Tucker cites overall figures for the release of the classic Marxist texts in the years 1932–33: 'seven million copies of the works of Marx and Engels, fourteen million of those of Lenin, and sixteen and a half million of those of Stalin, including two million copies of Stalin's \textit{Problems of Leninism}' ('The rise of Stalin's personality cult', p. 366).

\textsuperscript{337} Tucker, 'The rise of Stalin's personality cult', p. 366.

\textsuperscript{338} Tucker, \textit{Stalin as Revolutionary}, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{339} Pollock points out that Marxism–Leninism was viewed as an ideology based in science and that, accordingly, science should flourish and lead to the discovery of absolute truths if practised in accordance with Marxist principles ('Stalin as the coryphaeus of science: ideology and knowledge in the post-war years', pp. 271–88, in Davies & Harris, \textit{Stalin}, p. 273).

\textsuperscript{340} 'I am not a linguist … but as to Marxism in linguistics, as well as in other social sciences, this is a subject with which I have a direct connection' (I.V. Stalin, quoted in Pollock, 'Stalin as the coryphaeus of science', in Davies & Harris, \textit{Stalin}, pp. 277–78. The original of Stalin's article can be found at RGASPI f. 558, op. 1, d.5301).

\textsuperscript{341} 'Soviet power has been around for 33 years and we don't have a book on political economy. Everyone is waiting' (I.V. Stalin, RGASPI f.17, op. 133, d.41, ll.8–25, cited in Pollock, 'Stalin as the coryphaeus of science', in Davies & Harris, \textit{Stalin}, p. 284). Pollock observes: 'Stalin hoped the
qualified to make a valuable contribution to the science of Marxism–Leninism, a contribution born from the cauldron of actual experience in endeavouring to work in a socialist system. His predecessors did not have such experience, Lenin having died within seven years of the Revolution, many years short of the achievement of socialism in the USSR.

**Conclusion**

The personality cult of Stalin was a complex phenomenon that defies facile or superficial explanation. It was certainly generated as a ‘top-down’ phenomenon by the Soviet leadership with the purpose of rallying the citizenry around the central symbolic figure of Stalin. The state’s centralised control of artistic production facilitated the generation, maintenance and widespread dissemination of Stalin’s symbolic persona, although this centralised system of contractual work was often supported by the artists themselves, some of whom were able to gain access to stable and relatively secure incomes. The political poster industry was particularly tightly regulated, in part by virtue of the fact that the state controlled not only the distribution of contracts, but also the availability of materials and the printing presses. Artists created a charismatic persona around Stalin as leader, with a mythic and exemplary hagiography, increasingly superhuman abilities, and the blessing of the state’s founder. Stalin came to function as a symbol for the Party, the state and the nation, as well as for more abstract concepts, such as the new man, the new society and the Bolshevik vision. Chapter Three will explore the symbolism associated with the Stalin persona and his identification with the Father and Teacher archetypes.

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book would provide a stunning critique of capitalism and a powerful description of communism as Marx’s kingdom of freedom. In short, the book would be a ‘New Testament’ of Marxism–Leninism’ (Pollock, ‘Stalin as the coryphaeus of science’, in Davies & Harris, Stalin, p. 282).
Fig. 2.1 ‘Komsomol political education system mid-Volga organisation V.L.K.S.M for 1930–31’, unidentified artist, 1930, (Samara), 28 x 75 cm, edn 5,000

Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.2 ‘Under the Lenin banner for socialist construction’, Gustav Klutsis, 1930
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.3 ‘With the banner of Lenin we were victorious in the battle for the October revolution …’, Viktor Deni, 1931, Izogiz (Moscow, Leningrad), 52 x 72 cm, edn 20,000
Fig. 2.4 ‘Shock work at the machine is combined with the study of Marxist–Leninist theory’, A.M. Rumiantsev, 1931, Izogiz (Moscow), 85 x 58 cm, edn 40,000
Source: Hoover Institution Archives
Fig. 2.5 ‘With the banner of Lenin …’, Viktor Deni, 1933, Izogiz (Moscow), 77 x 109 cm, edn 60,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.6 ‘With the banner of Lenin …’, Gustav Klutsis, 1933, Izogiz, 62 x 88 cm, 300,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.7 ‘With the banner of Lenin …’, Iraklii Toidze, 1933, Izogiz (Moscow, Leningrad), 62 x 94 cm (edn of 300); 82 x 110 cm, edn 1,000
Source: Russian State Library

Fig. 2.8 ‘Long live the great party of Lenin–Stalin — leader and organiser of the victorious building of socialism!’, L. Stenberg, 1937
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.9 ‘Chronicle of the arrests, exiles and escapes of Comrade Stalin’, unidentified artist, 1938
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.10 ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, Vasilii Elkin, 1938, Izogiz (Moscow, Leningrad), 60 x 94 cm, edn 100,000

Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.11 ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, A.I. Madorskii, 1938, edn 15,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.12 ‘Be as the great Lenin was’, A.I. Madorskii, 1939, 60 x 90 cm, edn 20,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.13 ‘Departing from us …’, Vladimir Kaidalov, 1940, UzFimgiz (Tashkent), 60 x 92 cm, edn 7,000
Source: Russian State Library
2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

Fig. 2.14 ‘Under the banner of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin — forward to new victories!’, Petr Golub, 1945, Iskusstvo, 85.5 x 61 cm, edn 200,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.15 ‘1918–1943 Long live the XXV anniversary of the Leninist–Stalinist Komsomol’, Vladimir Serov, 1943, Iskusstvo (Leningrad), 70 x 52 cm, edn 5,000

Fig. 2.16 ‘The banner of Lenin …’, L. Stenberg, 1949, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), 85 x 56.5 cm, edn 100,000. Another edition of 100,000 was issued in 1951
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.17 ‘26 years without Lenin, but still on Lenin’s path’, Mytnikov, 1950, Izdanie Rostizo (Rostov-Don), edn 15,000
Source: Russian State Library
2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

Fig. 2.18 ‘In the name of communism’, Viktor Govorkov, 1951, Iskusstvo (Moscow), 86 x 97 cm, edn 600,000
Source: Russian State Library

Fig. 2.19 ‘Glory to the great leaders of October’, Naum Karpovskii, 1951, Iskusstvo (Moscow), 64.5 x 87.5 cm, edn 100,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.20 ‘Glory to Lenin, glory to Stalin, glory to great October’, V. Reshetnikov, 1952, Latgosizdat, edn 3,000
Source: Russian State Library

Fig. 2.21 ‘Long live the great, united party of Lenin–Stalin …’, unidentified artist, 1952
Source: ostaline.su/staliniana/posters/view.html?node=42411&letter=867&sort=names&card=37974
2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

Fig. 2.22 ‘Long live the Bolshevik Party, the Lenin–Stalin Party, the vanguard of the Soviet people forged in battle, the inspiration and organiser of our victories!’, Vladislav Pravdin, 1950, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), 64.5 x 87.5 cm, edn 1,000,000
Source: Russian State Library

Fig. 2.23 ‘Raise higher the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin!’, Gustav Klutsis, 1933, edn 50,000 and then an edition of 30,000. In 1936 an edition of 250,000 was released
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.24 ‘Long live the great, invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin’, Nikolai Dolgorukov, 1934, 163.5 x 56 cm
Source: The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum
Fig. 2.25 ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!', Vladislav Pravdin & Zoia Pravdina, 1938, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), 62 x 94 cm, edn 100,000
Source: Russian State Library

Fig. 2.26 ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin! Long live Leninism!', unidentified artist, 1940, edn 6,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.27 ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin!’, Nikolai Denisov & Nina Vatolina, 1941, Iskusstvo (Moscow, Leningrad), edn 100,000

Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.28 ‘Glory to great Stalin!’, Vladimir Kaidalov, 1949, Gosizdat (Tashkent), edn 5,000
Source: Russian State Library
Fig. 2.29 'But there is one branch of science …', Bainazar Al'menov, 1951, Tatgosizdat (Kazan), edn 13,000
Source: Russian State Library
2. THE RISE OF THE STALIN PERSONALITY CULT

Fig. 2.30 ‘Long live the great invincible banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin’, A. Kossov, 1953, Iskusstvo (Moscow), 66 x 92 cm, edn 500,000

Fig. 2.31 ‘Under the banner of Marx–Engels–Lenin–Stalin, under the guidance of the Communist party — forward, to the victory of communism!', Boris Belopol’skii, 1955, 54.5 x 87 cm
Source: Russian State Library