Introduction

In the arts of representation are found the real origins and organs of social control … What then is a king? He is a king’s portrait, and that alone makes him king …

Louis Marin¹

[N]ow the image of the leader is unthinkable outside of his portrait

Bill Keller²

Politics will eventually be replaced by imagery. The politician will be only too happy to abdicate in favor of his image, because the image will be much more powerful than he could ever be.

Marshall McLuhan³

Some people may say that Lenin is recommending moral persuasion instead of violence! But it is foolish to imagine we can solve the problem of organising a new science and technology for the development of communist society by violence alone.

Vladimir Il’ich Lenin⁴

¹ Louis Marin, Portrait of the king, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 218.
Although the literature on Stalinist propaganda is enormous, there has been no dedicated study on the marketing of Stalin’s personality cult in posters during the Stalinist period. This book is an attempt to fill this lacuna. Research on Iosif Stalin and the Soviet Union under his leadership is extensive and encompasses a wide number of academic disciplines, including history, political science, psychology, sociology, film, music, literature and the visual arts. In recent years, as material in the Soviet archives has become available to researchers since the collapse of communism in 1989, many scholars have used the archives to access material to confirm hypotheses that were earlier little more than informed conjecture. With so much material about Stalin already published, it is increasingly difficult to be familiar with all aspects of the Stalinist literature, and researchers in the field must exercise caution not to merely reiterate material that already exists elsewhere.

While it is true that almost every facet of Stalinist history, politics and biography has been examined by specialists in these fields, there has been limited research conducted on art under Stalin, and a comparatively small amount of research devoted to the posters of the Stalin era, especially examined from the iconographic perspective of the art historian. Historian Jan Plamper suggests that one reason for this derives from the very nature of Stalinist art. He argues that socialist realism had totalising ambitions that not only sought to fill all available space, but also to deny the existence of art criticism and art history as discrete disciplines by making them indistinguishable from the material found in visitor’s comment books at exhibitions. Thus, according to Plamper, the absence of conventional art historical exegeses of socialist realism paintings today seems to testify to the success of ‘socialist realist empire-building ambitions’.

From the beginning of the Soviet regime, posters were seen as a vitally important medium for communicating with and educating the vast population of the territories of the USSR. While the medium of film came to rival the poster in importance in the late 1930s, the poster remained, throughout the years of Stalin’s leadership, a primary form of propaganda produced under strict centralised control that closely reflected the regime’s evolving priorities. Posters containing an image of Stalin provide evidence for analysis of the way in which the

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5 Plamper, The Stalin cult, p. 115.
leadership wished to present itself and the regime, and indicate those values that were considered most important to the creation of the new man and the new civilisation. Stalin came increasingly to symbolise the Party and the state, and the persona generated for him in propaganda reflects how the state saw itself or, at the very least, wished to appear in the eyes of the people. Although scholars including Victoria Bonnell,6 Graeme Gill,7 and Jeffrey Brooks8 have all made extensive reference to the propaganda poster in their historical and sociological research, all but Bonnell (see below) have done so within a broader context of the history of the Stalinist years. The posters are employed for illustrative purposes, as examples of a particular theme or trend under discussion.

In this book, the Stalin propaganda posters are examined from an art historical iconographic and iconologic perspective, employing methodology that was first developed by Erwin Panofsky,9 and Fritz Saxl.10 This methodology focuses on imagery and the meaning of works of art, rather than on form. The iconographic analysis commences with a detailed and intensive study of the imagery employed in a large number of posters of Stalin, and the iconologic analysis explores the meaning inferred from this imagery, examined within the historic context in which the posters were produced. It is argued that the portrayal of Stalin in posters was not intended to reflect his personal qualities as a man, or even as a leader, but that his persona was constructed along archetypal and mythic lines in order to symbolise the essential qualities of Bolshevism as an ideology, and more concrete but impersonal entities, such as the Party and the state. The intention behind the use of Stalin as a symbol was primarily didactic. While Marxist ideology was a central concern for Stalin and

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the top Party elite, it usually assumed a lower priority among the
general population in their everyday struggle to survive in conditions
of varying privation. In order to transform man and society, and to
create a new civilisation, which was the ultimate goal of Marxist–
Leninist ideology, the population had not only to be made aware of
socialist tenets and principles, but to wholeheartedly adopt them
as their own and work harmoniously towards the achievement of a
real transformation in their physical environment. Due to the largely
agrarian nature of Soviet society and low levels of literacy in the
population, propaganda that focused on complex ideological notions,
or that assumed considerable prior knowledge, was found to be
unsuccessful in educating the population as a whole. Ideology had to
be simplified, goals had to be made clear, and impersonal entities were
given a face that was both representative and instantly recognisable.
As this process evolved, the image of the leader came to increasing
prominence. Unlike painted portraits of Stalin, posters usually left
less room for ambiguity by virtue of greater freedom to montage
objects in the one image. They also had the capacity for distortions of
scale and perspective and the accompanying caption could direct the
viewer to the intended meaning.

The approach adopted in this research is primarily an art historical one,
however the art history discipline itself has become, to some extent,
multidisciplinary. Primary emphasis is placed on an iconographic,
iconological and semiotic study where the Stalinist imagery is placed
within an iconographic tradition. Simultaneously, this tradition is
interrogated in a broader sociological context, taking into account
a multitude of approaches that are adopted by political scientists,
historians, psychologists, psychoanalysts and other researchers.
The author’s own background in art history, psychology, philology,
political science and modern history is, to some extent, reflected in
the approaches adopted. It is hoped that the material uncovered in
this study may in turn inform the current discourse in Stalinist studies
across a number of other disciplines.

In order to obtain a thorough understanding of the purpose and
meaning of Stalin posters, research for this book draws on several
fields of enquiry. One of the primary areas of research focuses on the

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development and uses of political posters, both in Stalin’s Soviet Union and outside. A good general history of the graphic arts for political purposes can be found in Robert Philippe’s *Political graphics*, and Jeffrey T. Schnapp’s *Revolutionary tides*. An excellent overview of the history of the political poster in Eastern Europe is *Political posters in Central and Eastern Europe, 1945–95*, by James Aulich and Marta Sylvestrová. For a comprehensive examination of the Russian Civil War poster, see Vyacheslav Polonskii’s *Russkii revolyutsionnyi plakat*, and B.S. Butnik-Siverskii’s *Sovetskii plakat epokhi grazhdanskoj voiny, 1918–1921*. For an examination of posters in the context of art in the early years of Stalinism in the USSR see C.G. Holme’s *Art in the USSR*, published in 1935. Peter Kenez also examines pre-Stalinist posters in the context of Soviet propaganda on the whole in *The birth of the propaganda state*, published in 1985. Writing more recently, since the opening of the archives, Graeme Gill and Malte Rolf both examine the poster in the wider propaganda context.

Stephen White’s *The Bolshevik poster* of 1998 examines the pre-revolutionary influences on the Soviet political poster and provides an excellent history of the development of the poster under Lenin’s and Stalin’s leadership. White’s study includes biographies of leading poster artists and outlines the formal structures in place for the production of posters, their dissemination, and ongoing feedback to poster artists. White’s primary focus is on the posters of the Civil War period, which he sees as the peak of Bolshevik poster production.
with perhaps a further peak in the years of the Great Patriotic War.\(^{22}\) He devotes only one chapter out of six to posters produced after the Civil War.

An extensive source of information on Soviet posters is Bonnell’s *Iconography of power*.\(^{23}\) Bonnell’s research, conducted with primary sources from the Russian State Library’s poster collection, examines the historical antecedents of the Soviet political poster and the circumstances under which political posters were created. She approaches the topic thematically, dealing with the iconography of the worker, the representation of women and Bolshevik demonology across the Lenin and Stalin years. Bonnell touches on material of particular relevance to the current research in chapters on the iconography of the *vozhd’* (leader)\(^ {24}\) and the apotheosis of Stalinist political art.

Three recent monographs have also provided useful information for this research. Margarita Tupitsyn focuses on the work of Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina,\(^ {25}\) while Erika Wolf\(^ {26}\) and Robert Bird et al.\(^ {27}\) have examined the career of Viktor Koretskii in publications in 2012 and 2011 respectively. Two sources were consulted for biographical information on Soviet poster artists. The incomplete multi-volume *Khudozhnikii Narodov SSSR*\(^ {28}\) contains brief biographies of many poster artists, and Matthew Cullerne Bown’s *A dictionary of 20th century Russian and Soviet painters, 1900s–1980s*\(^ {29}\) provides brief biographical sketches of some graphic artists who were also

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\(^{22}\) White, *The Bolshevik poster*, p. 130.

\(^{23}\) Bonnell, *Iconography of power*.

\(^{24}\) The term *vozhd’* derives from the Church Slavonic for leader. At the time of the Russian Revolution, it was primarily used to denote a military leader, and was first applied to Lenin in around 1918 (see Bonnell, *Iconography of power*, p. 140).


known as painters. A 2009 journal article by Maria Gough examines the emergence of photomontage in the work of John Heartfield and Gustav Klutsis. An invaluable comprehensive catalogue of Okna TASS (windows of the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) posters was compiled by Aleksei Morozov in 2013. Many other sources were consulted for general research or comparative purposes in order to situate the Soviet political poster in the context of other propaganda posters.

During Stalin’s leadership, all production of propaganda materials was centralised under government control, which lead to homogeneity of themes, and often of methods, across artistic fields. It is thus necessary to view the political poster in the context of the whole of Soviet artistic production. Key texts dealing with art and literature under

Stalin include those by Matthew Cullerne Bown,33 Jan Plamper,34 Jeffrey Brooks,35 David Elliott,36 Sheila Fitzpatrick,37 Katerina Clark,38 Graeme Gill,39 Evgeny Dobrenko,40 Rosa Ferré,41 Peter Kenez,42 James von Geldern,43 Irina Gutkin,44 Dawn Ades,45 Thomas Lahusen,46 Régine


A central argument of this book is that the Russian tradition of icon painting associated with the Orthodox Church has been a strong influence on the form and content of the political poster. In The avant-garde icon, Andrew Spira argues that Russian art of the 19th and 20th centuries is underpinned by the artforms associated with traditional Russian icon painting. The meaning of icons by Léonide Ouspensky

52 Igor Golomshток, Totalitarian art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People’s Republic of China, New York, Icon Editions, 1990.
and Vladimir Lossky is one penetrating and insightful resource on the meaning of icons, their history, and the way in which they are used for the purposes of didactic instruction in the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is not sufficient to merely consider Stalinist art in isolation. In any society, but most particularly in the centralised and controlled socialist systems of the 20th century, art both reflects and creates the cultural milieu in which it operates. It is crucial to understand this wider social, economic and political context if one is to understand the meanings and functions of propaganda in the Soviet system. A vast array of material has been published on the historical, political and social conditions in the USSR under Stalin. For a full listing of materials consulted see the bibliography. Key texts include those by Stalinist scholars Balázs Apor, Jan Behrends, Polly Jones and E.A. Rees; Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomquist; Marina Balina and E.A. Dobrenko; David Brandenberger; Jeffrey Brooks; Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko; Sarah Davies; Orlando Figes; Sarah Davies, "The "Cult" of the Vozhd": representations in letters from 1934–41", *Russian History*, 24:1–2, 1997, pp. 131–47; Sarah Davies, *Popular opinion in Stalin's Russia: terror, propaganda and dissent, 1934–1941*, Cambridge University Press, 1997; Sarah Davies & James Harris (eds), *Stalin: a new history*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

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68 Clark & Dobrenko, *Soviet culture and power*.
Sheila Fitzpatrick;71 J. Arch Getty;72 Graeme Gill;73 Jochen Hellbeck;74 Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper;75 David L. Hoffman;76 Catriona Kelly;77 Peter Kenez;78 Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman;79 Stephen Kotkin;80 Eric Naiman;81 Jan Plamper;82 Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger;83

78 Kenez, The birth of the propaganda state.
82 Plamper, The Stalin cult.
83 Platt & Brandenberger, Epic revisionism.

A substantial field of research over several decades has detailed the biography of Stalin. An early contribution to the field that is of particular interest is the biography written by Alexandrov et al. under Stalin’s supervision in 1947, which was published with specific didactic and propagandistic intent. This text provides one of the best available indicators of how Stalin and his cohort intended his persona to be presented to the people. Other Stalinist ‘insider’ accounts include those by Stalin’s daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva, Vyacheslav Molotov, Viktor Serge, Ilia Ehrenburg, Aleksandra Kollontai,

88 Stites, Soviet popular culture.
and Milovan Djilas. A contemporary hostile view of Stalin can be found in the writings of Lev Trotskii. Notable Stalin biographies from the period before 1990 include Isaac Deutscher’s Stalin; Robert McNeal’s Stalin; and Robert Tucker’s Stalin as revolutionary, 1879–1929. More recent biographies, which adopt a new perspective on Stalin that is informed by material in the archives, include Robert Service’s Stalin; and the two recent books by Simon Sebag Montefiore, Young Stalin and Stalin: the court of the Red Tsar.

Although a broad examination of many aspects of society under Stalin provides a crucial context for understanding the Stalin political poster, it is necessary to also look further afield to provide a more complete context for this material. Throughout recorded history there have been a number of personality cults around prominent historic figures, going back to classical antiquity with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Caesar Augustus; and later the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and Napoleon Bonaparte. Research in this area has sought to understand the phenomenon of the personality cult throughout history, and the ways in which the cults have manifested through time. Surviving art objects and contemporary accounts of artistic production from each period provide a rich record of how such cults were expressed in each era.

104 In Rituals and power, S.R.F. Price examines the personality cults of antiquity, from Alexander the Great to the Caesars (Rituals and power: the Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor, Cambridge University Press, 1984). Eric Badian’s Alexander the Great provides a comprehensive foundational study of the cult of Alexander the Great and how it came into existence (‘Alexander the Great between two thrones and Heaven’, Journal of Roman Archaeology, supp. ss 17, 1996, pp. 11–26). In The divinity of the Roman emperor, Lily Ross Taylor explores the processes by which Julius Caesar came to be deified, and how his successor, Caesar Augustus, was able to consolidate his divinity through reference to his lineage from Julius Caesar (The divinity of the Roman emperor, Middletown, American Philological Association, 1931). Larry Silver’s book Marketing Maximilian is a primary source of information on the cult of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, who utilised the newly invented printing press and artists including Albrecht
There also exists a specifically Russian context for the cult of personality and Stalin must be considered in the context of the tsars who led Russia before him. The available literature on Russian history is vast and cannot be covered adequately within the scope of this book. A selection of sources that provide a background to the history of Russian leadership include Abbott Gleason’s *A companion to Russian history*, Geoffrey Hosking’s *Russia and the Russians*, Michael Cherniavsky’s *Tsar and people*, Richard Hellie’s ‘The structure of Russian imperial history’, Richard Wortman’s *Scenarios of power*, and Edward L. Keenan’s ‘Muscovite political folkways’. As the Second World War loomed in Europe, Stalin and the Soviet leadership appealed to this great Russian past to gain legitimacy and to mobilise the people for the sacrifices necessary to the war effort. There is extensive literature available on Stalin’s ‘rehabilitation’ of Aleksandr Nevskii, Ivan IV and Peter the Great, which takes advantage of the recent availability of material in the Soviet archives. *Epic revisionism*, edited by Kevin M.F. Platt and David Brandenberger, is a collection of essays in which notable scholars from several disciplines explore the return to canonical status of a number of historic and literary personalities who had been disregarded after Dürer and Hans Burgkmair to spread the symbols of his authority with an unprecedented access to his target audience (Marketing Maximilian: the visual ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor, Princeton University Press, 2008). The scholarly literature on the cult of Napoleon also proves valuable to an investigation of the major premises of this book. Examination of the art produced in France in support of Napoleon’s reign shows a continuation and elaboration on the themes that emerged in earlier personality cults. In *Napoleon and history painting*, Christopher Prendergast conducts a detailed study of some of the most well-known paintings of Napoleon that were executed in his own time by artists such as Antoine-Jean Gros, Jacques-Louis David, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, with an eye to the symbolism employed, ambiguity (both intentional and unintentional), satire and the establishment of lineage and legitimacy for the emperor *Napoleon and history painting: Antoine-Jean Gros’s La Bataille d’Eylau*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997). David Welch and Simon Lee both examine art as propaganda in the personality cult of Napoleon (David Welch, ‘Painting, propaganda and patriotism’, *History Today*, 55:7, 2005, pp. 42–50; Simon Lee, *Art and ideas: David*, London, Phaidon Press, 1998).

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111  Platt & Brandenberger, *Epic revisionism*. 
the 1917 Revolution. In addition to this anthology, there is a wide selection of journal articles discussing ‘socialism in one country’, the rehabilitation of the tsars, and Russian art during the Second World War by scholars including David Brandenberger, Maureen Perrie, Katerina Clark, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Thomas Lahusen, E.A. Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, and Lars T. Lih.

Other personality cults of the 20th century provide a further historic context for examination of the Stalin cult. While the abovementioned readings provide a ‘vertical’ perspective from which to view Stalin, a horizontal perspective also contributes to a greater understanding of the phenomenon of his personality cult. Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Mao Zedong chronologically overlapped with Stalin, and each used the arts to generate and maintain personality cults, making use of the technologies that became available in the 20th century. A number of sources compare Stalin and Hitler, such as *Hitler and Stalin* by Alan Bullock, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler* by Robert Gellately, Åke Sandler’s *Stalin and Hitler*, and *June 1941* by John Lukacs. Igor Golomshtok undertakes a comparative view of art under the ‘totalitarian’ regimes of Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini and Mao, and argues that art functions in a totalitarian system to transform dry ideology into images and myths for consumption by the general

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114 Clark, *The Soviet novel*; Clark, ‘Eisenstein’s two projects for a film about Moscow’.

115 Fitzpatrick, *The cultural front*; Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism*.


In his article ‘Stalinism vs Hitlerism …’ Ernest Raiklin, however, argues for the existence of substantial differences between the societies of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

In addition to viewing Stalin posters in a historical context, it is also useful to examine the psychological phenomena associated with the personality cult and their relevance to the forms and content of propaganda. Research of this nature provides insights into how personality cults arise, and the many factors that maintain them. As there is a strong and consistent use of visual topoi throughout the history of the personality cult, and as the topoi themselves appear to be archetypal in their symbolism, and are the defining feature of much of the art generated in the service of personality cults, some understanding of the psychological mechanisms at work is helpful. Research has been undertaken in the field of leadership studies, with particular reference to charismatic and ideological leaders.

123 Golomshok, Totalitarian art.
Psychoanalytic approaches to the Stalin cult have been considered\textsuperscript{126} and, for the first time to this author’s knowledge, the concept of mortality salience has been applied to the personality cult of Stalin.\textsuperscript{127}

One notable feature of the personality cult that manifests strongly in Stalin posters is the way in which the forms and symbols of religion are employed in the service of a regime professing an atheist philosophy. A number of concepts and fields of research assist in understanding the way in which religious imagery came to be associated with Bolshevism, and Stalin came to be portrayed in a manner that suggested a dual, Christ-like nature, or deity. Central to this argument is the concept of political faith as religion in the Soviet Union and other ‘totalitarian states’. There exists a huge academic discourse in this area, including a journal, \textit{Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions}, that is devoted exclusively to the field.\textsuperscript{128}


The study of the Soviet poster is hampered by the fact that there is no comprehensive collection or catalogue of these posters. The Russian State Library in Moscow, known as the V.I. Lenin Library between 1925 and 1992, is the official copyright library of Russia (and the USSR between 1922 and 1991). In theory, one copy of every publication had to be lodged at this library, including all published posters. In practice, this has not always been the case and there are many lacunae, especially in the poster collection. The collection, which reputedly numbers about 400,000 posters and includes pre-revolutionary and post-Soviet posters, is catalogued in a card index divided thematically and chronologically. The posters themselves are stored in huge folios and are clustered in chronological bundles and then sorted thematically. This means that it is possible to directly access virtually all of the posters held at the library that deal with Stalin. There is also an incomplete subsidiary card index dealing with authors/artists of the posters. For this research I accessed all folders holding images of Stalin, as far as possible. Some of the posters listed in the index cards are no longer extant or could not be located. In many instances, neither the index cards nor the posters themselves contained all of the relevant publication information, including details of the artist, the size of the print run and the exact place of publication. There is
also room for inherent confusion as some of the posters, especially offset lithographs, were produced in different sizes and editions, and reproduced in subsequent years.

Commencing in 1934, *Letopis’ izobrazitel’nogo iskusstva* published four annual issues, continuing through to the present. All of the art volumes list the photographic reproductions of paintings, ‘posters’, ‘photographic newspapers’, postcards, handbills and any other publications with graphic content. A study of these between 1934 and 1953 reveals some of the lacunae in the Russian State Library holdings. For the purposes of this iconographic study it is difficult to determine whether the listed posters do or do not contain an image of Stalin. Although clearly the posters isolated in this study may not represent a comprehensive collection of posters with an image of Stalin, they do represent a substantial proportion of such posters and are a sufficient representation through which to draw substantiated conclusions.

In addition to the poster collection at the Russian State Library, the poster collection at the Museum of Contemporary History in Moscow was also accessed, yielding 43 posters that include an image of Stalin, although these overlapped with those contained in the State Library collection. The poster collections of the State Historical Museum in Moscow and the Museum of the Great Patriotic War were also accessed. Additional posters meeting the criteria for this research were found in a number of books that either contained Soviet poster collections, made reference to posters, or were monographs devoted to the most well-known Soviet poster artists, and in online collections.

These search methods yielded a total of 389 posters that contained an image of Stalin. In determining what constituted ‘an image of Stalin’, it was decided that all types of visual representation of the face or body of Stalin were eligible for inclusion, encompassing photographs, sketches and line drawings, paintings, silhouettes, representations of Stalin as a statue or a frieze, Stalin’s image on a banner, and images of Stalin in newspapers and books as they are represented in the posters. No images fitting the research criteria were discarded. This broad interpretation of the ‘image of Stalin’ was adopted because the way in

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129 Annals of the Fine Arts.
130 See Appendix 1 for a chart breaking down by year the number of posters illustrated with an image of Stalin.
which his image appeared on posters was fluid and dynamic over time, and changes in depiction coincided with external events or crises, the demands of internal policy, and trends in the development of the personality cult around Stalin.

The posters of this sample are analysed as art objects that were produced for the broad purpose of propaganda for the Soviet regime, under which a number of more defined purposes can be outlined, as discussed below. Although produced as a form of state art aimed at the masses, the posters as objects carry heavy political, ideological and sociological baggage and can only be understood within these contexts. This iconographic approach to the posters, coupled with a cross-disciplinary approach to the contexts in which they were produced, has both benefits and limitations. The focus on primary materials — the posters themselves — within the narrow confines of this topic, has brought to light many previously unpublished posters and has added substantially to the material available for scholarly analysis. This study’s concentration on the image of Stalin in the posters, and close examination of a such a large number of posters, limits its application to making broader generalisations about Soviet propaganda posters on the whole. This study does not undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis of Stalin’s image across all propaganda media, nor does it compare the image and persona of Stalin with those of other socialist/communist leaders or with his contemporaries in other countries. While these are potentially fruitful areas of study, they are beyond the scope of this investigation. This study does not focus on the material conditions and contractual arrangements under which poster artists and other artists worked in the USSR, although where these can be shown to have a bearing on the types of posters produced, they are discussed.131

131 There are several excellent studies that use archival resources to document these conditions, including Plamper’s The Stalin cult (2012). Plamper’s book also documents in considerable detail who was responsible for producing and censoring cult products, and how much control Stalin exerted over the dissemination and use of his image. The detail of Plamper’s argument is not reproduced in this study, although Plamper’s findings will inform this writer’s argument. See also Plamper, ‘Abolishing ambiguity’; Bown, Art under Stalin; Bown & Taylor, Art of the Soviets; Bown, Socialist realist painting; Rosa Ferré, Red cavalry; Groys, The total art of Stalinism; Oliver Johnson, ‘The Stalin Prize and the Soviet artist’; Reid, ‘All Stalin’s women; Reid, ‘Socialist realism in the Stalinist terror’.
In Chapter One the key concepts informing the research will be explored and a brief historical overview of the use of art as propaganda in leader cults from the ancient world to Stalinist times will be undertaken. It will be demonstrated that the cult of Stalin was not a unique phenomenon but drew heavily from its historical precedents. The political science concept of the ‘political religion’ will be investigated and it will be argued that Bolshevism fits all the criteria for inclusion in this category. This concept is crucial to a proper understanding of the Stalin personality cult not only because it provides a rationale for features of the cult that may seem surprising in a secular, anti-religious context, but also because the traditions, images and rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church continued to be strongly expressed, albeit often in mildly disguised form, in Soviet propaganda, despite its avowedly atheist stance.

Myth and ritual are crucial components of any society, and when the Bolsheviks seized power they attempted to break with the past and to invent a new tradition. As myths develop from the collective unconscious and grow out of a shared cultural experience, as well as demonstrating many commonalities across all human traditions, Soviet myths inevitably drew on universal archetypes and had much in common with their Russian predecessors and with other myths from other societies. The propaganda used to disperse these myths drew on ancient forms, whilst also incorporating new technologies. One point of divergence between the newly forged Soviet myths and rituals and those of some other societies is that the Soviets sought consciously to instil a collective culture that emphasised the values of collective welfare and happiness rather than focusing on individual fulfilment.

The model of leadership engaged in by the Bolshevik Party will also be examined as an example of charismatic leadership, with reference to the concepts of legitimacy outlined by the sociologist Max Weber. Brief reference will be made to some of the salient features and special challenges that accompany the charismatic situation. The concept of charismatic leadership is important to an understanding of the perceived need to build a cult of personality around a leader in order to bestow legitimacy upon the regime. While there is a common perception that the Russians prefer strong autocratic leadership to more democratic forms of government, this has not always historically been the case, and the creation of a strong leader persona at the helm
of the nation had more to do with the lack of any traditional or legal legitimacy for the government, and to the presence of forces hostile to the regime, than to any alleged national predisposition.

Chapter Two will explore how Stalin’s charismatic leader persona was created. Despite appearing an unlikely candidate for charismatic leadership, Stalin was perceived as approachable and accessible in his early years, as personally charming by people who met him and by close comrades, and also as highly intelligent by those who knew him well. Beset by internal strife and external pressures, the Bolshevik regime required a rallying symbol at its head, a figure who could appeal to and mobilise people of all nationalities from all walks of life. Those who would not be mobilised were deemed ‘enemies of the people’ and exiled, imprisoned or executed. It will be argued that a number of devices were employed to construct a symbolic persona embodied by the name ‘Stalin’, including binary coding to contrast the leader with the demonic enemy; the creation of a hagiography that functioned in the same manner as the lives of the saints to create an instructional myth for the education of believers; and the veneration of an apotheosised Lenin symbol to legitimate Stalin as leader and, by extension, the Party and its ideological vision for government. There will also be a brief examination of the ways in which artistic production was co-opted and regulated by the state in order that all art served the function of propaganda and education of the masses. Finally, there will be an examination of the role of the Soviet propaganda poster in maintaining the leader cult in Soviet society.

Chapters Three and Four will be devoted to a detailed examination of the plurality of meanings embodied by the symbolic persona of Stalin as depicted in propaganda posters. Many of the metaphors associated with Stalin will be examined, including his association with steel and with the sun, which emerge from pre-Soviet traditions of leadership emblems. The association of Stalin with the archetypes of the Architect, the Helmsman, the Magician, the Teacher and, most notably, the pervasive archetype of the Father will be explored in considerable detail. Analysis of these archetypes will be informed by what Jeffrey Brooks calls the ‘politics of obligation’, and the way in which notions of obligation and reciprocity pervaded Soviet society and contributed to the utility of these archetypes will be examined.
In Chapter Four the exploration of the archetypes associated with the Stalin persona in posters will continue, focusing on the Warrior and Saviour archetypes. It will be argued that although a warrior identity for Stalin was emphasised in posters from the early years of his leadership and was indeed a natural extension of the self-image of most of the Old Bolsheviks, the Warrior archetype as identified with the top leadership was primarily resident in the person of Kliment Voroshilov, marshal of the Soviet Union until 1941, when the Soviet Union became embroiled in the Great Patriotic War. After victory in the war, the Warrior archetype came to be merged with that of the Saviour, as Stalin was credited with leading the nation to victory. As the Cold War deepened and the Soviet Union became the major sponsor of the international peace movement, the Saviour archetype came to dominate in portrayals of Stalin in propaganda posters.

Although the notion of Stalin as Saviour only gained momentum after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin was depicted in posters as a sacred personage from the mid-1930s, when he was frequently portrayed in a similar or identical manner to the apotheosised Lenin and given superhuman attributes. There is considerable evidence that some people treated portraits and posters of Stalin and Lenin as icons, hanging them in the ‘icon corner’ in their homes and praying to them and that, despite official censure for such behaviour, some propaganda was created to intentionally evoke the Orthodox icon. It will be argued that, despite religion being anathema to Lenin, propaganda posters consciously paralleled and invoked religious experience in order to arouse enthusiasm and zeal in the population for the immense tasks of industrialisation, collectivisation, winning the war and creating a new type of civilisation. The image of Stalin in propaganda posters across the decades of his leadership, when examined in broad perspective, reveals that not only was that image ubiquitous by its omnipresence, but that it was all-encompassing, holding a multitude of semantic meanings, encapsulating a number of archetypes and also, somewhat surprisingly, encompassing traits of both male and female genders.

From 1929 until 1953, the retouched image of Stalin became a central symbol in Soviet propaganda across all artistic and cultural genres. Images of an omniscient Stalin appeared in the media of socialist realist painting, statuary, monumental architecture, friezes, banners and posters. Stalin was lauded in poetry, theatre, film and song; oaths were sworn to him; thanksgiving ceremonies were held to
honour him; and millions of Soviet soldiers in the Great Patriotic War ran into battle with his name on their lips.\textsuperscript{132} The ‘Stalin’ who was celebrated in propaganda bore but scant resemblance to the man Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili whose humble origins, criminal past, penchant for violent solutions and unprepossessing appearance\textsuperscript{133} made him an unlikely recipient of uncritical charismatic adulation. The Bolsheviks needed a wise, nurturing and authoritative figure to embody their revolutionary vision and to legitimate their hold on power. The persona of ‘Stalin’ arose through a process that involved both the deliberate manufacture of a charismatic leader through propaganda, and the wish-fulfilling projections of an unnerved, destabilised and largely uneducated, illiterate and superstitious population of a sage guide through troubled times. This leader would come to embody the sacred and archetypal qualities of the Father of the nation, the great Warrior and military strategist, the wise Teacher and the Saviour of the land. Stalin’s image in propaganda posters became a symbol of Bolshevik values and the personification of a revolutionary new type of society. Transforming a leader into a symbol that embodies an ideological vision is a key tactic in mobilising a population to identify as a cohesive whole, to strive for common goals and to behave in prescribed ways.

When the Bolsheviks seized power in the October Revolution of 1917, they were not secure in their rule. Lenin hoped that the Russian Revolution would be a spark for a broader rebellion — Europe, including Russia, was still in the grip of the First World War, and it was hoped that this instability would see communist parties across Europe brought to power, which would then support the revolution in Russia. This expected domino effect did not occur and the Bolsheviks in Russia found themselves isolated in power in a country with a largely feudal economy that was still suffering from the ravages and deprivations of war. As early as 1881, the revolutionary leader Vera Zasulic wrote to Karl Marx on behalf of the revolutionary socialists to ask whether he thought all countries of the world had to pass

\textsuperscript{132} Ehrenburg, \textit{Men, years — life}, vol. 6, p. 304. Literary historian Lazar Lazarev claims, however, that in his experience of the war, soldiers did not run into battle shouting ‘For Stalin!’: ‘… in fact we never mentioned Stalin, and when we went into battle it was “For the Motherland!” that we shouted. The rest of our war cries were obscenities’ (quoted in Figes, \textit{The whisperers}, p. 434).

\textsuperscript{133} Ilia Ehrenburg recalled: ‘On one occasion I found myself standing close to him … He was not like his portraits. An old man, short of stature, with a face that looked pitted by the years, a low forehead, a pair of sharp, lively eyes …’ (Ehrenburg, \textit{Men, years — life}, vol. 6, p. 302).
through all phases of capitalist production on their way to socialism. Zasulic implored Marx to answer as soon as possible because, for the Russian socialists, this was a matter of ‘life and death’. Marx replied in a brief and guarded missive from London on 8 March 1881 that the Russian socialists could jump directly to the communist phase, but would only achieve success by starting with the land held in common by the peasants, eliminating all other harmful influences, and with subsequent revolutions in Western Europe. Marx noted that his theories, as outlined in _Das Kapital_, applied only to the highly industrialised and modernised Western democracies, where all property was privately owned.\(^{134}\)

After 1917, the Bolsheviks found themselves waging war on two fronts — the military and the ideological. Russia was torn apart by a civil war that lasted approximately four years. The situation was complex and variable across the vast empire and conflict did not occur merely along class lines, but was complicated by nationalist concerns in some ethnic territories. In an informative study of nationality and class in the 1917 revolutions, Ronald Suny points out that, while most of the non-Russian peoples of the tsarist empire were peasant, they differed radically from one another in their internal class differentiation and their degree of national consciousness. Thus, while in some areas, such as the Ukraine, national and economic class divisions coincided almost exactly — the Ukrainians were almost entirely peasants, the landowners and officials were Poles and Russians, the commercial bourgeoisie was largely Jewish — in other parts of the empire the population was almost entirely peasant with low levels of national consciousness. Often concepts of identity were tied to the village or region, rather than to nation, race or class. Across the empire the Civil War, which was triggered by the disintegration of the unifying imperial authority and which was characterised by economic disintegration and the upheaval of the old social order, was fought on a variety of grievances and issues by combatants with varying agendas.\(^{135}\)


Despite the fact that the Bolshevik elite shared some grievances with the peasantry, there was not much common ground from which to mobilise the peasants against the monarchic regime. Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861 as part of a large-scale agrarian reform under Tsar Aleksandr II, yet the material situation of many peasants did not improve. The revolution of 1905 in which Tsar Nicholas II’s troops fired on petitioners was seen by many as an indication that the tsar was no longer the protector of the people. Ideological arguments assumed little importance for the peasants when compared with greater concerns such as how to feed the family. The Bolsheviks sought to win over the peasantry with the promise of a better life under a socialist system and freedom from oppression, and appealed to the peasants with tangible promises including the seizure of land from rich landowners, and the redistribution of this land on an equitable basis. Much of the peasantry turned against the Bolsheviks as the Civil War became increasingly protracted.

The situation in the urban centres, although better for the Bolsheviks, was still far from certain. Unemployment and inflation were high — the ruble was worthless and workers were paid in kind and then had to barter for food. Industrial output had dropped to one-fifth of that before the war, with the steel works producing only 5 per cent of prewar output. Marxism promised the elimination of class, and state ownership of the means of production. Ideologically, it promised power and dignity to the worker, as the proletariat took over the reins of government. To make matters worse for the Bolsheviks, they could not even count on unequivocal support from the intelligentsia. For example, writer Maksim Gor’kii expressed his concerns in Novaya Zhizn as early as January 1918:

The ‘Government of Soviets’ is putting into the heads of the workers the notion that the establishment of a socialist system is possible in Russia.

136 In her examination of folklore themes as a means to shed light on peasant attitudes to government and authority, Maureen Perrie finds the picture that emerges is not straightforward. While sometimes appearing as a negative or foolish figure in folklore, the tsar is more often portrayed as the benevolent protector of the poor, with boyars, landowners and the clergy as the perpetrators of evil and injustice. The ‘good tsar’ was a stereotypical figure, not necessarily embodied by the current monarch, but referencing backward to the historic past (‘Folklore as evidence of peasant mentalite’).
137 Deutscher, Stalin, p. 223.
138 New Life.
Novaya Zhizn, in a number of articles which met no objections as to their substance from the government organs, asserted — and will assert in the future — that the necessary conditions for the introduction of socialism are nonexistent in our country and that the Smolny government treats the Russian worker like brushwood: it kindles the brushwood in order to see — will a European revolution be ignited by the Russian bonfire?  

By 1921 about 800,000 soldiers had lost their lives fighting in the Civil War and as many as 8 million civilians died as a result of war, starvation and disease.

In addition to winning military battles, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were faced with the tasks of gaining and consolidating power in a large and ethnically diverse empire; establishing legitimacy for a government that had no traditional or legal right to rule; and also with beginning to institute the tasks of the socialist revolution — to not only change the behaviour of the people it governed, but to transform their thoughts and consciousness as well. With their history as underground revolutionaries and a tradition of using journalism, pamphleteering and essay writing to attract and organise followers, it was natural for the Bolsheviks to turn to methods of propaganda to support their aims.

Upon seizing power, the Bolsheviks’ first act was to nationalise the publishing industry. On 9 November 1917, Lenin issued the ‘Decree on the Press’, which closed down all newspapers that preached ‘open opposition or insubordination to the worker–peasant government’. The control of information, and the production and dissemination of propaganda became chief tasks of the new regime. The term propaganda is a slippery one, and definitions of the term say as much about the people defining it, their era, and their political viewpoint, as they do about the term itself. To employ the term at its most

141 Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin!, p. 3.
142 As communications scholar Nicholas J. O’Shaughnessy observes: ‘To attempt to define propaganda is to tread lightly on a conceptual minefield. How we define propaganda is in fact the expression of the theories we hold about propaganda’ (Politics and propaganda, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 14).
basic level of meaning, ‘propaganda’ refers to the manipulation and employment of language and symbols in the service of an ideological or social purpose.\textsuperscript{143} The term is used colloquially in a somewhat pejorative manner today, but should not automatically carry negative connotations.\textsuperscript{144} As Nicholas O’Shaughnessy notes, ‘The word propaganda is a description of style, function and political content, but it is not in itself a final judgment, however it might be used in popular discourse’. Propaganda was to serve several purposes under the socialist regime: to legitimate the Party and its leadership, to express the Bolshevik ‘vision’ of a new society, to publicise government policy, to mobilise the population to participate in campaigns related to industrialisation and collectivisation, to clearly and publicly identify enemies of the regime and to enlist popular support in eliminating these enemies. The Bolshevik vision included such massive tasks as educating the population according to Marxist–Leninist principles and engineering a new type of person in a new type of society, and was often phrased in terms that were not only utopian, but that borrowed from the language and symbols of religion.

This sacralisation of politics did not happen subconsciously or unintentionally. Within the revolutionary movement, there was a strand of socialist thought to which Lenin was vehemently opposed, the idea of \textit{bogostroitel’stvo} (‘god-building’), which claimed such notable adherents as Gor’kii, Anatolii Lunacharskii, Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich and Aleksandr Bogdanov. The god-builders accepted the basic human need for religion, but sought to replace supernatural beliefs with a belief in science, and belief in god with belief in humanity (as a collective, rather than the worship of any one individual). Science and the belief in humanity would ultimately liberate the whole world, and the science of Marxism–Leninism would abolish all barriers of class, race and nation.

\textsuperscript{143} I am not distinguishing at this point between the term ‘propaganda’ that, after Plekhanov, was the attempt to get many ideas across to a small group of Party members and the intelligentsia, and the term ‘agitation’, which consisted of a small number of simplified messages aimed at the masses, and am subsuming both terms under the general term ‘propaganda’ according to its current use in academic discourse.

With such lofty aims as creating a ‘heaven on earth’, and ‘engineering’ a new type of Soviet person, it is hardly surprising that the creation and dissemination of propaganda held crucial importance for the Bolsheviks, both when establishing the new regime and later, under Stalin, in maintaining power in the face of exceptionally challenging circumstances. It was a central tenet of Bolshevik ideology that art and culture would belong to ‘the masses’ and, more specifically, reflect the tastes and preferences of the ‘proletariat’ or working class. As Lenin famously said, under a socialist government, art would no longer serve the elite of society, the ‘upper ten thousand suffering from boredom and obesity; it will rather serve the millions and tens of millions of labouring people, the flower of the country, its strength and its future’.

Whether or not the small proletariat in existence in the 1920s was to be allowed to express its own preferences, or whether these needed to be guided and shaped from above, was a matter of contention in the early Bolshevik regime. Under Lenin’s leadership, this debate was resolved in favour of the latter proposition.

After the October Revolution, Lenin, the Bolshevik leadership and members of the intelligentsia, including Vladimir Maiakovskii, Vladimir Tatlin and Aleksandr Rodchenko, called for artists to take to the streets and use their creative talents in the service of the Revolution. Large numbers of artists and designers supported the Revolution by contributing their talent to the propaganda machine. According to Pavel Tretiakov, businessman and patron of the arts, ‘The “art-worker” must stand beside the man of science as a psycho-engineer, a psycho-constructor … Propaganda towards the forging of the new man is in essence the only content of the works of the Futurists’.

In making art and culture available for mass consumption, all fields of artistic endeavour and communications were potential vehicles for the dissemination of propaganda and the inculcation of the core values of Bolshevism. This preoccupation with art and culture was to continue into the Stalinist era, with Stalin becoming minutely involved in many areas of cultural production. Stalin watched every film before its release,

giving his approval or veto, and sometimes suggesting changes that had to be implemented before the film could be released. Stalin was involved in editing slogans for press publications. He was also involved in scientific and scholarly debates, making major corrections to works of non-fiction and, ultimately, in 1950, contributing his own dissertation on linguistics to the academic arena, followed in 1952 by a long pamphlet on political economy.

The 1919 program of the Petrograd Collective of Communist–Futurists declared:

A Communist structure demands a Communist consciousness. All forms of everyday life, morality, philosophy and art must be restructured according to Communist principles. Without this, any future development of the Communist revolution is impossible.

Most of the existing artistic genres — painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, theatre, music, porcelain and, indeed, some new ones (for example, film, agit-trains and agit-ships, festivals and parades) — were pressed into the service of these aims. This massive undertaking saturated Soviet society with the values, symbols and imagery of the Bolshevik cause. Symbols create a lens through which people perceive and shape their present reality, remember and interpret the past, and make predictions about the future. In order to initiate the necessary dramatic transformation in people and society, the Bolshevik leadership had to not only seize power, but to capture and redefine the discourse.

148 Plamper provides evidence that Stalin corrected the wording of his own quotes and, for films, suggested that scenes be reshot, changed endings, and suggested that musical scores be rewritten (The Stalin cult, pp. 133–34). Maria Belodubrovskaya argues that, at least in relation to the dominant biopic genre, Stalin’s interventions were less direct than is usually claimed (‘The jockey and the horse: Joseph Stalin and the biopic genre in Soviet cinema’, Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema, 5:1, pp. 29–53).
150 Stalin’s Marxism and problems of linguistics was published in the 20 June, 4 July, and 2 August, 1950 issues of Pravda.
152 Quoted in Golomshtok, Totalitarian art, p. 22.
153 Agitation trains — trains that travelled the country delivering propaganda messages. Andrew Spira contends that the idea for the agit-trains may derive from a mobile church in a train that was despatched under Tsar Nicholas II in 1896 (The avant-garde icon, p. 186).
While Marxist ideas may have been accessible to the intelligentsia and, indeed, debated in endless meetings, the Bolshevik leadership realised the need to translate the basic concepts of Marxism–Leninism into a format that could be understood and adopted by the proletariat and the peasantry. In general, the peasantry did not have a grasp of ideological concepts and were unfamiliar with the words used by the Bolsheviks and other participants in the political arena. \(^{154}\) In the early days of Bolshevik rule, Party members were sent out amongst the people to attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of propaganda campaigns. The information brought back to the centre revealed that both urban and rural workers had little understanding of the language used in propaganda and media such as the newspapers. \(^{155}\) In order to dominate meaning, shape society and change thought, the new language of Marxism–Leninism had to infiltrate society and obliterate the old systems of meaning and interaction, and to do so in a manner accessible to a population that, in 1917, was largely functionally illiterate. \(^{156}\) The poster was a comparatively cheap and accessible medium that was particularly suited to this time and to the purposes of mass propaganda. The visual impact of messages conveyed through the use of simple and bold colour schemes and eye-catching design in posters transcends language barriers, although a shared visual literacy

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\(^{154}\) Many of the words appearing in the press were new and imported from other languages, or were abbreviations of the names of the new committees and administrative bodies set up by the Bolsheviks. Peter Kenez observes that, in 1923, peasants were unfamiliar with even the most commonly used acronyms such as those for the USSR and Sovnarkom (The birth of the propaganda state, p. 256). Orlando Figes and Boris Kolinitskii observe that imported words were both misunderstood and mispronounced by bewildered peasants: ‘Thus the word “republic” (respublica) appeared as rezhubliku (“cut the public”), despublika and razublika in various peasant letters; “regime” (rezhim) became prizhim (“suppress”); “constituent” (uchreditel’noe) was transformed into chereditel’noe (on the basis that the Constituent Assembly would decide everything “in its turn” or cheredom); “revolution” (revoliutsiia) was pronounced and written as revutsia, levoliutsiia and levorutsia; the “Bolsheviks” (bol’sheviki) were confused with a party of bol’shaki (peasant elders) and of bol’shie (big people); while “annexation” (anneksiia) was thought by many peasant soldiers to be a small Balkan kingdom neighbouring kontributsiia (the word used at this time for indemnity) and at least on one occasion was confused with a woman called Aksinia’ (Interpreting the Russian Revolution, p. 129).

\(^{155}\) Readers of The Workers’ Newspaper, a newspaper specifically aimed at the masses and written at a lower level of sophistication and complexity than Pravda and Izvestiia, complained that they needed ‘ten dictionaries’ to read the paper (Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin, p. 12).

\(^{156}\) According to Stephen White, the 1897 census of the Russian Empire found that only 28.4 per cent of the total population aged between nine and 49 was literate, with considerable regional variation (e.g. Estonia, 96.2 per cent; Russia, 29.6 per cent; Uzbekistan, 3.6 per cent); whereas, by 1920, the overall level of literacy within the territory under Soviet rule had increased to 44.1 per cent, with national variations and significant variations between urban (73.5 per cent) and rural (23.8 per cent) dwellers (The Bolshevik poster, pp. 18–19).
and culture is necessary for the intended audience. Exposure to the *lubok* (an illustrated broadsheet) and the iconography of the Russian Orthodox Church meant that most of the population shared a visual literacy that included stylisation, symbolism, exaggeration, caricature, inverse perspective, distortions of scale and the use of multiple scenes to tell a story.

The poster was not a new phenomenon in Russian life. St Petersburg had hosted an important international exhibition of artistic posters in 1897 and, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a small commercial industry primarily producing movie and advertising posters. Under the Bolsheviks, the use of the poster was greatly expanded and modified in design and purpose. Poster campaigns were central to propaganda efforts throughout the Soviet era and were well suited to deal with the government’s need to publicise widely and quickly a large number of policies and initiatives, to identify enemies of the people, and to promote united goals and visions. Director of the editorial and publishing wing of the Red Army during the Civil War, Vyacheslav Polonskii, enthusiastically proclaimed the value of poster art:

> With the help of this handiwork of the streets and squares, that rapprochement between art and the people that other dreamers have been awaiting will come about … It is not pictures hanging in museums, or book illustrations passed from hand to hand among book lovers, or frescoes, which are accessible to only the few, but the poster and *lubok*, which are produced in the millions for the masses and the streets, that will bring art to the people, show them what can be done and how with brush and paint, intrigue them by their artistry, and unleash the pent-up reserves of artistic possibilities.157

In the early years of the new regime, the issue of each new poster was announced in *Pravda* and posters were also reviewed there. The magazine *Bednota*158 reproduced posters on its pages, ensuring that their message reached even remote villages.159 In the 1930s, there were two journals devoted to the reproduction, review and analysis of posters — *Produktsiia izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv*,160 begun in 1932,

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157 Polonskii, *Russkii revolyutsionnyi plakat*, p. 3.
158 The Poor.
159 Alla Rosenfeld, ‘The world turned upside down: Russian posters of the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, and the Civil War’, in Rosenfeld, *Defining Russian graphic arts*, p. 147.
160 Art Production.
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and *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduktsiia*,\(^{161}\) from 1934 to 1935.\(^{162}\) Indeed, posters were deemed so important to the propaganda effort that many of the propaganda posters of the early years had the words ‘Anyone who takes down this poster commits counterrevolution’ printed across the base.\(^{163}\)

Stalin’s image became a prominent feature of propaganda posters in the early 1930s and remained so, with some fluctuations, until his death in 1953. Stalin was portrayed through propaganda as a charismatic leader and his image was idealised, emphasising the charismatic relationship between Stalin and the citizenry. The notion of charismatic leadership derives from the work of Weber.\(^{164}\) According to Weber’s theory of political legitimation, there are three pure types of legitimate domination: traditional, charismatic, and rational.\(^{165}\) ‘Charismatic’ legitimation rests ‘on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him’.\(^{166}\) By its very nature, revolution creates charismatic leadership that relies on the motivating persona of the leader for popular support. Legitimacy, as conceived by Weber is a socio-political relationship, not a psychological state or ideological claim. Charismatic domination is not defined purely by the personal qualities of the leader, but by the existence of a following.

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161 *Poster and Artistic Reproduction*.
164 There is a vast literature discussing the virtues and limitations of Weber’s notions of legitimacy and charismatic legitimation and it is beyond the scope of this study to enter into this sociological debate. Plamper makes a good case for the application of Edward Shils’ notion of ‘sacrality’ to the Stalin cult, as being more flexible and having stronger religious connotations than Weber’s ‘charisma’ (*The Stalin cult*, p. xvi). Graeme Gill outlines seven means of legitimacy that were sought by the Soviet leadership during the Stalinist years (*Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, p. 24). The broad notion of charismatic legitimation, as outlined by Weber, can be meaningfully applied to the Stalin cult and illuminates some of the basic premises underlying the argument in this book.
165 ‘Traditional’ grounds rest ‘on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them’. The tsar and his successors were deposed in the revolution of February 1917 (and later assassinated with his extended family, the doctor, the nurse and the dog), thus traditional authority in Russia was swept away. ‘Rational’ grounds rest ‘on a belief in the sanctity of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands’. The provisional government under Aleksandr Kerenskii, which replaced the tsar, was overthrown by force and, with only 24 per cent of the vote in the Constituent Assembly elections in November 1917, the Bolsheviks could not make a strong claim to legal–rational legitimacy.
that is oriented to the leader.\textsuperscript{167} To some extent, an infantilising bond is created between the charismatic leader and his followers\textsuperscript{168} and such conditions may have facilitated the development of a personality cult around an authoritative, charismatic leader like Stalin, and certainly contributed to the success of the Father, Saviour and Teacher archetypes in Stalinist symbolism.\textsuperscript{169}

The phenomenon of the personality cult goes hand-in-hand with Weber’s notion of charismatic leadership. The two concepts are often used interchangeably, with the same criteria applied to both terms. As it may be argued that not every charismatic leader develops a manifest personality cult, some clarification is necessary. As has already been noted, the charismatic leader is the recipient of devotion and loyalty from followers due to perceived qualities and abilities. Adulation is thus directed to the leader as an individual, not as the holder of a particular office. Charismatic leaders tend to come to the fore during crises and, if they are successful, manage to bring some order to the chaos, and deliver their followers from imminent danger.

The charismatic leader created by the October Revolution was Lenin. With the need to institute law and order after the Revolution and Civil War, a ‘routinisation of charisma’ began to occur. After the struggle of the Revolution with its promise of utopia, and the desperate struggles of the Civil War, came the routine business of governing, with all its political rhetoric, bureaucratic bulkiness, taxation and

\textsuperscript{167} ‘Psychologically this recognition is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope’. Weber in Roth & Wittich, \textit{Max Weber}, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{168} Sociologist Ronald Glassman adopts a Freudian perspective on the followers of a charismatic leader: ‘humans allow themselves to fall into this altered state of perception and interaction because (1) they tend to fall into states of existential despair, (2) they become anxious about actually upcoming dangerous situations, and (3) under such circumstances, because of the long dependency-and-love period of human childhood, humans may turn toward a parental figure and assume a childlike dependency and subordinate attitude of behavior’ (‘Legitimacy and manufactured charisma’, p. 617).

\textsuperscript{169} In fact, in an article on the psychology of Soviet corruption, Jeffry Klugman argues that passivity and obedience are a part of Soviet culture inculcated through cultural norms in Soviet parenting: ‘Perhaps for lack of space, perhaps to maintain supervision, children are included in adult gatherings, becoming passive spectators. Teenagers are discouraged from having chores or earning money. Childhood thus becomes a training ground for both passive dependency and compliance with an intrusive authority’, and ‘Via the indulgent privileges accorded to members, the need for support from above for both membership and advancement, and the required submission to Party discipline, Party membership expresses the passive dependent side of the original parenting relationship’ (‘The psychology of Soviet corruption, indiscipline, and resistance to reform’, \textit{Political Psychology}, 7:1, 1986, pp. 67–82, pp. 68, 70).
mundanity. The extraordinary became submerged in the routine of the ordinary. Weber employs a dramatic metaphor: ‘every charisma is on the road from a turbulently emotional life that knows no economic rationality to a slow death by suffocation under the weight of material interests’. This routinisation of charisma began to set in while Lenin was still alive and, as Lenin’s physical presence as Bolshevik leader diminished due to the severity of his illness, the first inklings of a personality cult were being constructed around him.

When Lenin died in January 1924, the fledgling Bolshevik regime was faced with a crisis of succession. This was particularly risky for a regime that was born under charismatic legitimation, because there were no traditional or legal traditions in place for the transfer of power to a successor. The regime was particularly vulnerable at this time and one way of dealing with this situation was to attempt to transfer the charisma of the first leader to a successor, who then also partakes of charismatic legitimation. A potential new leader strives to demonstrate his close links to the first charismatic leader and employs propaganda that highlights a ‘lineage’ or seemingly natural succession.

One of the options that may be open to the charismatic leader who faces routinisation or a succession crisis, is to formally enter the structures of power by accepting or seizing political office. The term ‘personality cult’ may be said to refer to the circumstance in which a charismatic leader accepts political office or formal political leadership of some sort, and sets about generating, maintaining and controlling his public image or persona. Alternately, one could say that the term refers to the specific charismatic situation in which charisma is generated ‘from above’ (from the leadership) rather than rising ‘from

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170 Roth & Wittich, Max Weber, p. 1120.
171 In Weber’s words: ‘Emotional revolutionism is followed by the traditionalist routine of everyday life; the crusading leader and the faith itself fade away, or, what is even more effective, the faith becomes part of the conventional phraseology of political philistines and banausic technicians’ (Weber, Gerth, Mills, Max Weber, p. 125).
172 Weber discusses the routinisation of charisma and the crisis of succession at length. It is beyond the scope of this book to examine these concepts in detail, or to look at the means by which the charisma attached to Lenin came eventually to be grafted onto Stalin. The personality cults of both Lenin and Stalin were created largely with the purpose of serving as vehicles for this transfer.
below’ (from the masses). Generation of charisma from above usually involves the use of mass media and propaganda tools to construct a carefully tailored persona for the leader.

With Lenin’s death, construction of the personality cult became centralised in the Commission for the Immortalisation of Lenin’s Memory, and his personality cult expanded rapidly, assisted by the genuine grief felt by followers at his early demise. Stalin came to power among the Bolsheviks at least in part because he was the most successful in establishing an identity as Lenin’s disciple, student and mentee, and in demonstrating the extent to which he had become indispensable to Lenin. While this was critical in the early years of his leadership, over time Stalin gained increasing charismatic legitimacy in his own right.

The marketing of Stalin’s constructed image in the media and propaganda served to legitimise his increasingly despotic rule and the rule of the Bolshevik Party through the generation and maintenance of a personality cult built around his persona, and also functioned as a mechanism for communicating the Party’s vision. Stalin not only articulated the Bolshevik vision of society but, through the use of his image in propaganda, came to embody it. Jill Strange and Michael Mumford outline five mechanisms through which a leader’s articulation of a vision appears to influence followers’ actions. First, the vision specifies the direction, purpose and uniqueness of the future goal; second, vision motivates followers into action towards these future goals; third, vision provides a sense of meaning and identity; fourth, vision provides the common framework around which people coordinate activities; and fifth, vision institutionalises prescriptive beliefs that may serve as a basis for development of organisational norms and structures.

If the tasks of the new revolutionary society in the USSR were to be achieved, it was essential that the leader articulate the Bolshevik vision in a clear and inclusive manner. By applying Strange and Mumford’s mechanisms to the situation in the USSR we can see that first, Bolshevik propaganda stressed the historic significance of the advent

of socialism and the Soviet people’s unique place in world history as the vanguard of a higher phase in world economic and political evolution. Socialism was the preparatory stage of communism and, when the transition to communism was complete, time and history would cease, as the peoples of the world would live in a classless, harmonious, unchanging utopia of material plenitude and spiritual maturity — a real ‘heaven on earth’.

Second, though this future was some way off, it was attainable, and propaganda provided evidence that progress was being made and the appropriate milestones reached, and motivated the population to continue to work towards future goals. The Stakhanovite movement became a national phenomenon due to newspaper publicity of the 1935 Stakhanovite conference, and a concerted poster campaign that promoted the concept of socialist competition and exceptional achievement, and made national heroes of the Stakhanovite workers. Collective group achievements such as the Metro, the Dnieper Dam, Magnitogorsk, and the Moscow–Volga Canal, became widely celebrated phenomena thanks to posters that, while ultimately attributing all credit for their success to Stalin, encouraged an attitude of collective ownership of the finished product. The propagandising of spectacular socialist successes had the dual function of reassuring the population that they were on the way to achieving their collective goals (and their sacrifices were worthwhile), whilst also reflecting well on the leader and shoring up legitimacy for the Party. As Weber pointed out, charismatic authority is inherently unstable, and:

The charismatic leader gains and maintains his authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a warlord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must ‘prove’ itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods.

175 The Stalin Constitution of 1936 instituted in law the fact that socialism had now been achieved.
176 An industrial city in Chelyabinsk Oblast that, under Stalin’s Five Year Plans, was to be developed into a city of the future, built around a huge iron and steel plant. For a fascinating account of this process and its challenges, see Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a civilization, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995.
Third, Stalinist propaganda posters provided the population with a strong sense of identity for inclusion in the new socialist utopia — the people pictured in the posters were usually either proletarians or peasants and were portrayed in typical garb, sometimes carrying identifying tools of trade, or undertaking typical worker or peasant tasks. In early posters, Stalin could be seen walking beside the workers in his workman’s boots — the first among equals. Children were also often featured in posters, reinforcing the notion of Stalin as the father–protector and emphasising the infantilised bond between Stalin and the people.

Fourth, policy directions and visions of their implementation were brought to life in the drawings and photomontages depicted on the posters. The goals and projections of the five-year plans, and successes in aviation, electrification and construction were indicated with charts and graphs in the posters of the late 1920s and early 1930s and publicised with catchy slogans such as ‘Five into four’, which encouraged the population to achieve the targets of the five-year plan in only four years. Finally, the message contained in well-publicised slogans such as ‘Cadres decide everything’, gained dogmatic authority through association with Stalin’s name and image, and became institutionalised in practice through their ubiquitous presence in posters.

As the person who articulated society’s vision, Stalin became both an inspiration to the populace and a symbol of strong, wise authority requiring implicit obedience and spiritual faith, and leaving little room for individual thought and interpretation. Even someone as widely travelled and experienced as Ilia Ehrenburg could only look back on the Stalinist years and reflect: ‘The cult of personality had not

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178 For example, Viktor Nikolaevich Deni & Nikolai Andreevich Dolgorukov, ‘We’ve got a Metro!’, 1935; P. Yastrzhembsky, ‘Glory to the creator of USSR constitution, the great Stalin!’, 1937; Konstantin Pavlovich Cheprakov, ‘So — greetings, Stalin, and live for a hundred years, shine like the sun, live for victory! And lead us on the way to victory! Accept the country’s joyous greetings!’ 1939; A.M. Venediktov, ‘You cleared the way for our freedom, Soviet rule gave glory to our country’, 1949; and, Naum Pavlovich Karpovskii, ‘Long live the Komsomol generation!’, 1948.
179 For example, Gustav Klutsis, ‘The reality of our program — it’s real people …’, 1931.
180 See Chapter Three.
181 For example, Gustav Klutsis, ‘Five into four’, 1930; and, Viktor Deni, ‘The five-year plan in four years’, 1930.
182 For example, Gustav Klutsis, ‘Cadres decide everything’, 1935 (Fig. 4.62).
converted me to unthinking faith but it had swayed my judgments: I could not see the future of the country as other than bound up with what was daily called “the wisdom of our leader of genius”.\textsuperscript{183}

It is a challenging prospect to attempt to determine whether Stalin's charismatic persona was created as a vehicle for transmitting the socialist propaganda message, or whether, as much recent research in the field of leadership studies suggests, the nature of the visionary and transformational message in a society that has in the recent past been characterised by exploitation and corruption (under the tsars) almost inevitably leads to the endowment of the bearer of that message with charismatic properties.\textsuperscript{184} One reason for broaching this question in relation to Stalin is that, as evidenced by eyewitness accounts, Stalin did not appear to have many of the traits that one traditionally associates with a charismatic presence. He was not possessed of great oratorical skill, spoke Russian with a strong Georgian accent,\textsuperscript{185} and appeared to be self-effacing. Stalin is known to have tried to curb some of the excesses of his cult of personality. He rejected the idea of a personal biography for many years and, when one was produced, he edited the text of his biography and removed some of the more extreme adulatory passages. In July 1933, he opposed a proposed exhibition on his life that was organised by the Society of Old Bolsheviks and, in February 1938, he rejected the publication of Vera Smirnova's \textit{Tales of Stalin's childhood} by Detizdat, the Komsomol publishing house.\textsuperscript{186}

Several other Party members, particularly Trotsky, were renowned for their brilliant and fiery oratory. Stalin, like Mahatma Gandhi in India,\textsuperscript{187} spoke simply, directly, somewhat monotonously, and without

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ehrenburg, \textit{Men, years — life}, vol. 6, p. 302.
  \item 'vision may be conceived of a set of beliefs about how people should act, and interact, to attain some idealized future state' (Strange & Mumford, 'The origins of vision', p. 344).
  \item Molotov recalls that, when Stalin mispronounced a word on the podium, all subsequent speakers felt obliged to repeat the mistake: 'If I'd said it right', Molotov reminisced, 'Stalin would have felt I was correcting him.' He was very 'touchy and proud' (quoted in Montefiore, \textit{Stalin}, p. 304).
  \item See Sarah Davies, 'Stalin and the making of the leader cult in the 1930s', in Apor et al., \textit{The leader cult in communist dictatorships}, pp. 33–34. Stalin also rejected Nikolai Ezhov's suggestion in 1937 that Moscow be renamed Stalinodar, and attempted to quash Ivan Koniev's suggestion after the Great Patriotic War that he be given the rank of Generalissimus. Simon Sebag Montefiore recounts the occasion on which Lazar Kaganovich coined the term 'Stalinism' during a dinner at Zubalova (Stalin's dacha): "Everyone keeps talking about Lenin and Leninism but Lenin's been gone a long time ... Long live Stalinism!" "How dare you say that?" retorted Stalin modestly. "Lenin was a tall tower and Stalin a little finger" (\textit{Stalin}, p. 66).
  \item Bligh and Robinson use the case study of Mahatma Gandhi to argue that charismatic leadership owes more to the nature of the 'vision' or message, than to the personal characteristics
\end{itemize}
rhetorical device.\footnote{According to Strange and Mumford, one of the 29 characteristics that identifies the ideological subtype of the charismatic type of leader is: ‘The leader will communicate in such a way that the attention is not placed on himself, but on his ideas’ (‘The origins of vision’, p. 351).} E.A. Rees contrasts Stalin’s style of public speech with that of his contemporary, Adolf Hitler: ‘Compared to Hitler’s mesmeric, demonic oratory, Stalin’s speeches were slowly delivered, based on the relentless presentation of figures and argument to make his case. Stalin’s appeal was primarily to the intellect’.\footnote{E.A. Rees, ‘Introduction: leader cults: varieties, preconditions and functions’, in Apor et al., The leader cult in communist dictatorships, p. 17.} Despite his lack of theatrical flair, some eyewitnesses expressed a preference for Stalin’s style of speech over that of more accomplished orators.\footnote{For example, in her personal diary of 1936, Galina Vladimirovna Shtange (wife of a professor at the Moscow Electromechanical Institute of Railroad Engineers (MEMITT)) noted: ‘Stalin speaks very slowly and distinctly — extremely simply, so simply that each word penetrates into your consciousness and I think the man cannot be found who would not be able to understand what he says. I really love that, I don’t like highfaluting, bombastic speeches that are aimed at creating an acoustic effect’ (‘Diary of Galina Vladimirovna Shtange’ (1936), in Veronique Garros et al. (eds), Intimacy and terror: Soviet diaries of the 1930s, New York, New Press, 1995, p. 205).} In filmed recordings of Stalin’s speeches, he seems uncomfortable in the spotlight, however, he was also a keen strategist and, from the earliest days of his public speaking, was aware of the effectiveness of his low-key, anti-oratorical approach: ‘your big cannon is no use here when you need to shoot short distances’.\footnote{Stalin quoted in Montefiore, Young Stalin, p. 135.}

The question of whether the leader’s charisma is seen as the vehicle by which the message is delivered, and is therefore of central importance, or the message itself is primary, with the leader becoming charismatic in the eyes of followers through his ability to articulate that vision, appears to be one of the ‘chicken-and-egg’ variety and, as such, may not have a definitive answer. Exploration of this topic has implications for an understanding of the role of propaganda in society and, in particular, for an examination of the role of the image of Stalin in Bolshevik propaganda. Does the most effective propaganda focus on the visionary message or on the visionary leader? If propaganda begins with a focus on the visionary and transformational message, is there a degree of inevitability that it will end with a focus on the leader as the embodiment of that message? To approach the question from another angle: do propagandists set out with the deliberate purpose of creating a mortal deity? Or, in broadcasting the visionary
message, does the necessity for easily apprehended symbols mean that propagandists follow a path that inevitably leads to the deification of the leader?

The situation becomes even more complex when we delve further into psychological studies of charismatic leadership. The nature of the pre-existing society (the one that is being rejected and replaced) and the nature of the transformational/revolutionary message appear to prescribe the type of leader that will emerge. It appears that social and environmental factors play a large role in determining the type of leader who will emerge, the type of message that will be received by the revolutionary masses, the characteristics the leader must embody, and the charismatic relationship the leader will have with his followers. These environmental factors interact in a complex and cyclical manner

\[192\] In a 2007 study on leader violence, Mumford et al. found that group, organisational and environmental conditions may play a greater role in predicting leader violence than the personal characteristics of the leader (‘The sources of leader violence’, pp. 217–35). Mumford and Strange propose that ‘ideological leadership’ is a subgenre of charismatic leadership with some distinguishing features, and argue that Stalin’s style of leadership fits the ideological subgenre: ‘ideological leadership may be viewed as a form of charismatic leadership where greater emphasis is placed on values and standards in vision formation than is typically the case for charismatic leaders’ (‘The origins of vision’, p. 373). While speculative at this point, if one extrapolates from these findings to suggest that, in many respects, the charismatic leader is a product of the prevailing social conditions (as the Marxists claim and Stalin himself insisted), we once again arrive at the prospect that his image in propaganda reflects the qualities expected of and perceived in the leader by society, rather than qualities intrinsic in the leader himself. See Stalin’s 1931 interview with Emil Ludwig (R. MacNeal (ed.), I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, 13, Stanford, Hoover Institute of War, Revolution and Peace, 1967, p. 255). The idealised elevation of the charismatic leader appears to become more inevitable still when we factor in leadership research suggesting that the type of person who is likely to become a charismatic leader of the personalised ideological type is commonly narcissistic, selective in interpretation of information, projects negative intentions on others, and engages in biased self-serving appraisals of others. House and Howell follow McClelland in defining:

socialized charismatic leadership as leadership which (a) is based on egalitarian behavior, (b) serves collective interests and is not driven by the self-interest of the leader and (c) develops and empowers others ... socialized leaders tend to be altruistic, to work through legitimate established channels and systems of authority when such systems exist, and to be self-controlled and follower-oriented rather than narcissistic. Theoretically personalized leaders rely on personal approval or rejection of followers to induce others to comply with their wishes. They show disregard for the rights and feelings of others and they tend to be narcissistic, impetuous, and impulsively aggressive. (‘Personality and charismatic leadership’, p. 84)

This personality type may be more inclined than most other people to insist on the correctness of his own values and beliefs over others, and to accept laudatory praise as his due. See Mumford et al., ‘The sources of leader violence’, p. 233.
with certain personal qualities of the charismatic leader. It is difficult
to establish to what extent propaganda drives this process or merely
reflects the prevailing situation.

The above questions aside, it will be argued that the Stalin who appeared
in propaganda posters was not a ‘real person’, but an idealised image
that was either manufactured in a manner not dissimilar to branding
in modern marketing, or that served as a sort of projected wish-
fulfilment on the part of the population. In several private statements
to his intimates, Stalin appears to have had no illusions about the
separation between the man, Iosif Dzhugashvili, and his persona.193
Stalin’s Politburo colleagues often had the sense that he was acting:194
‘Krushchev called him a “man of faces”; Lazar Kaganovich remarked
that there were four or five different versions of Stalin; and Molotov
and Anastas Mikoian both sensed at various times that Stalin was just
playacting.’195 Yuri Zhdanov is quoted as reporting a family argument
in which Vasilii, Stalin’s younger son, stated that he is a Stalin too!
According to Zhdanov, Stalin replied: ‘No you’re not … you’re not
Stalin and I’m not Stalin. Stalin is what he is in the newspapers and portraits, not you, no not even me.’196 Stalin
proclaimed a Marxist perspective on the role of the leader in society,
asserting that leaders should not be glorified as individuals, but could
be promoted as the embodiment of the cause. Great men arise from
the circumstances of the times.197 Molotov recalls that at first ‘Stalin
struggled with his cult and then came to rather like it’.198 When the
writer Mikhail Sholokhov criticised the adulation directed at Stalin,
Stalin replied smiling, ‘What can I do? The people need a god.’199

193 During the Great Patriotic War, Stalin declined the opportunity to swap his captured son,
Yakov, for the German General von Paulus on the grounds that his son was not the equivalent of
the General and that such a swap would be insensitive to all the other citizens whose sons had been
taken prisoner-of-war. Yakov eventually perished in the POW camp. Stalin was questioned about
this by a Georgian compatriot after the war and replied, ‘What would they have said of me, our
millions of Party fathers, if having forgotten about them, I had agreed to swapping Yakov? No, I had
no right … Otherwise, I’d no longer be “Stalin”’ (Chuev, Molotov remembers, p. 209).
194 By way of contrast, Pavel Sudoplatov, a Chekist, thought ‘it was hard to imagine such a man
could deceive you, his reactions were so natural, without the slightest sense of him posing’
(Montefiore, Stalin, p. 55).
195 Montefiore, Young Stalin, p. 42.
196 Quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 4.
197 Stalin famously expressed this conviction in his 1931 conversation with Ludwig (Sochineniya,
vol. 13, p. 255).
199 Quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 143.
In order to create the persona of the great and bountiful leader, much obfuscation of Stalin’s true history and character had to occur. There is an extensive literature on the falsification of history under Stalin and, in particular, the inaccuracy of Stalin’s official biography. While providing many valuable insights, to focus on this aspect of Stalin’s leadership is to somewhat miss the point. The Soviet leadership, many of whom carried their revolutionary pseudonyms or ‘cadre names’ throughout their political careers, never intended biography to be a genre that revealed the literal truth regarding the minutiae of personal character, history and upbringing. ‘You speak about history,’ Stalin told his Politburo colleagues, ‘but one must sometimes correct history.’ Personal lives and individual character were irrelevant to the cause and, in fact, even in the earliest days of the regime, under Lenin’s leadership, the highest praise a Bolshevik could bestow on a comrade was that (s)he had no personal life. Biography was constructed as a genre of literature with a purely didactic purpose, which was aimed at mobilising a poorly educated and only newly literate population. Its aim was to show the path to be taken to communist enlightenment, and it operated as a guide to the individual’s path and struggle, and also as a parable for the larger struggle of the Bolshevik Party at a macroscopic level.

Under Stalin, the falsification and rewriting of history eventually extended to all areas of public discourse and even into the private sphere. Paintings on popular revolutionary subjects, such as the salvo from the Aurora and the storming of the Winter Palace, were published in history textbooks and took on the status of documentary images. Not only was history rewritten or created afresh, thereby eliminating everything that did not fit with the official Party line, but evidence was altered — in particular, photographs. The leadership ensured that people who had fallen from favour were painted/inked out of photographs or, sometimes, when shoring up a historical claim,

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200 For example, after 1929 Stalin used a false date of birth. Stalin was born on 6 December 1878 (old style calendar) but, during his leadership, began to officially list his birthday as 21 December 1879.
201 Stalin, quoted in Montefiore, Stalin, p. 142.
202 For example, in 1925 a Bolshevik was praised in a Pravda newspaper obituary for his ascetism: ‘Comrade Nesterenko had no personal biography and no personal needs’ (cited in Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin!, p. 24).
203 For an interesting and in-depth argument of this case, see D. Brandenberger, ‘Constructing the cult: a case study of Stalin’s official biography’, in Davies & Harris, Stalin.
204 Golomshtok, Totalitarian art, Introduction.
removed seamlessly, so that it appeared that they had never been there in the first place. 205 Terrified of being found in possession of compromising material after a family member was arrested, people took to their family photo albums with scissors or ink. It was not enough, though, for enemies of the people to disappear from historic occasions. Stalin had also to be seen to be present at the most decisive moments in revolutionary history, whether or not he had actually been there. David King sees Stalin’s need to control his image and the context in which it appeared in the public arena as one of the principle motivating factors in adopting socialist realism as the official artistic form for the socialist state:

from the time of [Stalin’s] birth in 1879 [sic] until he was appointed General Secretary in 1922, there probably exist fewer than a dozen photographs of him. For a man who claimed to be the standard-bearer of the Communist movement, this caused grave embarrassment, which could only be overcome by painting and sculpture. Impressionism, expressionism, abstraction — for Stalin none of these artistic movements were capable of showing his image properly. So he made realism — socialist realism — the central foundation of the Stalin cult. A whole art industry painted Stalin into places and events where he had never been, glorifying him, mythologising him. 206

Works of art, such as a painting depicting the young Stalin helping a wounded comrade who had been shot during a demonstration, were commissioned in the service of the creation of a mythic biography befitting a Bolshevik leader. 207

So, too, in propaganda posters, Stalin did not exist as a man, but operated in a symbolic and allegorical realm that gradually saw him increasingly removed from the everyday and mundane, and moved

205 In later versions of a famous photograph of Lenin speaking in Red Square, Trotskii has disappeared. Teachers instructed their pupils to rip pages containing images of denounced people out of their school textbooks (King, *The commissar vanishes*, p. 10). In 1934, constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko published his book *Ten years of Uzbekistan*, which celebrated the first 10 years of Soviet rule in the area and featured a number of official portraits of the Uzbek leadership. Three years later, as this leadership was purged on Stalin’s orders, these images had to disappear. David King was able to examine Rodchenko’s own copy of the book: ‘Rodchenko’s response in brush and ink came close to creating a new art form, a graphic reflection of the real fate of the victims. For example, the notorious secret-police torturer Yakov Peters had suffered an ethereal, Rothko-like extinction. The face of party functionary Akmal Ikramov, veiled in ink, had become a terrifying apparition’ (King, *The commissar vanishes*, p. 10).


towards a form of deity. The Stalin symbol was complex and many-faceted and, like all symbols, exhibited shifts in meaning and emphasis over time. At the most basic level, as Stalin explained to his son Vasilii, ‘Stalin’ symbolised Soviet power and the socialist state. He was seen as the source of all bounty, the dispenser of all goods and services, the inspiration for, and strategist behind, all victories, and the supreme mentor and patriarch to the people—first to the people of the Soviet Union and, after the Great Patriotic War, to the people of the world. Stalin’s image was represented to the populace through the archetypes of the Father, the Warrior, the Teacher and the Saviour.

The Father archetype was one of the strongest and most prevalent images associated with Stalin’s persona. Despite the Bolshevik regime’s break with the autocratic past, many of the symbols and traditions associated with tsarist authority were co-opted by the new regime in the quest for legitimacy. Stalin was frequently referred to in the press by ‘father’ epithets and was often portrayed in posters in a paternal or patriarchal role. Stalin was also referred to in posters and other propaganda by the term rodnoi, which implied a familial relationship or kinship, as that of a father to children, between him and the Soviet populace. This patriarchal relationship was to extend throughout Soviet society, which consisted of vast networks of patronage that ran both vertically and horizontally. Thus the notions of gift-giving, obligation, bounty, reciprocity, and even mentorship, were integral to Soviet life, and Stalin merely sat at the top of the pyramid, as the ultimate dispenser of goods and benefits to a network below. As such, Stalin was the patriarch of all the Soviet peoples, all nationalities and all ethnicities. After the Great Patriotic War, with the ‘liberation’ of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviets’ active involvement in the world peace movement, Stalin was portrayed in posters as the patriarch and protector of all of the peoples of the world.

Like so many of the ‘great men’ of history, Stalin’s public image drew on the Warrior archetype, with Stalin represented in postwar propaganda as a successful military leader and strategist. Victory in

208 For a detailed examination of Stalin and the ‘politics of obligation’ see Brooks, ‘Stalin’s politics of obligation’, and Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin!
209 These networks of patronage were reinforced by the strong familial connections that existed among the top Bolsheviks. Entire family clans held leadership positions, and intermarried with each other in tight-knit circles.
the war was sometimes even attributed directly to Stalin. After the war, Stalin rarely appeared in public and delegated many public functions to his close deputies. Stalin’s disappearance from public life meant that his only presence for the people was through the image projected in propaganda, with its mythic, allegoric, archetypal and spiritual dimensions. Thus Stalin became less like a man, and more like a god.

A third major archetype contributing to the Stalin persona was that of the Teacher, with Soviet propaganda frequently referring to Stalin as ‘teacher’, ‘great teacher’ or ‘dear teacher’. Of course, Stalin took great pains to point out that he was only a humble student/disciple/mentee of the great Lenin. The archetype, however, had a strong tradition in Russian society, originating with the intelligentsia in the mid-19th century when higher education became accessible to individuals from the non-gentry classes. Teachers facilitated the education, spiritual development, and social advancement of their mentees through widespread systems of patronage. Under the Soviet system, as all resources became concentrated in the hands of the state, systems of mentorship came increasingly under the control of the state, with Stalin at its head as the ultimate mentor and teacher.

There are countless portrayals of Stalin and Lenin together in a variety of propaganda media. In propaganda posters, Stalin’s image was frequently linked with that of Lenin in order to show that Stalin was Lenin’s truest disciple, the continuer of the faith, and Lenin’s legitimate successor to the Soviet leadership. In the early years of his leadership, Stalin was depicted as taking a subordinate role, listening to Lenin’s guidance or reading Lenin’s works. From the mid-1930s, however, Stalin was usually portrayed as Lenin’s equal and, at times, even appeared to be giving advice to Lenin. Eventually, in the late 1940s and the 1950s, with victory in the war to recommend him, Stalin no

210 As Isaac Deutscher points out, Marshal Zhukov gained enormous popularity for his role in the war victory and, on the first Victory Day, he stood side by side with Stalin on the Lenin mausoleum to receive the gratitude and adulation of the pressing crowds. The situation had already changed by the second Victory Day: ‘in 1946 Marshal Zhukov completely disappeared from the public eye. From then on his role in the defence of Stalingrad and even Moscow was gradually blurred in the official accounts of the war, until, on the third anniversary of the battle of Berlin, Pravda managed to commemorate the event without mentioning Zhukov even once’ (Stalin, p. 547).
longer needed always to appeal to Lenin’s legitimating influence and was able to claim the title of ‘Teacher’ in his own right. He even began to publish authoritative texts, which appeared on bookshelves next to those of Lenin and Marx.\textsuperscript{212}

One of the most interesting archetypes used to portray Stalin in the avowedly atheist Soviet society was the archetype of the Saviour. Lenin, whose abhorrence of the personality cult was legendary, was frequently associated with Christ and this archetype was easily transferred, along with most other manifestations of the Lenin cult, onto the figure of his successor. The incorporation of the visual language of the icon of the Russian Orthodox Church into the Soviet propaganda poster drew visual analogies between Stalin and the sacred and divine figures with whom the Russian population was familiar.\textsuperscript{213} Stalin was not only associated with the figure of Christ but, somewhat surprisingly, was endowed with many of the qualities of the Mother of God. That the use of a number of archetypes to portray Stalin was a deliberate propaganda strategy is evidenced by the fact that, in the 1930s, exhibitions of Stalin portraits were held and structured around themed rooms carrying titles such as ‘Stalin as military commander’ and ‘Stalin as Marxist theoretician’.\textsuperscript{214}

The Soviet propaganda poster provides, among other things, a striking case study of the centrality of art to human society and of the power of art to shape society at all levels — physically, emotionally and spiritually. The Soviet poster encouraged the Soviet people to make physical changes in their environment, such as performing superhuman feats in the workplace, and to build new cities and railways. It encouraged diverse peoples with often conflicting interests and values to identify as a nation, to pursue common goals, to rally behind a supreme leader and to survive indescribable hardship to win the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet poster also promoted a new type of atheistic, egalitarian society with core values that were markedly different from the preceding society and those in the capitalist countries surrounding the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{212} Ethan Pollock’s ‘Stalin as the coryphaeus of science: ideology and knowledge in the post-war years’ (Davies & Harris, \textit{Stalin}), outlines the process by which Stalin was called in by scholars to arbitrate the scholarly debates in Soviet linguistics.

\textsuperscript{213} From around the 1880s, new technology in Russia allowed the accumulated layers of varnish, repainting and soot on icons to be stripped back to reveal their original detail and vivid colour.

\textsuperscript{214} Plamper, \textit{The Stalin cult}, p. 181.
While it would be disingenuous to claim that the entire Soviet population embraced the Stalin persona uncritically, there is ample evidence to indicate that the majority of people did embrace and support the goals of the regime, and were deeply invested in the creation of a new and better society. Support came not only from Old Bolsheviks, dedicated Party members and cynical careerists, but also from workers, peasants (although this group proved to be particularly intransigent), writers and artists, and members of the intelligentsia both inside and outside the Soviet regime. The image of Stalin embodied the vision of an unprecedented new type of society in which opportunities were open to all who chose to follow the Bolshevik line and re-create themselves in the image of the Party.

215 Stephen Kotkin discusses the difficulty in gauging the sincerity of belief of participants in the 'Bolshevik crusade' in his study of Magnitogorsk. He notes that the high value placed on public displays of allegiance and the lack of source materials make it difficult to assess the level of support for the regime amongst citizens. Kotkin approaches the task, instead, by examining radical 'unbelief' and concluding that 'there seems to have been little support or grounds for radical unbelief in the Communist cause for those living inside the USSR under Stalin, however, this does not mean that universal, uncritical acceptance was the result … Elements of “belief” and “disbelief” appear to have coexisted within everyone, along with a certain residual resentment'. Kotkin states further that 'When a compelling revolutionary vision resembling the “higher truth” of a revealed religion is refracted through patriotic concerns and a real rise in international stature, we should not underestimate the popular will to believe or, more accurately, the willing suspension of disbelief'. He notes that revolutionary truth was maintained by the collective power of millions of people participating in the system for a variety of reasons, which include belief in the cause (Magnetic Mountain, pp. 225–30).